IT'S TIME TO STOP AND LISTEN:

EXPLORING ADOLESCENTS' UNDERSTANDINGS AND EXPERIENCES OF

AGGRESSION

by

Jonathan Edward Brown

M.A. The University of Saskatchewan, 2007

B.A. (Hons) Okanagan University College, 2002

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Abstract

Throughout the extensive literature on aggression few attempts have been made to examine the experiences of aggression from the perspective of adolescents. The purpose of this dissertation was to understand how adolescents experience aggression. Specifically, this dissertation examined how adolescents (a) define aggression, (b) experience acceptable aggression, (c) associate bullying and aggression in general, and (d) understand intentionality in the context of aggression. A total of 11 focus groups were conducted with a purposive sample of 59 adolescents aged 12 to 18 years ($M = 15.1$). Data from these group discussions were thematically analyzed. Participants were found to produce definitions of aggression that were consistent with formal definitions. However, participants further grounded their conceptualizations of aggression in terms of anger and tone, which are not referenced in the most widely used formal definitions. Acceptable aggression was premised on the thematically derived construct of social positioning, which is a multifaceted index of social status and vulnerability to aggression within the social hierarchy. Social positioning was found to consist of four elements: (a) reputation agency, (b) chronological status, (c) social power, and (d) physical toughness. Participants described bullying as a function rather than a unique form of aggression. However, it was found to be distinct from the commonly accepted functions of aggression (i.e., instrumental and reactive) according to (a) the power differential between the perpetrator and target and (b) the repetitive nature of the behaviour. Based on these results, it was argued that the functions of aggression should be classified according to a trichotomy of instrumental, reactive, and bullying. In looking at intentionality, while participants had some similarities to previous research, they added that intentionality is comprised of further components such as

performing the intended behaviour, obtaining the desired goal, and intensity. Intensity was not only found in the context of physical aggression, but also in nonphysical aggression in the degree to which the perpetrator manipulates the event. From these results, recommendations were also made on the future development of adolescent intervention strategies.

Preface

All data for this dissertation were collected following a full-board ethics protocol review of the research methodology. Approval was granted by the University of British Columbia Behaviour Research Ethics Board on October 17, 2008. The certificate number was H08-01803.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Hawley, Little, and Rodkin (2007) stated that there are few topics that have elicited a similar degree of scientific interest as that of aggression. One explanation could be that aggression is a pervasive form of human behaviour. Vaughn and Santos (2007) argued it impacts interactions at every level of social organization. The authors stated further that it is a myth to believe in a time in which aggression was absent, because there has been no historical evidence indicating humans have ever lived in complete harmony with each other. And while typing the word into both academic and general databases will yield thousands of articles it is important to realize that aggression is not one thing. It does not constitute a single, homogeneous behaviour, but rather a variety of behaviours expressed in different forms and serving different functions. In fact, aggression is not always conceptualized as behaviour. For example, Tedeschi, Smith, and Brown (1974) indicated that throughout the literature aggression is at times considered an instinct, a source of energy, a drive, an emotion, or a class of behaviours. With the term being used to represent a number of different concepts, it becomes imperative that it is clearly defined by researchers.

Paquette and Underwood (1999) suggested that there are hundreds of definitions that have been used for aggression. Although there are common elements among them, Ramirez and Andreu (2006) argued there remains disagreement about the precise nature of what the definition should include. The authors identified that the majority of definitions highlight aggression as a behaviour that is intended to harm another person. Unfortunately, this definition alone is problematic. By simply using this definition, a single category of aggression is implicated as a stand-in for all types of aggression. In other words, aggression is falsely treated as homogeneous

behaviour. Stadler, Rohrmann, Steuber, and Poustka (2006) argued that implying or treating

aggression as a single entity does not capture the variability in either its origins or expressions.

Therefore, a more complex definition is needed. To more precisely capture the heterogeneous

nature of aggression, researchers have extended beyond the defining features of intention to harm

and included additional elements regarding the underlying purpose of the behaviour (i.e.,

function) and the manner in which the behaviour is manifested (i.e., form; see Berkowitz, 1988;

Dodge & Coie 1987; Feshbach, 1964). Although these extended definitions are better equipped

to investigate the complexity of aggression, they have contributed more variability in how

aggression is defined. As a result, there exists more potential for confusion.

Adding further to these definition issues is the trend to routinely conceptualize aggression

in a morally or value-skewed manner. From early on, aggression has been placed on a

continuum of good and bad behaviour and in particular on the side of bad behaviour (Hawley,

2007; Hawley et al., 2007; Merten 1994; Tedeschi et al., 1974). For decades, aggression has

commonly been linked to an extensive list of social problems, including but not limited to

academic failure, antisocial behaviour, poor interpersonal behaviours, peer rejection, emotional

dysregulation, substance abuse, and impulsivity (see Blake & Hamrin, 2007; Card, Stucky,

Sawalani, & Little, 2008; Hawley, Johnson, Mize, & McNamara, 2007; Poulin & Boivin, 2000).

Many of these problems are found for both perpetrators and victims of aggression (Bagwell &

Schmidt, 2011; Farmer & Xie, 2007; Paquette & Underwood, 1999). Further, aggression has

been linked to maladjustment through all periods of development including childhood,

adolescence, and adulthood (Di Giunta et al., 2010). As a result, aggression is typically viewed

from perspectives of pathology and social incompetence.

Bukowski (2003) argued that as a result of being linked to measures of incompetence,

aggression has become an index of incompetence. This becomes confusing and contradictory

when one considers recent findings indicating that aggression may serve a number of adaptive

functions. For example, not all aggressive adolescents are found to be rejected and many

experience higher degrees of social status than nonaggressive adolescents (Coie & Dodge, 1998;

Farmer & Xie, 2007; Robertson et al., 2010). In other words, many socially successful

individuals appear to express as much, if not more aggressive behaviour than those deemed to be

socially incompetent. Vaughn and Santos (2007) argued that in certain times and places,

aggression serves as a viable means to resolve conflict and should not always be associated with

deviancy and mental disorder. By associating aggression with problematic and dysfunctional

outcomes, our understandings of its aetiology and application to prevention and intervention

have been greatly limited. If aggression is always viewed as a symptom of incompetence then

the contexts in which it is performed by socially competent individuals will be neglected. In line

with this argument, researchers have suggested that definitions of aggression are limited and that

viewing aggression as multidimensional will show some dimensions to be more maladaptive

than others (Heilbron & Prinstein, 2008; Marsee et al., 2011).

The overall purpose of the following dissertation is to understand how adolescents

conceptualize and experience aggression. In light of what is currently known about aggression

in general and adolescent aggression specifically, this project will, in one sense, take a step back

and examine how adolescents define aggression. In other words, it will look at how adolescents

make sense of the term *aggression*. With a clearer understanding of how adolescents

conceptualize aggression, definitions that are more pertinent to adolescents can be developed and

used. This will have clear implications for interacting with adolescents on the topic of

aggression, such as through prevention and intervention strategies. While examining how

adolescents make sense of aggression, this dissertation will also gain insight regarding how adolescents experience some of the most widely debated aspects of aggression, such as the contexts in which it serves maladaptive and/or adaptive functions and the role intentionality plays in its conceptualization and ascription of harm.

1.1   Why study adolescents?

This research study will focus on adolescents for two particular reasons. First, adolescence is marked as a major transition period in human development as adolescents experience biological, educational, and social role changes (Caprara, Regalia, & Bandura, 2002). Adolescence is considered to cover lifespan development between the ages of 11 and 19 (Myers, 2004). During this period, adolescents will typically transition from elementary to middle school to high school, not to mention from one grade to the next on a yearly basis. With each transition, adolescents experience changes to their social roles, which have been found to have dramatic impacts on the development and expression of aggressive behaviour (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007; Roseth, Pellegrini, Bohn, Van Ryzin, & Vance, 2007; Vaughn & Santos 2007).

Second, there is debate as to whether aggressive behaviour peaks during adolescence or is stable throughout the human life cycle. For example, some studies report that although aggressive behaviour develops in childhood, it peaks during adolescence and tapers off in adulthood (Csibi & Csibi, 2011; Geen, 1998). Paquette and Underwood (1999) argued that it peaks more specifically in the high school years. Barkin, Kreiter, and DuRant (2001) reported that adolescents aged 12-18 years of age experience more than three times the amount of violence as 19 year olds. Conversely, other studies argue that aggression remains stable from childhood to adulthood (Huesmann, 1988, 1994; Kellner & Bry, 1999; Petras, Masyn, Buckley, Ialongo, & Kellam, 2011). For example, peer-rated aggression at the age 8 was found to

moderately correlate (i.e., *r* = .44) with peer-rated aggression at the age of 19 (Huesmann, Eron, Lefkowitz, & Walder, 1984). Although these two groups of findings may appear contradictory, there is a possibility that they are both correct because these individual findings may be capturing different types of aggression. For example, other research has found that aggression follows a developmental trend, in which the frequency of aggression depends on its form and function (Hawley, 1999; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Xie, Farmer, & Cairns, 2003). The form in which aggression is expressed appears to change as children transition throughout adolescence and as social environments change. Therefore, regardless of whether or not aggression is a characteristic of the adolescent transition period or is a more stable trait, it is apparent that focusing on adolescent aggression is important to developing an overall understanding of aggression in general.

1.2   Layout of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided into four separate but related topics. Together these topics provide overall insight as to how aggression is experienced by adolescents; however, individually, each topic focuses on a more specific research question that is important to understanding adolescent aggression as a whole. This format was chosen to better facilitate the reading and understanding of the entire dissertation. Each topic addresses a specific area of adolescent aggression, and will therefore contain its own review of relevant research, presentation of research findings, and interpretation of the results. It is important to note that data for each topic were collected at the same time and from the same participants. For example, in each focus group, participants were asked questions pertinent to topics one through four. As such, all topics utilized the same research methodology, which will be presented before the full presentation of the individual topics. The following provides a brief overview of each of the four

topics.

1.2.1 Topic one: Defining adolescent aggression

Although aggression has typically been defined as behaviour that is intended to harm another person (see Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939; Feshbach, 1964), more recent studies have begun to focus on the different ways in which the behaviour is expressed and the underlying reasons the behaviour is enacted. This topic begins by examining the different definitions and conceptualizations of aggression that have been used in previous research and then explores the central elements of adolescents' own understanding of aggression. In other words, this topic addresses what the term *aggression* means to adolescents and how they define aggression. Through this process, consistencies between adolescents' experiences and understandings and those used in previous research paradigms were identified. In a sense, the focus here was to replicate in a group of adolescents the theoretical underpinnings that have been used to guide much of the adolescent aggression research to date.

1.2.2 Topic two: Exploring adolescents' conceptualization of acceptable aggression

This topic explores the acceptable side of adolescent aggressive behaviour. The notion of aggression as acceptable and possibly having positive benefits is a widely contested and often overlooked aspect in the study of aggression. It should be noted that the phrase *acceptable aggression* is not used to imply that aggression results in good outcomes for everyone involved. Rather, the phrase is used to indicate that in some contexts and for some individuals aggressive behaviour can facilitate beneficial outcomes and opportunities. For example, research indicates that aggression is positively related to child and adolescent attributes such as popularity, social networking, and academic success (see Farmer & Xie, 2007; Kaukiainen et al., 1999; Lease, Musgrove, & Axelrod, 2002). The vast majority of these studies used teacher, parent, and peer

nomination procedures, in which individuals were identified according to a list of criteria. Again, this highlights the approach of targeting behaviours of interest and then surveying their expression. Moving away from this approach, this topic focused on establishing adolescents' understandings of acceptable aggression. In particular, adolescents identified the conditions in which aggression is considered to be more acceptable among peers. These conditions were then mapped onto the different forms and functions of aggression.

1.2.3 Topic three: Examining the association between bullying and aggression

Bullying and aggression often go hand in hand. Some researchers have argued that bullying is a subset of aggression. In particular, bullying is characterized by harmful behaviour that is repeated and occurs when there is a power imbalance between the perpetrator and target (Olweus, 1995). However, this perspective of bullying has not been universally accepted. In some studies, the terms bullying and aggression are used interchangeably (see Paquette & Underwood, 1999), or various specific features of the bullying as previously described are contested. This topic examined how adolescents define and position bullying within the context of aggression to understand how adolescents distinguish, if at all, bullying from the specific forms and functions of aggression.

1.2.4 Topic four: Identifying the role of intentionality in adolescent aggression

Without question, the relevance of intentionality in the conceptualization of aggression is almost as widely debated as the theories addressing the origins of aggression. Some authors (see Dollard et al., 1939; Feshbach, 1964; Baron & Richardson, 1994) have argued that the presence of intention is necessary to distinguish aggression from accidental behaviours causing harm. Conversely, other authors (see Buss, 1961; Lorenz, 1966; Westen, 1996) have argued that intentionality is a mental state that should have no bearing on the study of aggressive behaviour,

because mental states are difficult to understand and open to interpretation and misinterpretation. This topic looked specifically at how the presence or absence of intentionality impacts adolescents' perceptions of harm, responsibility, and interpretation of aggressive events. If intentionality is shown to have an impact on such perceptions then it will become clearer that intentionality is a critical component of aggression and how we conceptualize its meaning.

1.3   Perspective of the Researcher

As a qualitative research study, it is important that the researcher's assumptions and biases are identified at the outset, so that the reader is informed about the epistemology that shaped the following study. This study was guided and developed under a pragmatist paradigm. Pragmatism is a paradigm situated between positivism and social constructionism (Fishman, 1999; Johnson, 2006; Sailor & Stowe, 2003). Pragmatism is a postmodernist perspective in that people are believed to interpret their experienced reality according to their own goals, experiences, values, and attitudes. It rejects the positivist notion that there is a reality independent of the human mind that can be understood through objective scientific inquiry (Fishman, 1999). Thus, it does not imply the presence of absolute truth that can be discovered and understood through fundamental laws, or for that matter, does it imply an absolute truth that guides behaviour. In other words, it realizes that analyses and interpretations of data are influenced by the perspective and biases of the researcher. This is not to say that pragmatism denies truth and objectivity, rather it adapts the concepts (Menand, 2005). Pragmatists view truth as being provisional, in that it is socially constructed in historical and cultural contexts (Fishman, 1999; Menand, 2005). One similarity between pragmatism and positivism is the value of the scientific method (Fishman, 1999; Johnson, 2006). Pragmatists view scientific theories and methods as tools that should be used to solve problems (Johnson, 2006). However, such

theories and methods are seen as being informed by researchers' values and biases, and as a result, must be considered provisional, because it was for provisional reasons that they were chosen (Menand, 2005).

While pragmatism shares similarities with social constructionism in the sense that conclusions are seen as being constructed in social contexts, the two paradigms differ with respect to the notion of causality. Pragmatists often talk about causation and argue that it is warranted to the degree that it coincides with experience (Menand, 2005). For instance, if behaviour *A* is performed and effect *B* occurs, it is applicable to say that *A* causes *B*. However, pragmatists will also contend that such beliefs in causation are only acceptable as long as they are supported by experience (Johnson, 2006). If behaviour *A* is performed and effect *B* no longer occurs, the belief that *A* causes *B* must be abandoned as it no longer has value.

In pragmatism, the problem being studied is of most importance, as opposed to methodology (Creswell, 2003). As such, researchers under this paradigm use whichever methods or procedures will enable them to address the problem. As this study is concerned with exploring how adolescents define and make sense of aggression, a qualitative approach is most appropriate, as it allows adolescents to share their experiences in an open-ended context.

1.4   Methodology of the dissertation

1.4.1 Participants

A total of 59 participants took part in this study (see Table 1.1 for the distribution of gender and age by school program). The convenience sample of participants was drawn from three separate schools from the Central Okanagan School District in Kelowna, British Columbia. Two of the schools were from the district's alternate-education program, while the third school provided regular-education programming. Students attending the alternative schools are at risk

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of dropping out of school for a variety of reasons, such as behavioural and academic problems. The first school was part of the district's junior storefront program, which provides self-paced programming for students in grade 7 to grade 9. Eleven students from this school participated in the study. The second alternative school provides senior programing (i.e., grade 10 to 12) to students through direct instruction. Twenty-seven students from this school participated in the study. The third school was a middle school (i.e., grade 7 to grade 9) from the district's regular-education program. A total of 21 students from this school participated in the study.

Table 1.1 *Gender and Age Distribution of Participants by School Program*

	Junior Alternative Program	Senior Alternative Program	Regular Education Program	Total
Boys	10	18	11	39
Girls	1	9	10	20
Total	11	27	21	59
Mean Age	14.1	16.4	14.0	15.1

Adolescents in grade 7 to grade 10 were purposively sampled for this study, because official district records (Molloy, 2007) indicated that this age group was at the highest risk for school suspensions in the school district. Two types of suspensions are given to students in the school district. *Definite suspensions* are for a period of up to 10 days. *Indefinite suspensions* are handed down to students who are repeat offenders or involved in very serious infractions. These suspensions involve periods longer than 10 days and the student must appear before a board committee. Looking at definite suspension records for the 2005-2006 school year, a total of 1,056 definite suspensions were made for assault, behavioural problems, bullying, fighting, and

vandalism. Of those, 491 (46%) suspensions were specific to students in grades 8, 9, and 10.

Looking at indefinite suspensions for more severe infractions, from 2001 to 2007 a total of 161

suspensions were made for assault, behavioural problems, fighting, and vandalism. Of those,

114 (71%) were given to students in grades 8, 9, and 10.

1.4.2 Procedure

Prior to commencing the study, the researcher met with the school district's director of

student support services and principal of the alternative schools to explain the study and identify

participating schools. The school principal elicited support from individual teachers and

provided the researcher with their contact information. The researcher then contacted teachers

and arranged for a time to come to class and elicit participation from students. During school

time, the researcher entered participating classrooms to inform students of the study. In order to

participate, students had to provide written assent to participate and obtain consent from their

teacher who provided proxy parental consent (see Appendix A for a copy of the student assent

and teacher consent form).

Data for all four topics were collected from participants through 11 separate focus

groups. Two focus groups were conducted with participants from the junior alternative program,

four groups consisted of students from the senior alternative program, and five groups were with

students from a middle school in the regular-education program. The duration of the focus

groups ranged from 18 minutes to 56 minutes, with a mean of 38 minutes. This time varied

according to the amount of time participants were able to miss from their regular school

requirements. The aim was to have focus groups last between 30 and 45 minutes. The shortest

focus group resulted from a last-minute room scheduling conflict that required finding a new

room during the time available for the focus group. The size of the focus groups ranged from

four to eight participants. All focus groups were mixed gender, except for one group that consisted of only boys. The author facilitated all focus groups. Only those participating in the focus groups and the researcher were present during the focus groups. Focus groups took place within the school in either a vacant classroom or multipurpose room. Each focus group was audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

A semi-structured interview guide was used for the focus group. The list of preset questions was slightly modified after the second focus group in order to facilitate better discussion through better probing questions. In detail, questions were made more specific and additional probing questions were developed. Appendix B provides the final version of the interview guide that was used. A semi-structured approach was chosen to allow participants the most freedom to answer the questions and engage in a group discussion regarding aggression and their experiences with it.

Initially, data were gathered using six focus groups from the alternative-education program; however, to expand on the data and further clarify the themes identified from this sample, additional data were sought from the middle school in the regular-education program. As a result, five more focus groups were conducted. Data collection was stopped when the focus groups did not appear to add to the development of new themes. It should also be mentioned that a variation to the methodology was introduced during these latter groups. Specifically, at the beginning of the focus groups, after participants had been further informed about the topic and ethics protocols were reiterated, participants were given a piece of paper and asked to write down an example of aggressive behaviour. Participants were not asked to submit their paper to the researcher. This process was introduced to provide participants a greater opportunity to think to themselves about a concrete example before being asked to discuss with the group.

1.4.3 Data analysis

Data gathered from participants during the focus groups were analyzed using a thematic analysis process. Although thematic analysis is widely used, some researchers have argued that it is a tool used within other methods of qualitative research (Boyatzis, 1998). Braun and Clarke (2006) argued, however, that it serves as a foundational method for qualitative analysis and should be considered its own specific method. Regardless of where one sides on the thematic analysis debate (e.g., is it its own method or a step used in a method such as grounded theory?), it remains a process that enables the researcher to identify, encode, interpret, and report on patterns and meaning within the data (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Like many methods of qualitative analysis, thematic analysis is an iterative process (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, data analysis and interpretation are always in a state of development and redevelopment. Therefore, thematic analysis provides a great deal of flexibility allowing the researcher to repeatedly examine the data from multiple perspectives. One difference between thematic analysis and other methods of qualitative analysis is the purpose of the analysis. For example, grounded theory is used to develop theory that ultimately explains an entire dataset (Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Although thematic analysis is used as a stepping-stone to grounded theory (Boyatzis, 1998), it does not require the same theoretical focus (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was chosen for this study because of the flexibility it affords in exploring the data. The purpose of this study was to examine how adolescents define and experience aggression rather than explaining why they experience it as they do. As such, thematic analysis allowed for interpretations regarding what aggression means to adolescents, and these interpretations were supported by the themes identified in the process.

Due to its iterative nature, thematic analysis requires the researcher to be immersed in the

data, which extends beyond simply the data gathered from participants, but also the gathering of background information and the researcher's own thoughts and views of the data. This was achieved at every stage of this study from the initial conceptualization of the study to the writing of this report. Engagement in the literature pertinent to adolescent aggression began well before the idea for this study was even conceived, and continued through to the writing of this report. Some qualitative researchers have argued that involvement in the literature can limit the scope of data interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006); however, Tuckett (2005) argued that early engagement increases the researcher's sensitivity to various elements within the data. Along with developing the following study, the researcher was also responsible for conducting the focus groups with participants, transcribing the audio recordings, and conducting the data analysis, thus ensuring full immersion in the data (see Figure 1.1 for an overview of the procedure for dissertation).

Although there are no strict rules one must follow to conduct thematic analysis, procedures and guidelines have been developed to help facilitate the thoroughness of the analysis. As such, the thematic analysis used for this study followed the procedures detailed by Braun and Clarke (2006) as well as Frith and Gleeson (2004). An overview of the thematic analysis process used in this research is provided in Figure 1.2. As Patton (2002) suggested for all qualitative research, analysis of the data began during data collection. Following each focus group, notes were made regarding initial observations about the data. These insights also led to the modification of the interview guide during the course of data collection to further clarify questions and facilitate the progression of participant conversation. In addition, information gathered from previous focus groups was at times incorporated and presented to subsequent focus groups. For example, participants were asked to comment on an example shared in an

earlier group or on a manner in which the researcher was interpreting what previous participants talked about. Importantly, this approach served as a method of member checking in which participants are asked to comment on the study's findings (Creswell, 2003).
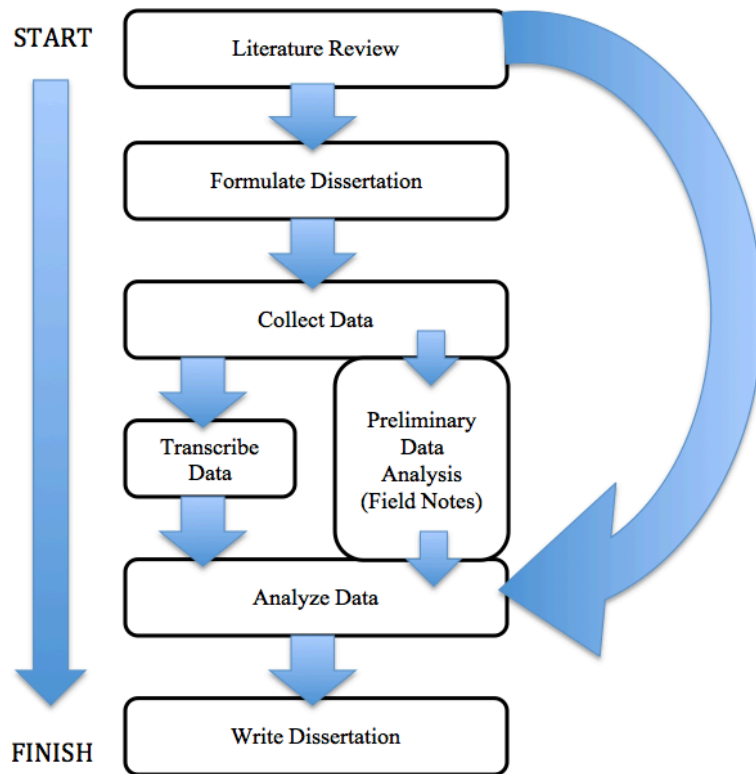
Figure 1.1 *Overview of Methodology Procedure*

Following the focus groups, the researcher transcribed audio recordings of the group discussions. As these were audio recordings only, the transcripts only included verbal aspects of communication. While punctuation was entered to facilitate reading, efforts were made (i.e., replaying the audio file while reading the text) to ensure it did not alter the meaning of what was being said. It is important to note that while transcribing, the researcher continuously made notes to record initial thoughts and interpretations of the data.

Core Process	Conduct focus groups	Transcribe audio files	Initial coding	Identify themes
Step One	Make field notes	Record initial observations and interpretations	Identify meaningful units	Examine how codes relate to each other
Step Two	Modify interview guide if necessary		Group similar units together	Group codes according to higher- order codes
Step Three			Label and describe the meaning capture in the code	Label and describe the meaning of the theme
Step Four			Add, modify, or delete codes as necessary	

Figure 1.2 *An Overview of the Thematic Analysis Process*

After transcribing the audio recordings, each focus group was reviewed and rigorously coded. A code consisted of meaningful units (i.e., thoughts, ideas, words, or phrases) that on some level were interesting and related to the research question (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). These units were then coded by developing a label and description of the meaning. The exact words used by the participant were then marked as quotes to represent what the code described. Subsequent focus groups were then subjected to the same process, existing codes were added upon, and new codes were developed. As an iterative process, the researcher constantly redeveloped these initial codes to ensure that they accurately described the very quotes and meaningful units they represented. It is important to note that the same meaningful unit could be included in multiple codes (Frith & Gleeson, 2004). This initial coding pass was used to code as much data as could be potentially needed. This approach helped to ensure nothing was missed, but still maintained the possibility that the code could be later dropped, as it

did not add to the meaningful interpretation of the data.

Once the initial coding was completed for all transcripts, the codes were reviewed and organized according to themes. This process involved shifting the analysis from focusing on the codes to focusing on the broader level of how the codes relate to each other (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The end result was a hierarchical set of codes in which more concrete codes were grouped according to higher-order abstract codes. The final step in this process involved naming each theme and describing/interpreting the meaning that it represented. Table 1.2 provides an example of how a theme was generated from individual codes and meaningful units. The data presented in Table 1.2 are discussed in more detail in section 4.1.1. It should be noted that no stringent criteria were used to determine the prevalence of a theme. In other words, a theme, or code for that matter, was not considered to only be relevant if a specific number of participants alluded to it or if it was mentioned in a specific number of focus groups. Instead, themes and codes were considered relevant if they contributed to the overall interpretation of the data. In some cases this relevance was in the capacity of raising questions for future research.

To further understand the scope and intent of the thematic analysis used in this study, issues pertaining to (a) the level of detail the analysis seeks to address, (b) the inductive/deductive nature of the analysis, and (c) the level of theme development should be discussed (Braun & Clark, 2006). First, both codes and themes were identified for the purpose of providing a detailed account of specific aspects of the data that pertained to the individual research focus of each topic. As data for each of the four topics were collected concurrently, the analysis did not seek to capture themes representing the entire data corpus, and therefore, the entirety of adolescents' experiences and meanings of aggression.

Table 1.2 *An Example of Generating a Theme Through Thematic Analysis*

Meaningful Unit	Code (Label)	Code (Description)	Theme (Label)	Theme (Description)
"yeah separates them from the group like little prey"	Using Isolation	The perpetrator is described as using techniques to isolate the target.		Bullying is described as a predatory behaviour. The perpetrator is argued to use strategies that isolate the target. The behaviour is also described as relentless in that it occurs over multiple events in order to wear down the target.
"excluding him everyday"				
"if it's like an everyday thing then that's a different story"	Continuous Victimization	Participants describe bullying as harm occurring over time and through repeated events.	Predatory Behaviour	
"I think if it is over a long period of time it can be considered as bullying"				
"bullying is like picking on them all the time and stuff. And like it keeps happening"				
"they break down more and more every time"	Wearing Down the Target	The constant behaviour is said to wear down the target.		
"wears them down"				

Note. Quotations were drawn from discussions about bullying.

Second, the thematic analysis was conducted using a predominantly inductive approach. Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that inductive themes are tied more strongly to the actual data than to previous theory or preconceptions. Patton (2002) stated that inductive analysis involves discovering and allowing themes to emerge from the data. Conversely, deductive analysis involves analyzing data according to the preconceived framework. While this description helps to contrast the two approaches, the account of inductive analysis is too passive because it does not credit the active and influential role the researcher plays in identifying and selecting which themes are important (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). Simply put, the inductive process allows the

researcher to make interpretations based on that data rather than use the data to support previously generated theoretical conceptions. An inductive approach is also evidenced when the themes do not merely represent the questions asked of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While this was certainly the case across the entire data analysis, aspects of some of the analysis in topic one could be considered by some to be deductive. The purpose of topic one was to examine how adolescents define aggression and to see if elements of formal definitions were present in adolescents' understanding of what aggression is. Therefore, there were some preconceived notions (e.g., the functions of aggression) as to what the data could look like, which may constitute deductive analysis. With that said, however, these themes were only considered relevant if they were supported by the data. Within this same topic, alternative themes that had not been identified through previous research were identified and interpreted inductively. The remaining analysis involved in topics two, three, and four was inductive.

Third, themes for this analysis were developed at a latent level as opposed to a semantic level. At the semantic level (also known as manifest level), the theme simply reflects the surface meaning of its content (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this level, the researcher does not look to explain or interpret meaning beyond what is directly apparent from the data unit. Conversely, latent-level theme development involves interpretation of the underlying meaning of the data unit. This level of analysis goes beyond what is present strictly at the semantic level. The majority of the thematic analysis used in this study sought to provide a deeper level of interpretation regarding adolescents' definitions of and experiences with aggression rather than stopping at a surface level of description. With that said, some themes were identified at the semantic level in order to capture specific words or phrases some adolescents used to describe aggression.

The NVivo 9.2 software program was used to manage all aspects of the thematic analysis used throughout this study. This software program operates as a qualitative data management tool. It is important to note that this program does not assist with or provide interpretations of the data. Unlike statistical software programs in which variables are entered into an analysis and a solution is then calculated, NVivo 9.2 simply allows for qualitative data to be electronically organized. In other words, the program serves as a sophisticated *closet organizer*. Rather than the commonly used methods of coloured pens/highlighters, index cards, and post-it notes (see Patton, 2002), NVivo 9.2 serves as an electronic interface to store, modify, and link transcripts, audio files, and project notes. For example, the program allowed the researcher to upload the transcripts from each focus group. From there the researcher read through the transcript and when a meaningful unit was identified the text was copied and placed into an electronic *storage bin* so to speak. NVivo 9.2 refers to these bins as *nodes*. Because the text was copied directly from the transcript, the bins contain quotes from participants. The researcher then provided a label and description for each of these bins. It is through this process that data were coded. In relation to the example provided in Table 1.2, the bins are simply codes for the contents that are the meaningful units identified by the researcher. At any point the researcher is able to open a bin and check its contents, add additional contents, or remove contents. These bins (i.e., codes) were then arranged and linked together by the researcher to generate additional bins that subsequently served as themes. The content of these resulting themes is simply the codes described above. As made evident from this description, the program simply allowed the researcher to manage the participants' quotes that were identified as meaningful units when reading the transcripts. At no point does the program provide suggestions or insight as to what is meaningful, how data should be coded, or which themes best explain what participants

discussed. This is the conceptual work of the researcher. The next four chapters will present each topic separately.

Chapter 2 - Topic One: Defining Aggression

Aggression is one of the most widely studied aspects of human behaviour. Theorists and researchers from a multitude of disciplines, including but not limited to psychology, sociology, criminology, anthropology, education, neurobiology, and philosophy have addressed the topic. Although such an extensive and multidisciplinary interest benefits the study of aggression, the involvement of so many different individuals and perspectives has led to two problems. First, a review of the literature suggests that some researchers have taken for granted the long history of aggression research and assume everyone knows the meaning of the term aggression. Second, the field is abound with a number of terms for aggression, some of which appear to be synonyms, while others are clearly distinct, and yet some lack clarity to determine exactly where they fit.

An unfortunate reality of aggression research is that there are far too many studies in which the authors do not provide specific definitions of what aggression is or consists of. It may be possible that some of these authors were simply unaware that they did not provide a definition or believed that providing a definition was not necessary. Failing to provide a definition makes two assumptions. First, it is assumed that readers will have their own conceptualization of aggression. Second, these authors assumed that the concepts held by the readers are consistent with their own concept of aggression.

The absence of aggression definitions is not a problem plaguing only a single type of research paper. Instead, the problem is present in a variety of genres including reviews, theoretical proposals, and primary research articles. For example, Huesmann (1988) proposed an information processing model for explaining the development of aggression. Throughout the

paper, Huesmann talked about aggressive scripts, observing aggression, and aggressive behaviour, but at no point was the term *aggression* actually defined.

In a more recent empirical study, Winstok (2006) examined the escalatory tendencies of aggression at the workplace and home. While the author consistently identified how aggression is expressed (e.g., pushing and shoving), as well as explaining why one might behave aggressively, there was again no clear definition of aggression provided. That is, the author did not articulate why, for example, pushing and shoving should be considered aggression. In fact, many authors focus on providing examples of what aggressive behaviour is and how it may be expressed (e.g., verbally and physically). But again, it is not made clear why or how a behaviour expressed in that manner is classified as being aggressive. In one final example, Kingery (1998) developed an adolescent violence survey. The survey is intended to measure violent behaviour in a general adolescent population in order to aid research and prevention strategies. While the survey contains a detailed inventory of behaviours, the author did not provide a clear definition of aggression, and thus, assumes that the reader will have a shared understanding of the constructs the survey intends to measure. In other words, it is implied that aggression is a self-evident construct that people are familiar with.

On the other hand, when definitions of aggression in general are provided, confusion arises because there is no single agreed upon definition (Ramirez & Andreu, 2006). This is not to say that a single definition is needed, but rather authors should acknowledge that their definition is not necessarily inclusive of all types of aggression. Examination of the definitions that are provided finds that they fall into one of two categories. The first category is limited to the condition of harm. Buss (1961), a socio-biologist, found that there were two underlying characteristics of aggressive behaviour. First, all aggressive acts were considered to be harmful.

Second, all aggressive acts occurred in an interpersonal context. As a result, Buss defined aggression as a "response that delivers noxious stimuli to another organism" (p. 1). In other words, aggression consists of behaviour that harms another person. From an ethological perspective, Lorenz (1966) also focused on the issue of harm, defining aggression as a fighting instinct directed against members within the same species. In comparing these definitions, two subtle differences arise. First, in Buss' definition, the act of harming is not limited to within the same species as it is in Lorenz's. Second, Buss described aggression as a behaviour, whereas, Lorenz described it as an instinct. To further stress the condition of harm, Baron and Richardson (1994) specified that the target of the behaviour must be motivated to avoid being harmed. A desire to avoid the behaviour validates that it was in fact harmful.

Westen (1996) also drew on the simple notion of causing harm when he defined aggression as "verbal or physical behaviour aimed at harming another person or living being" (p. 716). While this definition still defined aggression as a harmful behaviour, it also provided insight into the possibility that aggression can be expressed in multiple ways. In fact, it is common for authors to include different types of behaviour in their definitions of aggression, while still maintaining the underlying element that aggression is harm directed toward another person (e.g., Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2004; Reppucci, Fried, & Schmidt, 2002). Not only are these authors highlighting that aggression can take on many different forms, but also that the resulting harm is not limited to a physical experience and can include emotional and social experiences as well.

Building on the first category, the second category of general aggression definitions maintains the requirement of harmful behaviour, but adds the inclusion of intention. Dollard et al. (1939) defined aggression as behaviour directed towards and intended to harm another

person. While using different terms or phrases to convey the concept of intention (e.g., deliberate; Kempes, Matthys, de Vries, & van Engeland, 2005) many researchers consider it a necessary component in defining aggression (e.g., Bartol & Bartol, 2005; Berkowitz, 1988, 1989; Berkowitz & Alioto, 1973; Crapanzano, Frick, & Terranova, 2010; Feshbach, 1964; Moeller, 2001; Roberto, Meyer, Boster, & Roberto, 2003). The inclusion of intent identifies aggression as a purposeful event beyond simply delivering *noxious stimuli* (Berkowitz, 1989).

Looking back at the first category of definitions, the criterion of intention was not simply an oversight. Buss (1961) for example, adamantly opposed including the criterion of intentionality, and he was not alone. One of the main criticisms of intention is that it is not an actual behaviour (Buss, 1961; Tedeschi et al., 1974). Rather, it is internal to individuals and not openly available for observation, making it difficult to study in behavioural research (Graham et al., 2006). Buss (1961) also opposed intentionality because it implied purposeful behaviour that did not coincide with his behaviourist approach to the study and explanation of aggression. The second criticism of including intention involves its measurement and interpretation. Kim (1976) argued that intention is vague and attributable to any behaviour appearing to be nonaccidental. Bailey, Smith, and Dolan (2001) stated that intention is an aspect of motivation, and that motivations change over time, place, and situation. The authors added that the study of intentions is dangerous because they are difficult to measure. Buss (1961) and Kim (1976) argued further that because intentions are inferred and can change (e.g., later be denied by the aggressor), they are difficult for individuals to verbalize or accurately reflect upon because they are subject to perceptual distortions. One final criticism of focusing on intentionality is that researchers use many different terms to represent the concept (Buss, 1961).

While the above criticisms are valid, they mostly highlight the inherent difficulties with

studying intentions in aggressive behaviour. Intention, however, provides an important criterion to help distinguish behaviours that cause harm. Without considering the intention behind the event, any event resulting in the harm of a person would be classified as aggression. Feshbach (1964) stated that including the element of intention is important because it helps distinguish between accidents resulting in injury and purposeful behaviours that were expected to harm another person.

It should also be mentioned that general aggression definitions are not typically limited strictly to harming a person. Many definitions include the damage or destruction of objects (e.g., Bartol & Bartol, 2005; Rohner, 1976). Buss (1961) argued that a target of aggression could be harmed indirectly through the destruction of an object associated with or valued with him/her. In fact, he expanded his definition to include directing noxious stimuli towards an *organism-surrogate*. While many researchers simply encompass the damage of objects in their definition of general aggression, others have classified it more specifically as *displaced aggression*. Archer (2004) defined displaced aggression as damaging objects, banging tables, slamming doors, and temper tantrums. Pond et al. (2011) included road rage (e.g., honking horns and pounding the steering wheel) in their examples of displaced aggression. Unlike Buss' definition, these definitions of displaced aggression involve damage to an object that may have no actual association with the target. For example, when a person pounds his/her own steering wheel, the target, who is in another vehicle, is in no manner harmed. Therefore, contemporary researchers focus simply on the damage or destruction of objects regardless of their association with the target.

2.1 Getting to the specifics of aggression

The two core definitional categories discussed thus far have highlighted the overall

criteria that are considered when classifying a behaviour as either aggression or not. However,

these criteria alone are not sufficient in capturing the complexities of how and why aggression is

expressed (Stadler et al., 2006). In fact, many researchers argued that aggression is not

homogeneous and it serves different functions and is expressed in different forms (see Anderson

& Bushman, 2002; Berkowitz, 1988, 1989; Brown, Atkins, Osborne, & Milnamow, 1996; Dodge

& Coie, 1987; Feshbach, 1964). Considering the two criteria discussed thus far (i.e., intention

and harm), the intention criterion requires distinguishing subtypes of aggression. While

aggression is used with the intention of harming the target, it quickly becomes apparent that

aggression can also be used with the intention of obtaining additional outcomes. Therefore, the

intention to harm serves as a proximal goal, while consideration should be open for possible

distal goals (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Ramirez & Andreu, 2006).

Considering the overall reason for intending harm against a target, researchers identified

two functions of aggression. Functions refer to the underlying purpose of the aggressive

behaviour. Consistently, two distinct functions have been identified throughout the literature;

however, their specific names have not been agreed upon. The first function, *instrumental

aggression* (also commonly referred to as *proactive aggression*), refers to a harmful act primarily

motivated by a distal outcome in addition to the proximal outcome of harming the target (Dodge

& Coie, 1987; Feshbach, 1964). In this instance, the act of harming another person is simply the

means to an alternative goal, such as social dominance or financial gain. The second function,

reactive aggression (also commonly referred to as *hostile aggression*) is primarily focused on

harming the target in retaliation for previous or potentially future harm done to the aggressor

(Dodge, Lochman, Harnish, Bates, & Pettit, 1997). Contrary to instrumental aggression, reactive

aggression operates as a direct response to provocation (Berkowitz, 1988) and is motivated only

by the proximal goal of harming the target in retaliation.

The need to distinguish between instrumental and reactive functions of aggression has been supported both theoretically and empirically. Prior to distinguishing between the functions, aggression was viewed as homogenous (Kempes et al., 2005). As a result, the dominant theories of aggression were seen as competing theories. However, after distinguishing the functions, these theories were found to each explain a different function. In light of the complexity of aggression, Huesmann (1988) contended that no one should expect a single explanation for aggression. Instrumental aggression is typically explained by social learning theory (Bandura, 1973, 1977), in which individuals learn behaviours through observing and modelling behaviours that are rewarded or punished. With respect to instrumental aggression, perpetrators intentionally harm the target in order to obtain a reward. Conversely, reactive aggression is commonly explained by theories such as the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Dollard et al., 1939), cognitive-neoassociationistic model (Berkowitz, 1988, 1989, 1990) or social information processing models (Dodge & Coie, 1987).

Empirical findings have also supported a distinction between the functions (see Brown et al., 1996; Little, Jones, Henrich, & Hawley, 2003; Poulin & Boivin, 2000). Utilizing a common instrument to measure the functions of aggression, Poulin and Boivin (2000) found that the data fit a two-factor model (i.e., distinguishing between the two functions) better than a one-factor model in which aggression was treated as homogeneous. Interestingly, these and other authors continuously find a high degree of overlap and redundancy in the two-factor model. Looking closer at the problem, Little et al. (2003) found that measures of the functions were confounded with the means by which aggression can be expressed.

Along with multiple reasons for engaging in aggressive behaviour, people can also

express aggression in different forms. Unfortunately, when discussing the forms of aggression, many terms are used. Perhaps the two most consistently used terms are *physical* and *verbal* aggression. Physical aggression involves harming a target by physical force or using a weapon (Marsee & Frick, 2007; Xie et al., 2003). Verbal aggression is described as causing harm to another person through threats or hurtful words intended to harm the target's self-concept (Meyer, Roberto, Boster, & Roberto, 2004; Xie et al., 2003).

Two other terms that are frequently used are *overt* and *covert* aggression. Some authors defined overt aggression as simply using physical or verbal behaviour to harm a target (Dempsey, Sulkowski, Dempsey, & Storch, 2011; Little, Brauner, Jones, Nocke, & Hawley, 2003; Marsee et al., 2011). Marsee and Frick (2007), on the other hand, equated it with only physical aggression. At this point, the term does not appear to add anything to the description of aggression other than possibly serving as an aggregate of the physical and verbal forms of aggression. However, other authors extended the definition and argued that in contrast to covert aggression, overt refers to aggression that is more visible (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Csibi & Csibi, 2011) and directly in the target's face (Little, Jones, et al., 2003). Here the terms direct and indirect aggression are introduced and begin to overlap with and cloud the distinction between overt and covert aggression. For example, Card et al. (2008) stated that forms of aggression that are covert or indirect in nature harm the targets' social relations. By using both covert and indirect terms to encompass the same behaviour (i.e., harming one's social relations), it appears these authors are implying covert and indirect are supposed to mean the same thing. Interestingly, Heilbron and Prinstein (2008) argued that indirect aggression entails behaviours that *may* be covert, and therefore, implied the terms can overlap but are not direct synonyms. The authors went on to specify that covert aggression occurs when the perpetrator wants to

conceal his/her identity from the target. This notion of covert aggression is consistent with Sullivan, Helms, Kliewer, and Goodman's (2010) view that covert does not involve direct confrontation. Perhaps the most inconsistent use of the overt/covert terms occurred when Dodge et al. (1997) opposed the terms because they had no theoretical basis. Instead, they proposed distinguishing between reactive and instrumental aggression. As mentioned above, reactive and instrumental refer to the functions of aggression rather than the forms.

Examining the terms direct and indirect more closely, direct aggression is defined in one of two ways. First, it is defined using the typical definition of aggression, in that it is behaviour aimed at harming another person (Ramirez & Andreu, 2006). In their meta analysis of direct and indirect aggression, Card et al. (2008) defined direct aggression as physical and verbal aggression. However, Coyne et al. (2004) stated that indirect aggression could involve both physical aggression in the form of damaging or destroying someone else's property and verbal aggression, such as gossiping. Therefore, simply amalgamating physical and verbal aggression into direct aggression seems to be an overgeneralization. Second, direct aggression is defined in many respects as the opposite of indirect aggression. Looking then specifically at indirect aggression, Feshbach (1969) stated it entails ignoring and/or excluding a target. Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, and Peltonen (1988) added that it occurs when the perpetrator does not directly confront the target. Ramirez and Andreu (2006) defined indirect aggression as a perpetrator circuitously harming the target through another person or object.

To summarize the distinction among the terms so far, overt and covert aggression appear to address the visibility of the perpetrator to the target. In overt aggression, the perpetrator is visible in that the target knows his/her identity. Conversely, in covert aggression the perpetrator's identity is unknown to the target. It is unclear whether the perpetrator's identity

must remain unknown. However, for clarification it should be argued that visibility is restricted to the immediate aggressive event. That is, if the perpetrator performs the behaviour and the target is harmed without knowing the perpetrator's identity, then the event should be classified as covert aggression, regardless of whether or not the target later learns the perpetrator's identity after being harmed. Direct and indirect aggression refer to the perpetrator's degree of confrontation with and proximity to the target during performance of the harmful behaviour. In direct aggression, the perpetrator does not use any intermediary means to confront and harm the target. In contrast, indirect aggression involves harming the target through nonconfrontational means and/or a secondary source. For example, the perpetrator may harm the target by ignoring or avoiding him/her.

Two constructs that are closely related to indirect aggression are relational aggression and social aggression. Relational aggression is commonly defined as behaviour intended to damage a target's social relationships with others and feelings of social inclusion (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Lagerspetz et al., 1988; Letendre & Smith, 2011; Little, Jones et al., 2003; Xie, Swift, Cairns, & Cairns, 2002). Examples of this type of aggression include, but are not limited to, threatened or actual withdrawal of friendship, social exclusion, and gossiping. Aside from the focus on the perpetrator's intent to harm the target's social relations, another key aspect of this type of aggression is that it does not involve the use or threat of physical aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Sullivan et al., 2010).

Although social aggression is argued to include many elements of relational aggression Coyne et al., 2004; Putallaz et al., 2007), there are some distinguishing characteristics. Similar to relational aggression, social aggression is argued to involve the intention to harm a target's social relationships (Heilbron & Prinstein, 2008; Paquette & Underwood, 1999). One criticism

of Crick and Grotpeter's (1995) conceptualization of social aggression was that it did not include nonverbal behaviour that can be used to harm a target (Galen & Underwood, 1997). Therefore, social aggression includes behaviours such as gossip, social exclusion, telling secrets, stealing friends and romantic partners, and negative facial expression (e.g., eye rolling, mean faces, tossing hair; Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Ferguson, & Gariépy, 1989; Coyne et al., 2004; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Heilbron & Prinstein, 2008; Xie et al., 2003). As such, it initially appeared as though social aggression is simply an expansion of relational aggression by including more behaviours; however, further examination yields an important distinction. Social aggression is argued to be nonconfrontational (i.e., indirect) and covert, which distinguishes it from relational aggression that can be direct or indirect and covert or overt (Xie et al., 2003; Xie et al., 2002).

Card et al. (2008) argued that with respect to indirect, relational, and social aggression the literature lacks complete correspondence in how the terms are used and operationally defined. The authors argued that the terms overlap and together can be defined as behaviour that typically, although not always, entails using nonconfrontational means to attack the target's social relations. Banny, Heilbron, Ames, and Prinstein (2011) argued similarly that although the terms do have important distinctions, the overlap is more significant than their differences. Evidently, these authors and others (e.g., Crapanzano et al., 2011; Garcia-Gómez, 2011) simply amalgamated the terms and chose relational aggression to represent the focus of their study. It can be argued, however, that this process has a negative impact on the study of aggression. In social aggression, and to a similar effect relational aggression, a perpetrator harms the target by utilizing the social community (Heilbron & Prinstein, 2008; Xie et al., 2003; Xie et al., 2002). Therefore, the overall impact of the aggression is dependent on the perpetrator's social standing and capacity to engage the social network (Xie et al., 2002). Conversely, indirect aggression is

not reliant on involving the social community, but rather involves nonconfrontational behaviour, such as the perpetrator alone ignoring the target. The most overlap appears with the relational and social aggression constructs. Both forms of aggression involve harming a target through his/her social relations. Therefore, both of these forms of aggression will inflict harm through manipulation of the social network. The fundamental difference appears to be in their degree of confrontation and visibility of the perpetrator to the target. While social aggression is limited to being indirect and covert, relational aggression can be either indirect or direct and overt or covert. One way to distinguish these terms, is to label those behaviours that utilize the social network to harm a target's social relations through indirect and covert means as social aggression; whereas, those behaviours intending the same outcomes, but instead using direct and overt means, should be classified as relational aggression.

Another term that is commonly used throughout the literature on aggression is violence. In many cases, violence and aggression are used interchangeably (e.g., Kingery, 1998; Woodworth & Porter, 2002). However, there are many studies that distinguish between the two terms. And like the terms discussed above, violence has taken on different meanings in the literature. For example, Bailey et al. (2001) defined violence as destructive aggression, whereas, Anderson and Bushman (2002) defined it as extreme harm. Typically, however, violence is defined as the use or threat of physical force to harm a target or the physical damage or destruction of property (Athens, 2005; Bartol & Bartol, 2005; Moeller, 2001; Reppucci et al., 2002; Roberto et al., 2003). Violence is therefore a form of aggression and more specifically it is the equivalent of physical aggression.

2.2 Identifying adolescent definitions of aggression

The above discussion illustrated a number of factors that must be considered when

aggression is defined and used in research. At times it is difficult to read through the existing literature because it is not always clear whether two reports are referring to the same behaviour or not. Too often authors are using terms interchangeably. Malle and Nelson (2003) argued that using multiple terms for a single concept creates confusion because the reader's initial response is to assume the terms have different meanings. As the review above highlights, many of these terms do in fact reference different expressions of aggression, and therefore, should not be used interchangeably. Unfortunately, there has been a recent trend for researchers to amalgamate multiple terms into a single construct (e.g., Banny et al., 2011; Card et al., 2008; Crapanzano, 2011). As a result, different behaviours such as indirect aggression and social aggression are being treated as the same thing in one study and possibly compared to something else unique in another study.

Inaccurate understandings and variations in the use of definitions can have detrimental impacts on the reporting of behaviours, the study of behaviours, the effectiveness of interventions, and the perceptions of the phenomena in question (Naylor, Cowie, Cossin, de Bettencourt, & Lemme, 2006). Therefore, to be successful in understanding adolescent aggression and developing prevention and intervention programs, a clear identification of what constitutes aggression is needed. In order to do this there must be an understanding of how adolescents experience and make sense of aggressive behaviour.

Malle and colleagues argued that people have a natural tendency to want to make sense of the world, adapt to it, and shape it (1999; Malle & Nelson, 2003). To do this, people develop explanations for their own and others' behaviour (Malle, 1999, 2006). When analyses reveal that people have similarities among their explanations, they are said to have a shared understanding, or rather a folk concept of a particular phenomenon. The terms shared understanding or folk

concept can be thought of as *common sense* or *lay belief* about the world. Bruner (1990) argues that it is through folk concepts that people establish a folk psychology explaining why they themselves and other people do the things they do. In order to obtain a clear understanding of how adolescents experience and make sense of aggression it is first necessary to identify the elements that characterize their understandings of aggression. The focus of this topic is to examine how adolescents make sense of the term aggression. The above discussion highlighted how researchers understand and define aggression. But it is not clear which of these understandings and definitions are reflected or shared among adolescents. As such, this specific topic aimed to examine which elements constituting official definitions of aggression were replicated among adolescent understandings of what constitutes aggression.

2.3   Thematic analysis of topic one

The goal of this topic was to identify how adolescents make sense of and experience aggression. In other words, determine from the perspectives of adolescents, what the term aggression means to them. Table 2.1 provides an overview of the themes that were identified when analyzing the data for topic one. When asking participants about aggression, it became clear that the term aggression is not one that is commonly used and for many it was an abstract concept. This did not come as a surprise as even within the academic literature, the term conveys many different types of events. The term *event* is used to represent an exchange of behaviour between the perpetrator(s) who is behaving aggressively and the target(s) who is being aggressed against. Participants were asked to focus on providing examples, rather than trying to provide more structured definitions.

Table 2.1 *Themes for Topic One: Defining Aggression*

Theme Label	Theme Description
Violence: An outcome or a form of aggression?	In relating the concept of violence to that of aggression, participants identified violence as either an outcome or a form of aggression. As an outcome violence was considered an emotion. As a form, violence was seen as a severe type of physical aggression.
Experiences of direct overt aggression	Examples of overt aggression entailed aggressive behaviours that were direct, obvious, and either physical or verbal in nature.
Subtheme - Direct overt physical aggression and its short-term context	Examples of overt aggression entailed aggressive behaviours that were direct, obvious, and physical in nature.
Subtheme - Direct overt verbal aggression	Examples of overt aggression entailed aggressive behaviours that were direct, obvious, and verbal in nature.
Identifying the other form of aggression: Blurring the boundary between social and relational aggression	Participants described additional types of verbal aggression; however, in these examples the perpetrator was aggressive towards the target indirectly. While this may constitute social and/or relational aggression, participants further described these examples as blurring the boundary between these two types of aggression.
Reactive aggression: All I want to do is hurt you	Participants gave examples of when the perpetrator used aggression to retaliate for something the target did or might do. Due to the retaliatory influence, the behaviour was argued to be more acceptable than other functions of aggression.
Instrumental aggression: Difficult to explain why	Participants described aggression that was not in retaliation, and therefore, engaged for a purpose beyond harming the target. Participants had difficulty when trying to describe that purpose.
Anger, the aggression catalyst	Aggression was grounded in anger, suggesting that anger operates as a precursor to aggression. Anger also links aggression to the concept of an emotion.
There's something about the tone of it	Participants noted that the meaning of an event is conveyed and interpreted through the tone used by the perpetrator.
It's not aggression: it's play fighting	Participants described play fighting which to an external observer looks like aggression, but to those involved it is not aggression.

2.3.1 Violence: A form of aggression or an outcome?

In order to identify the best terminology to use when talking to adolescents about aggression, participants were asked to distinguish, if necessary, among aggression, bullying, and violence. It was assumed that if considered different from aggression and bullying, a definition of violence could be identified. While some participants suggested there was no difference, many participants felt there was a difference, despite having difficulties explaining the nature of the difference. For example, one boy said, "you can be a bully, you can be angry at someone and still not be violent…. You can be angry at somebody and still not be aggressive. But you can be aggressive, it's a, it's a weird concept."

Those that were able to articulate the distinction suggested that violence is related to aggression as either (a) an outcome or result of aggression or (b) a form of aggression. As an example of the first perspective, one boy said, "yeah, there is a large difference," which was immediately followed by another boy who said, "violence is the end product of aggression." This argument was supported in another group when one boy said, "violence would be like the performance. One way of exerting your aggression sort of thing." Participants appeared to suggest that violence is a product of aggression. Within this perspective aggression was considered an emotion, such as anger, from which violence then results. Interestingly, this perspective is not consistent with formal definitions of violence or aggression. Aggression is consistently argued to be a behaviour (e.g., Berkowitz, 1988; Feshbach, 1964); however, participants adhering to this perspective suggested it is an emotion or something that is to be *acted on*. This conceptualization is explored in greater detail when examining how participants talked about anger (see the section: Anger, the aggression catalyst).

According to the second perspective, violence was seen as a form of aggression, in

particular, a more severe form of physical aggression. For example, one participant said, "violence is where you get beat up and stuff and then there's aggression where it's … the pushing not … physically hurting somebody, but it could be … mentally." This example, like others, clearly distinguished the nature of violence from the more general concept of aggression.

Both perspectives highlighted that violence is an action. If violence is seen as an action or a form of aggression, it is important to examine whether it constitutes any type of action or if it is more specific. Based on the discussions, participants described violence as an overt physical behaviour as opposed to covert, relational, or socially aggressive behaviour, such as spreading rumours. For example, one boy described violence as "react[ing] in a way that you have to like use force," while another boy stated, "violence is more of the physical side." One girl gave more specific examples, such as "break their jaw or … punching and stuff." Interestingly, participants also argued that violence is not limited to only targeting people, but could also be directed at objects. For example, participants described violence as including behaviours, such as "smashing holes in walls." In contrast, participants argued that aggressive behaviour such as bullying "has to be directed towards a person." As a result, violence appears to refer to a type of aggressive event in which a physical behaviour is directed at either a person or object. Overall, participants understood violence as a specific form of physical overt aggression, which is consistent with formal definitions of violence (see Bartol & Bartol, 2005; Moeller, 2001; Reppucci et al., 2002; Roberto et al., 2003).

2.3.2 Experiences of direct overt aggression

Data collected from the focus groups were analyzed using an inductive approach. However, a deductive approach was used when assessing whether or not participants would replicate through self-identification the different forms and functions of aggression that have

been discussed in previous studies. When providing examples of the different types of

aggression, participants grounded their examples in terms of the behaviours' outcomes. As such

these outcomes were used to help shape the themes representing the different types of

aggression. While discussing aggression, participants provided examples of aggression that were

classified as direct, overt, or relational aggression. Overt aggression consisted of behaviour that

was direct, obvious, and either done through physical or verbal means. As such, direct overt

aggression was distinguished by two themes pertaining to whether or not the event was physical

or verbal.

2.3.2.1 Direct overt physical aggression and its short-term context

Examples of overt physical aggression included events such as fighting between people.

As one girl said, "punching someone and … smashing them out." This type of aggression

included other examples, in which a perpetrator tries to physically hurt a target. One boy gave

an example where he was walking across the road and was targeted by a person driving a car,

"yeah man and he was like … (*makes sounds*) … and he didn't even slow down. And I was just

walking and he just about hit me. And he's like get the fuck off the road." In this example, the

driver did not make an effort to avoid the participant, and made a confrontational verbal gesture.

Although the participant was not injured, he attributed the driver's behaviour as intent to harm

him, therefore constituting aggression. Another boy gave the following detailed example that

involved direct overt physical aggression:

> He's [a] manager and all in my buddy's face. I'm like yo buddy back off. He swung at
>
> me, hit me in the face, ripped my shirt completely off … no sleeve, nothing. And once he
>
> got my shirt off, I just started … fucking hay making on his face … his buddy hadn't
>
> come over and fucking shoved me and then he jacked my hat, my headphone, my skate.

These and other similar examples involving physical aggression, established a context in which the target is aware of the perpetrator's identity (i.e., overt) and the perpetrator directly aggressed the target. There were no instances involving physical aggression that was covert. There were only a few examples involving indirect physical aggression, in which the perpetrator would harm a target by hurting someone else or damaging his/her property. These examples included actions such as punching walls, screaming into a pillow, and throwing objects. In each of these types of examples, there was no indication that the behaviour was intended to harm another person. These actions may be more consistent with the construct of displaced aggression (see Archer, 2004; Pond et al., 2011).

Interestingly, while talking about direct overt physical aggression, participants emphasized short-term outcomes rather than long-term outcomes. Examples of physical injury, such as bruises were mentioned; however, the impact of such injuries were somewhat minimized. For example, one girl stated, "if it's really bad I guess … the other person can break something. Break their jaw or … it's punching and stuff, break their nose." Although she acknowledged that severe injury could occur, she implied that it is rare and only *guessed* that it might occur if the event was "really bad." Similarly, one boy argued, "a knock to the head is not that harmful … you ain't going to die over it."

Along with short-term outcomes, participants also suggested that compared to other forms of aggression, overt physical aggression can provide a quick solution to a dispute. For example:

Girl: but if you fight then it's kind of like done and over with.

Boy: yeah

Girl: you have the bruises, but the bruises go away or stitches and whatever. Breaks can

heal.

Long-term outcomes of overt physical aggression were recognized in terms of possible escalation. As one participant said, "if you … punch them in the head, they're probably going to get more aggressive." In another group, one boy identified two potential outcomes, "either it's not going to happen anymore, or it's just going to keep on going and one of them is going to get their friends one day and uh oh." The other long-term outcome cited involved getting in trouble legally:

> Well my brother and I … my brother gets fucking, head butt kids all the time, gets kids teeth stuck in his head. Punches kids in the face all the time. But you know what, I look at him and he's in trouble with the police all the fucking time.

Another girl from an at-risk school recognized that physical aggression would likely lead to her being expelled from school, "I could … seriously hurt her and I don't need … any of that shit, like I'm doing really good right now, so you know. I don't need that … kind of [problem] coming back to me." It should be noted that participants from the regular system, did indicate that they could get in trouble for being physically aggressive, but it would mostly depend on where the event occurred.

2.3.2.2 Direct overt verbal aggression

Participants provided a wide range of examples in which a perpetrator is verbally aggressive towards a target. These examples included behaviours such as name calling, which one boy said aggression was when you "[go] up to them and call them names." Other examples included when a perpetrator questions the target's social position or his/her ability to do something. For example, "laughs at him when [he] screws up on something," and "if this kid called me a fag." Two boys gave the example:

Boy 1: when you have a class chanting at you that sort of shit

Boy 2: chanting at you?

Boy 1: like names and shit

Another girl shared:

Girl 1: well I horseback ride. And I do English and it's really kind of [natty] and girls try

to intimidate you. And it freaks me out. It puts me down as I try to be nice to everybody.

And we had some of those girls who just like.

Girl 2: yeah, like I'm better than you.

Girl 1: yeah.

In all of these examples, the perpetrator aggressed directly towards the target and did not make

efforts to hide his/her identity.

With respect to outcomes, direct overt verbal aggression was perceived to have much

longer-lasting impacts than physical aggression. For instance one boy argued:

With the words you have them like burned into your mind. You can't stop thinking about

that. And then you start trying to do yourself to make those words go away. Then when

you get hit, you can say you have a couple of bruises. The bruises will go away later.

Talking further about this form of aggression, one girl said, "it wears you down," while another

said, "I mean if you get punched in the face that will heal, but … depending on what the person

says about you and how much it goes on, that can take a lot longer." Compared to direct overt

physical aggression, the verbal equivalent is experienced has having longer-lasting emotional

effects. Participants did not provide any indications of short-term effects with this form of

aggression.

Interestingly, when discussing this form of aggression, participants argued that

perpetrators specifically used this form of aggression to intimidate the target, hurt his/her inner feelings, or "make someone feel inadequate just because you want to make yourself [feel] better." In comparison, the reasons for using physical aggression were cited as scaring the target or establishing dominance and social positioning.

2.3.3 Identifying the other form of aggression: Blurring the boundary between social and relational aggression

Participants talked about another form of aggressive behaviour that was verbal in nature and included behaviours, such as "gossiping," "spreading rumours," and "saying shit you're not supposed to … and not even saying it to their face." What makes this form of aggression unique from the direct overt verbal aggression described above is that the perpetrator is being aggressive towards the target indirectly. By being indirect, the perpetrator is using intermediary channels (i.e., the social network) to harm the target. While most of the examples of this form of indirect aggression, involved verbal behaviour, some participants did stress that it can also include nonverbal behaviours, as one girl stated, "It's not … oh, I'm going to kill you kind of drama. It's … glares and … rumours."

Due to the indirect nature of this form of aggression, there is a possibility that the target of the aggression may not even be aware of the event in which he/she has been targeted. Evidently, participants did not overlook this issue and considered its implications in classifying this form of behaviour as aggression:

Girl 1: I think gossiping.

Girl 2: if it gets back to the person.

Interviewer: if it get's back to the person. What if it didn't get back to the person?

Girl 1: I think it would still be because

Girl 3: yeah me too.

Boy: because everyone still thinks so.

Girl 2: yeah.

Initially, it is suggested that gossiping would only constitute aggression if the target was aware of it. However, other participants felt that regardless of the target's awareness, the event should be considered aggression because other individuals within the social network are aware of it. In fact, participants considered this form of aggression to be *worse* than other forms because of its "backstabbing" indirect nature and it engages the social network.

Both the reasons for engaging in this form of aggression, as well as its outcomes are similar to those of verbal overt aggression discussed above. For example, perpetrators were said to use this form of aggression in order to hurt the target's feelings to make him/her feel better. The outcomes of this form of aggression were also said to be more long-term than those discussed for direct overt physical aggression.

The above examples of aggression conveyed a sense of being covert, in that participants implied the perpetrator's identity remained hidden from the target. Therefore, these examples were deemed to be consistent with conceptualizations of social aggression. Another type of aggression that was raised by participants involved online aggression. For example, one girl explained, "they'll message you and … say this. And they'll post videos about how much they don't like you." One girl also described, "you … post it and then everybody sees it, and then … you can make these … group things. And then you can also like make events to happen." For example, another girl added, "yeah, like kick [*target's name*] day." Another group of participants detailed how they "had a picture of this one chick, because she was a total bitch to

everybody. And it had like a cross[1] through her and [*target's first initial*]-H-C under it [for *target's name*] hate crew." These types of aggression still engage the social network, but they are implied to include elements of being direct and overt. Direct in the sense that the perpetrator is directly messaging or posting videos to the target, and in some cases clearly exposing his/her identity to the target. Therefore, these examples were classified as relational aggression.

Participants suggested that this form of relational aggression is unique because of the extent and velocity with which the aggression is disseminated. One boy described, "if you dis someone then it's instantly out there." Another girl added, "if you put it on Facebook, everybody knows." Participants believe that this type of aggression is growing in popularity, as one boy said, "people are more willing to fight on Facebook," and another said, "it happens a lot more than average." Participants speculated on why they think it is becoming more popular, "they don't have the guts to tell you something to their face. So they think it's easier if they type it over the computer." In reference to the perpetrator, one girl said, "there's not as much of the consequence fighting over a computer." Another girl said it is effective because, "it's almost as if it's like a shield … you can't get me through this computer screen, but I can still damage you because I'm saying hurtful things." What is being suggested in these discussions is that Internet or text-based aggression provides some of the benefits of indirect and covert aggression, while behaving directly and overtly. For example, the perpetrator is being confrontational, but the platform used to enact the aggression has become the intermediary, and therefore, delays the confrontation. Further, the Internet could be providing a perception of hidden identity. On the surface, these behaviours appear to be relational aggression, but they suggest an experience of social aggression. A false sense of anonymity could be blurring the boundaries further between relational and social aggression.

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[1] The participant is referring to the cross hair when looking through the scope of a gun.

2.3.4 Reactive aggression: All I want to do is hurt you

Participants provided a number of examples where a person (i.e., the perpetrator) is aggressive in retaliation to something that another person did (i.e., the target), which is consistent with the reactive function of aggression. For example, one boy said:

Somebody … let's say took your toast that you just made and just chucked it in the garbage [or] eventually broke it and then they took your homework and ripped it up and then it's just time to punch him in the face and tell him to fuck off.

Another boy gave a similar example, "when it comes time to when someone pisses you off long enough and you rush one of them." Interestingly, in both of these examples the resulting aggression was not in response to a single act, but rather repeated actions by the target who has in some capacity *pissed off* the perpetrator.

Participants also indicated that this type of aggression is the most common and that it is not premeditated. For example, one boy said, "most aggression is just … out of no where," to which another boy responded, "snap." The only thing that the perpetrator is thinking about is hurting the target, which is demonstrated in the following example:

Boy: when my bro ran down the street over here and started punching this kid in the head and started kneeing him in the face.

Interviewer: ok, so why would the person do that?

Boy: because the kid talked shit. He's got a big mouth.

Interviewer: ok, so he was talking bad. So he went and he did that stuff. What was the person your, what was your friend thinking at that time? Like what do you think was going through his head?

Boy: I'm going to beat the fuck out of this kid.

Interviewer: ok, did he have a specific outcome in mind?

Boy: just to kick his ass.

In another group, one girl simply stated, "you're hurt, then you get mad," clearly suggesting that this reactive aggression stems from and is experienced as an emotional response.

For many participants, reactive aggression is easily understood and justified, as one boy said, "but it's like, you just hit me. You're going to get it. Simple as that." In talking about a scenario in which "Sam said something to Tim about his girlfriend, so Tim punches him," one participant responded, "you kind of have a legitimate reason." Without question, participants perceived reactive aggression more positively than the other function of aggression (i.e., instrumental aggression). However this is not to imply that they felt such behaviour is *good*. In response to discussing reactions to an example of reactive aggression, one boy said, "it still doesn't make it ok. It just makes it [*pause*]" to which another boy added "more acceptable."

Such acceptance is not unconditional, as there appeared to be factors influencing just how acceptable a reactive response is viewed. Even though it is considered a reactive emotional response, many participants argued that the target should still make an effort to tell the perpetrator to stop whatever behaviour may be instigating the event. For example, one boy recounted:

> Yeah I remember this kid he's whipping snowballs at me. I told him to stop and … if you whip one more fucking snowball at me I'm going to fucking hit you so hard. And he whips one and hits me right in the throat. I couldn't breath. I was like that's it …. I grabbed his head and smashed it into my knee.

Another girl stated, "I would just go up to them and be … why are talking shit. And … well fucking keep your mouth shut, next time I'll smash you." It is also important to note,

participants also indicated they would be less accepting of such aggression coming from a target who is frequently reactive. Such individuals lack self-control, making them unpredictable and likely to misinterpret the innocuous behaviours of others.

Overall, participants identified acts of aggression that are consistent with the literature on reactive aggression. They experience this type of aggression as a response to something else someone does. In other words, the target instigated the perpetrator's aggressive behaviour. Due to this perceived causal relationship, participants find this behaviour acceptable and justified. This type of aggression was also seen as stemming from an emotion (e.g., anger). Being considered an emotional response would help to further justify the behaviour because the target is not thinking about what he or she is doing. In fact, a core characteristic of this type of aggression was that the target is only thinking about hurting the perpetrator, who in some capacity has caused the target harm.

2.3.5 Instrumental aggression: Difficult to explain why

While participants provided examples and explanations for aggressive acts that were consistent with reactive aggression reported in the literature, behaviour consistent with instrumental aggression was less clear. It was not that participants had difficulty providing examples of instrumental aggression, but rather the problem came when they tried to make sense of these behaviours. In other words, participants clearly experienced aggressive acts that had not been previously instigated. For example one boy stated:

> I remember this one kid who went to my school. He had … fluffy hair up to here, it was
> so funny… and this one kid is like I'm going to light his hair on fire. And we're … what,
> he's like yeah, I'm going to do it. And it spread around the school. And then the next

day he goes and lights it up. It's … (*makes sounds and participants start laughing*), It

was … a big … I don't know it was funny.

Another boy recounted an unprovoked encounter:

This crack head was in this uhmm park. He was … talking to us and we're all cool.

Then he's like are you the kids who beat up homeless people. We're … no. He's like,

well if you are I'm ready. And we're … are you ready? He's like yeah I'm ready. And

then, well I didn't do it, I walked away because I didn't want to beat him up for no

reason. Then my friends just stated whaling on him and his beer goes flying … halfway

across the field … blood all over his face.

Overall, many participants had difficulties explaining the underlying purpose of this type

of aggression. As one boy suggested, a possible explanation for this difficulty is that adolescents

simply do not think about the reasons for why they are doing something:

Yeah most of the time, the one they're thinking, the way you're thinking … in that

situation, they're just thinking about how am I going to beat the crap out of. Not why or

why am I doing this or what am I doing it for and all that jazz.

Some participants, however, were able to provide insight into these behaviours. For instance

they cited the need for getting a reaction, as well as boredom and entertainment:

Girl: make it … provoke them to … fight back ….

Interviewer: OK why would somebody want to do that? Want to get somebody to fight

back? Any idea?

Girl: they need something to do.

Interviewer: they need something to do. They might be bored?

Boy: want glory … someone to look at them and think look at him.

Interviewer: Oh that's really interesting. So we have this situation where out of the blue, I'm just going to attack someone and try to egg them on to fight me back. Because that looks good for me?

Boy: Uhm huh

When discussing possible explanations for instrumental aggression, participants consistently highlighted the role it plays in obtaining or maintaining social status.

2.3.6 Anger, the aggression catalyst

At one point or another, participants in each focus group, raised the issue of anger. It should be noted that participants were never directly asked about anger and its relation to aggression by the interviewer unless they first introduced the topic. It is clear from the discussion of anger that it is closely related to aggression; however, the specific nature of that relationship as viewed by adolescents is difficult to ascertain. After attempting to explain the difference between anger and aggression, and how one can exist without the other, one participant finally concluded, "it's a weird concept." A number of participants described anger and aggression as being one and the same. For example, one girl clearly stated, "aggression is like anger." When other participants were asked what it meant to be aggressive, they responded with words such as "getting mad" or "getting angry." In these cases, it appears that for some participants, aggression is thought of as an emotion and equated with anger. For example, one boy stated, "aggression [is] just frustration inside your head." At first, this conceptualization seems contradictory, as aggression is typically viewed in the literature as behaviour. However, it appears that for some participants aggression is viewed as both a behaviour and an emotion. For example, when asked why some people fight, one boy responded, "they don't have any, any other ways of getting out their aggression."

The relation between aggression and anger was further clarified after focusing on participants' discussion of anger in particular. In many of the discussions involving anger, participants began to talk about anger as though it is a catalyst for aggression. That is, a situation may have all the ingredients to create aggression, but it is not until anger is present that aggression will occur. As one boy described:

> Well I mean yeah, if he's calling you out, a lot of the time I wouldn't answer or anything. I would just keep walking because he's an idiot but if [he] keeps calling me a fag and gets me angry and aggression comes in and I [will] beat the crap out of him.

Another group of boys were asked if aggression is something that occurs everyday, one boy responded "there's always something that makes you angry," while the second boy followed with, "I think it's an everyday thing." This again, indicates that aggression results when anger is present.

A number of participants suggested that anger operates as such a powerful catalyst that an aggressive response is inevitable when a person is in a state of anger. For example, one boy gave the following two examples:

> *Example 1*: I've had it … where people call me … bitch to my face and you just don't even say anything back you just headbutt them or something.
>
> *Example 2*: I've had it where it hurts inside and where you're just … man I feel like shit now …. because people have actually made me so angry where I want to hurt them. Or it's … to the point where you have no other choice to deal with your feelings but hit them and attack.

In both examples, the external event of being called a name is similar; however, in the second example, the event made him angry, whereas the first event did not. After considering how he

described responding to the event, his response to the first event implied he had a choice as to how to behave. Conversely, having to deal with being in a state of anger in the second example left him with only aggression as a response. Other boys shared similar examples, in which anger was clearly a precursor to their aggressive response:

> *Boy 1*: I grabbed his head and smashed it into my knee twice and he's … on the ground. That's what you get for pissing me off.

> *Boy 2*: I got all angry and walked over to him with his skateboard and I hit him in the head with his skateboard.

Further discussions on anger revealed that in most cases, the degree of anger needed to operate as a catalyst for aggression is dose dependent. In other words, the mere presence of anger is not enough to trigger an aggressive response. Rather higher degrees of anger are often required. Many participants described aggression in the context of a *build up of anger*. For example, one boy explained the reasons why someone would start a fight in terms of "you got anger … building up or something. Or something pissed you off before that and you just … bust out [and] start hitting people." Another boy described getting into a fight with his friend as, "it just [kept] escalating from there. It just got to the point where we were both so angry at each other. Where we just wanted to kill each other." Together, three other boys clearly described how anger builds up:

> *Boy 1*: yeah, if they made you feel bad for so long. And I know personally like you may like seem alright. But deep down makes you so angry.

> *Boy 2*: … it builds up and builds up you know.

> *Boy 3*: it gets to the point where you're … clenching your fists and wanting to … kill this guy…. you could do anything you want to him.

Interestingly, aggression was also viewed as an inability to deal with anger. For example, when asked about the difference between adult and adolescent aggression, one girl responded "we don't know how to deal with our anger sometimes." This statement supports the previous notion that anger does not automatically lead to aggression, but rather a higher dose of anger is required to serve as a catalyst. In other words, participants appear to agree that if people can hold their anger in check, then they are not likely to engage in aggressive behaviour. However, this raises a new issue in light of what has been previously discussed. Many participants argued that aggression results from a build up of anger. At no point during the interviews did any participants suggest that anger could be dealt with by any means other than aggression. Therefore, it appears as though participants felt that anger was something that can certainly build over time, but a mechanism is missing to help cope with and dissipate existing anger. The question remains whether or not those who are not aggressive have not simply built up anger to an *aggression threshold level*.

Along with the inability to deal with anger, participants also highlighted that adolescents have varying degrees of aggression thresholds. When talking about examples where people behaved aggressively for no particular reason, participants described them as an "angry person" or "people with … major anger problems." Another boy referred to such a scenario as "uncontrolled anger."

When anger operates as a catalyst for aggression, the level of harm associated with it is seen as more severe. One explanation for this may be the overall build up of anger. For example, one boy described an event in which two people are angry as being "more blood thirsty." Another boy said there would be more harm "because the adrenaline and the aggression will build up all day and probably have a lot more aggression than if you just randomly saw a

guy and punched him in the face." Similarly, one participant argued that after anger builds up over time, "you're not just going to go up and just hit him once," implying that the resulting aggression would be much more severe.

2.3.7 There's something about the tone of it

Throughout the focus groups, participants kept alluding to an idea that in many instances it is not so much about what is done, but rather how it is done. And in this instance the *how* is not in reference to the form of the behaviour (e.g., physical or social aggression). For example, there are two events that in terms of the objective behaviours involved appear similar; however, one is found to be aggressive while the other is not. At play in these contexts is the tone of the behaviour. One boy described how tone impacts the overall context of the event:

> The tone that people use too, not just what they say. Like there is a difference between someone saying … you are stupid and … someone yelling it right in their face. That could be different…. if you are right in their face screaming that's pretty aggressive, but if you are just like you're an idiot then usually people laugh about it.

One girl provided an example, where:

> You could just follow like some stupid kid around and be … you're fat, you're ugly, you're a fucking piece of shit…. just keep following them … name calling. Or you could be … slamming them off lockers and be … what the fuck and screaming at them and shit.

Here the elevation in tone is being used to differentiate between *name calling* and more aggressive actions such as *screaming*. Even in situations where there is a deviation in behaviour from the nonaggressive to the aggressive, participants identified tone as a fundamental contributor in defining the event as aggressive. For example, one participant explained:

> *Boy*: if I was yelling at you. That would be aggressive.

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Interviewer: would there be … a specific word that you would use… or is it all in the tone?

Boy: tone and probably … swears once in a while.

It must be noted that tone is not limited to verbal contexts, but it also applies to physical behaviour as well. For example one girl argued, "isn't aggressive … just the way you do it? I could aggressively grab that donut out of the box, you know what I mean." Another girl explained:

Girl: I could trash this room … calmly or I can trash it aggressively. I could walk around and just keep knocking things over…. the whole room would be a disaster or I could run around and just start chucking shit everywhere.

Interviewer: Ok so does everybody agree, it's kind of an issue of if you are doing it calmly or…

Girl: it's … a way that you do it sometimes…. it doesn't always have to do with violence.

One boy also described tone in terms of physical effort put into an event and said, "when you see your friends sometimes, they'll just hit each other on the arms … but not that hard. It's like a friendly punch … a love tap."

Interestingly, tone appeared to be an important factor for not only those directly experiencing the event, but also those observing the event. In other words, tone is used by the perpetrator to convey meaning, by the target to infer meaning, and by observers to extract meaning of the event. Two boys recounted an event that involved swearing but was not considered aggression because the perpetrator was not yelling. Further, the boy involved in perpetrating the event recalled, "yeah, I was just pissed off. I wasn't really yelling that loudly, I was just pissed off." Here the participant is arguing that despite being angry, he was able to

convey through the use of tone that his purpose was not to be aggressive. In other words, it appears as though tone is important in defining aggression beyond the presence of anger. Similarly, tone appears to override the element of harm. One participant described a scenario in which she could "reach over and be like boom and punch him in the face and it wouldn't be aggressive" because she did it calmly and it would not hurt. Whereas, if she did it with greater force and tone, it would be aggressive, even though it probably would still not hurt the target.

Some participants were given a scenario in which a fictitious girl named *Sally* wants to confront another girl *Jamie* about rumours she has been spreading about *Sally*. Participants were asked how *Sally* could respond. In order to respond effectively and without aggression, one girl said:

> I think you have to approach it with as little anger and emotion as you can. Because if you put too much emotion into confronting people, it makes the other people uncomfortable. And so if you want to … get your point across, often you have to be like too calm.

Here she is highlighting that by controlling her tone, she is able to convey a nonaggressive intention. On the same hand, a target will not infer aggressive meaning when the tone is calm. Participants were asked, exactly what is happening when a person uses tone to make, for example, words aggressive. One boy responded, "you're … talking in a way that makes them think you're going to [be]come … physically aggressive so they want to defend themselves more." Other participants explained he/she is trying to "overpower them" and "kind of make the other person feel scared."

While these examples indicated how tone could be controlled and impact the meaning that is applied to an event, they fundamentally illustrated the importance of tone in the context of

aggression. With that said, it is important to consider the implications when tone is

misinterpreted. This is especially problematic when considering the high level of adolescent

social interaction that takes place through text-based electronic media. Text-based media does

not provide cues such as body language and facial expressions, which are available when

interacting in-person with someone. As a result, many participants expressed difficulty when

having to interpret situations that are void of tone. As one group of participants explained:

> *Girl 1*: but also the biggest thing about Facebook is you can never really tell if someone is
> joking or not.
>
> *Boy 1*: yeah
>
> *Girl 1*: because there's not really emotion in words.
>
> *Girl 2*: it's just written words
>
> *Boy 2*: unless it's in person.

While many text-based mediums, do allow for some means of expressing emotions through the

use of emoticons or colloquial expression (e.g., LOL), it is clear from participants that there is a

lot of room for misunderstanding.

2.3.8 It's not aggression: it's play fighting!

To better understand the definitional components of aggression, it is important to look at

a behaviour that when viewed externally looks the same as aggression. To the external observer

play fighting can easily be interpreted as an act of aggression. For example, play fights are said

to include "punching, kicking, and stuff. But they see it as playing but adults see it as fighting."

While some refer to this behaviour as play fighting, other participants called it "a bro fight."

Participants identified this behaviour as occurring only among boys. This is not to say that girls

do not engage in it, but it may be done much less frequently. These types of fights are

considered to be fun, as one participant said, "sometimes me and some of my friends will say

fight for fun." Another boy said, "it's just when you want to fight someone, you just fight for

fun." These fights were identified as a means to demonstrate strength and release stress. For

example, one boy argued, "basically it is two friends seeing who is stronger," while another

participant described them as "a way to release stress and just … have a strength competition and

some stuff."

While most described these fights as taking place between friends, some participants

suggested "they have fight clubs where it's two people who are pissed off have a monitored fight

by bigger guys than them." Therefore, it does not appear that these have to occur between

friends to be labeled play fights. One criterion that was consistently identified was that both

combatants agree to the fight. For example, one boy said, "you can't charge them because they

are two consenting fighters."

Participants were asked if these events would be labeled aggression and surprisingly, they

said yes. As one participant described, "actually in a way it is aggression. It is a way to…

acceptably express your aggression." Another group argued:

> *Girl*: it's still aggressive, but it's friendly.
>
> *Interviewer*: is it different in some way? It's friendly.
>
> *Girl*: it's … all in fun.
>
> *Boy*: … play fighting.
>
> *Girl*: but it's still aggressive.

One explanation as to why it is still considered aggression is because it is said to be harmful.

When initially talking about play fighting, some participants did say that it was not harmful, but

then changed their view as the behaviour was further discussed. Other participants claimed it

was harmful from the beginning. For example, one group said:

> *Boy 1*: it's harmful.

> *Boy 2*: it could be harmful.

> *Boy 3*: it's harmful, but it's not really.

Interestingly, another boy said:

> Well if it's, you know, a playful thing, you are probably not trying to actually physically
>
> harm. Well you're probably trying to harm them, but you're not trying to like cripple
>
> them. But if you're actually truly angry at them, you are probably going to try to get
>
> something out of them.

This participant identified the one clear element that is used to distinguish these events from

general aggression. Although they include intentions to harm and are fundamentally labeled as

aggression, it is the emotional element of anger that sets them apart from the core types of

aggression discussed so far. In the above example, the participants argued that play fighting

does not contain anger. In another example, one boy said play fighting turns into aggression

"when somebody gets angry." Another group of participants compared hockey players who

were fighting to *put on a show* versus *real* aggression. In a real fight, one boy said, "one of the

guys is going to be out for blood. He's angry, he was treated wrongfully. Then the other one is

just the two of them joking around for laughs and cheers." Later on these participants were

asked specifically if there is "something that makes a situation aggression versus … play

fighting," to which one boy responded "emotions" and another said "anger" and "sadness."

2.4 Discussing the results of topic one

From the results it can be seen that participants self-identified a wide variety of

aggressive behaviours that were consistent with formal definitions of general aggression. These

definitions specify that aggression involves behaviour intended to harm another person (Bartol & Bartol, 2005; Berkowitz, 1988, 1989; Feshbach, 1964). Not surprisingly, participants did not state specifically that aggression is harmful and intentional, but they did provide examples that contained the formal elements. While many examples, clearly involved intended harm, such as "punching someone and … smashing them out," or "punching and stuff, break their nose," harm was not limited to physical aggression. Participants provided numerous examples of verbal aggression, which counted as harmful behaviour, because as one girl described, "it puts me down." Such experiences identifying that nonphysical behaviour can result in harm is consistent with previous research findings (see Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011; Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996; Hess & Hagen, 2006; Paquette & Underwood, 1999). Participants also expressed that harm does not have to be experienced directly by the target to qualify as being aggression. In an example of gossiping, a group of girls identified that the event would still constitute aggression regardless of whether or not the target became aware of what was being said. Although the target was not harmed, his/her social reputation was.

Formal definitions of aggression have typically included damage or destruction of objects and property (see Bartol & Bartol, 2005; Rohner, 1976). Buss (1961) argued that objects could serve as proxies for a person, and therefore, damaging a person's property was a means of harming that person. More recently, definitions of relational and social aggression have included harm to reputations and social networks as criteria for aggressive behaviour (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Heilbron & Prinstein, 2008; Lagerspetz et al., 1988; Letendre & Smith, 2011; Little, Jones et al., 2003; Xie et al., 2002). As a result, a target's social network should be considered in the same way as personal possessions. From the examples discussed above, participants recognized the importance of social networks, and similar to physical

wellbeing, a target's social network can be harmed. This is not meant to imply that the people in that network are harmed, but rather the target's position, reputation, or ability to build and maintain that network is harmed. Most importantly, when this social network and its elements are harmed, the behaviour causing the harm should be considered aggression.

In addition to harm, participants also identified intention as a necessary factor of aggression. The specific examples participants shared articulated that even if the target did not experience harm, the event would be considered harmful because the perpetrator meant it to. For example, one participant shared an example where he was just about hit by a vehicle. Although he was not injured, the driver did not convey any effort to avoid him, and therefore, the behaviour was considered intentional.

While participants' examples of aggression stressed the criteria of harm and intent, they also self-identified aggressive behaviours that replicated some of the formally defined forms and functions of aggression. For instance, participants described physical aggression in a pure form, such as talking about fighting or punching someone, which is consistent with formal definitions (see Marsee & Frick, 2007; Xie et al., 2003). Participants also discussed physical aggression that was direct and overt in form; however, they did not identify any forms of indirect and/or covert aggression (e.g., a perpetrator damaging a target's property either openly or in secret). This could suggest that (a) these participants have not encountered such events of physical aggression; (b) these events are encountered but not experienced as aggression; or (c) these events occur infrequently, lack saliency in their lives, and were not raised during the focus groups. Out of the three possibilities, the second and third seem most likely. Further research is needed to explore this issue in more depth. It may be that, rather than interpreting such behaviour as aggression, adolescents would consider it vandalism.

On a somewhat similar note, it should be mentioned that a few participants used stealing as an example of aggression. Typically, stealing would constitute antisocial behaviour. For example, Kempes et al. (2005) define behaviour that violates and disadvantages other people as antisocial behaviour. Aggression is seen as a form of antisocial behaviour, but not all antisocial behaviour is a form of aggression. Perhaps, stealing was considered aggression because these participants were victims of theft and experienced harm from the event. This suggests further that participants were willing to consider behaviour involving objects as having potentially harmful outcomes. Therefore, had the context of indirect covert physical aggression been specifically raised, participants would have confirmed that it is a form of aggression.

There were some examples discussed by participants that involved the damage or destruction of objects, such as slamming doors and punching walls. One approach may be to consider these examples of indirect aggression. However, there was no indication that the behaviour was intended as an indirect means of harming a target. In fact, these behaviours were not associated with any target in particular or in general. These behaviours resemble the construct of displaced aggression as discussed by Archer (2004) and Pond et al. (2011). Because of the lack of association with a specific target, this behaviour stands apart from typical examples of physical aggression, and therefore, should continue to receive consideration as a unique form of physical aggression.

Although discussions of physical aggression were limited with respect to the different forms, examples of verbal aggression were well rounded and included direct overt verbal aggression, as well as the indirect covert variations that fall under the terms relational and social aggression. Interestingly, when participants talked about the different variations in verbal aggression, they argued the impacts were long-term compared to physical aggression. For

example, verbal aggression was described as being burned in the target's mind and wearing him or her down over time. Conversely, physical aggression was said to result in bruises, and in severe cases broken bones, but as one boy stated "the bruises will go away later." The long-term impacts were associated with verbal aggression regardless of whether or not it was direct overt, relational, or social in nature. These participants' experiences and conceptualizations of the effects of verbal, social, and relational aggression are consistent with research findings. Numerous studies have linked relational and social aggression to a multitude of long-term effects, including but not limited to anxiety, depression, peer rejection, and social adjustment problems (Banny et al., 2011; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Leff et al., 2010; Marsee & Frick, 2007; Paquette & Underwood, 1999). Most importantly, this contrast between verbal and physical aggression clearly highlights that participants have much different experiences with the two forms of aggression even when the behaviours are both direct and overt. This finding is discerning, given the number of studies that amalgamate physical and verbal aggression into a single construct such as overt aggression (e.g., Dempsey et al., 2011; Little, Brauner, et al., 2003; Marsee et al., 2011). In light of these findings, extreme caution should be used before combining the different forms of aggression as a single construct.

Participants also detailed clear examples representing aggression that involved the social network. A number of examples, involved social aggression, such as facial expressions, starting rumours, and gossiping, which were indirect and covert. Further, participants described similar events that engaged the social community, but were direct and overt, and therefore, classified as relational aggression. Interestingly, the latter examples seemed to place more emphasis on the use of social media (e.g., text-based communication, Facebook). One could expect that social media would better facilitate social aggression as it could afford more opportunities to be indirect

and covert. This is not to say that social aggression is not occurring through social media, as it most likely does occur with great frequency. Rather, it highlights that participants were more aware of the social-media based relational aggression that is direct and overt, perhaps because it is simply more visible. Most interesting, is that social media is being used in a direct, overt manner (i.e., the targets and everyone else seems aware of who the perpetrator is) when instead it could be indirect and covert. As a possible explanation, participants suggested that the perpetrator has a sense of protection or invincibility, as one girl said, "you can't get me through this computer screen, but I can still damage you." Because the perpetrator's behaviour seems to be confrontational (i.e., direct) and everyone including the target is aware of his/her identity, this is a false sense of security. Xie et al. (2002) suggested that the nonconfrontational nature (and indirect nature, which the authors did not specifically mention but should be added) of social aggression affords the perpetrator the benefit of concealing his/her identity and delaying the time and context of possible confrontation by the target. Social media appears to provide similar benefits; however, the perpetrator can be more direct and confrontational, but still benefit from the time delay that will elapse before the perpetrator and target can interact in person. Of course, this does not limit the possibility that the target will retaliate immediately through the use of social media him/herself. Law, Shapka, Domene, and Gagné (2012) argued that social media offers perpetrators a degree of *visual anonymity* and leads them to say things they would not normally say to the target in a person-to-person environment. Overall, the boundaries between relational and social aggression are further blurred, because the act of relational aggression is affording the perpetrator the experience of social aggression.

Participants gave further examples that evidenced the constructs of reactive and instrumental aggression. In terms of reactive aggression, participants clearly provided examples

in which a perpetrator is aggressive against a target who previously did something to harm the perpetrator. Further, the sole purpose of the behaviour is seen as hurting the target. These characteristics were consistent with the definitions of reactive aggression provided by previous researchers (see Berkowitz, 1988; Dodge et al., 1997). Because the perpetrator is retaliating against something the target did, participants described this function of aggression as being more acceptable than instrumental aggression. Interestingly, those engaging in reactive aggression are typically found to have more problems, such as depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, and lack of leadership skills (Bartol & Bartol, 2005; Csibi & Csibi, 2011; Poulin & Boivin, 2000). Whereas, those engaging in instrumental aggression tend to display more positive characteristics with the exception of a callous-unemotional interpersonal style, which entails a lack of empathy and manipulation of others (Crapanzano, 2010; Crick & Dodge, 1996). Therefore, it would be expected that reactive aggression is a behaviour performed by individuals who are difficult to get along with. However, participants argued that because the behaviour is a response to provocation, the behaviour of the perpetrator is legitimized. It must be noted, that participants did suggest that it is still better if perpetrators make an effort to tell targets to stop their harmful behaviour. Further, the behaviour is considered problematic if the perpetrator frequently engages in reactive aggression.

Embedded in their discussions of reactive aggression, participants clearly attributed it to being an emotional response (e.g., "you're hurt, then you get mad"). Their emotions are then leading them to only think about harming the target, which can help to further justify the behaviour, because the perpetrator is not thinking about anything else. What is most interesting is the clear link between aggression and emotion, which was found to play an extensive role in how participants understood and experienced aggression. This emotional link was evidenced

early on in the focus groups when participants were asked about the term violence.

Participants were initially asked to distinguish, if necessary, between the terms violence and aggression. While violence is defined as a subset of aggression, more specifically the threat or use of physical force intended to harm someone or something (Athens, 2005; Bartol & Bartol, 2005; Moeller, 2001; Reppucci et al., 2002; Roberto et al., 2003), it is often used synonymously with the term aggression, both publicly and through formal research (e.g., Kingery, 1998). Despite the terms being used interchangeably, participants expressed that there was a difference between the two terms. Violence was seen as either a specific form of aggression, or an action resulting from aggression. In the first view, violence was argued to be a physical manifestation of aggression (e.g., "react[ing] in a way that you have to … use force"), which is consistent with the above formal definition. In the second view, violence was described as resulting from aggression (e.g., "violence is the end product of aggression"). While this view still holds that violence is a behaviour, it simultaneously raises the issue that participants not only considered aggression a behaviour, but also as an emotion or state of being that then leads to behaviour such as violence. This view of aggression as an emotion was frequently shared among participants and commonly referred to as anger.

When participants were asked what aggression was, some responded "aggression is … anger," or that it consists of "getting angry," or stated "aggression [is] just frustration inside your head." Thus, participants' understanding of aggression is clearly bound to the construct of anger. Similar to aggression, the construct of anger is also plagued by inconsistency among definitions (Blake & Hamrin, 1990). For example, Berkowitz (1990) detailed how anger has been conceptualized in a variety of ways including feelings, expressive-motor or physiological reactions, and behaviours. However, for many, anger is considered to be an emotion (Berkowitz,

1990; Blake & Hamrin, 2007; Gambetti & Giusberti, 2009; Ramirez & Andreu, 2006; Sprague, Verona, Kalkhoff, & Kilmer, 2011). By associating aggression with the emotional construct of anger, participants added an emotional element to their definition of aggression.

This understanding of aggression as an emotion is contradictory to typical definitions of aggression that conceptualize it as a behaviour. As stated earlier, common definitions of aggression (see Berkowitz, 1988; Dollard et al., 1939; Feshbach, 1964) include behaviour that is intended to harm another person. These definitions alone do not specify or make reference to any emotional state. However, Crick et al. (1996) identified feeling angry and the intent to harm as the defining characteristics of aggression. In terms of the impact on the target, Eron (1987) defined aggression as behaviour that injures or irritates another person. Therefore, there have certainly been some definitions that have addressed a connection between the emotional experience of anger and the act of aggression.

Further discussions with participants regarding anger revealed that it serves as a catalyst for aggression. Therefore, anger appears to be a requirement for aggression to occur. Although anger has not been included in definitions of aggression, its relation with aggression has long been studied and theorized. Anger has been argued to function as a precursor to aggression (Buss & Perry, 1992; Cornell, Peterson, & Richard, 1999; Pond et al., 2011; Sprague et al., 2011). In their frustration aggression hypothesis, Dollard et al. (1939) argued that aggression results from the frustration people feel when access to their goals is impeded. Berkowitz (1988, 1989, 1990) later expanded on this hypothesis in his cognitive-neoassocationistic model, which premised that aggression is not dependent on frustration, but rather anger operates as the direct determinant of aggression. Evidently, anger results from states of negative affect that include, but are not limited to frustration. For example, negative affect stems from a variety of factors,

such as depression, agitated irritability, frustration, foul odours, and high temperatures.

Participants conveyed that anger played such a significant role that it made aggression inevitable. Their experience of the relationship between aggression and anger is consistent with the theoretical understanding of how aggression influences aggression. Berkowitz (1990) argued that anger is the primary reaction to a negative event. It is only after this primary reaction that higher order cognitive processing (e.g., careful consideration as to how to respond) may begin to operate and guide behaviour. However, if that does not happen, then anger will determine the course of behaviour, which ultimately involves aggression. Others have argued that anger leads people to be overly confident and optimistic that risk taking will result in positive outcomes (Debaryshe & Fryxell, 1998; Gambetti & Giusberti, 2009). Additional participants described aggression as resulting from a build up of anger. As such, the inevitability of aggression may not be so clear-cut. Berkowitz (1990) stated that when the higher-order cognitive processing goes into effect, people may interpret their state of arousal as minor, and therefore, not warranting anger or an anger-related response. However, over time, the build-up can lead to anger-related responding. Additionally, Berkowitz and Thome (1987) found that stronger levels of negative affect heightened feelings of anger and subsequent responding.

It should also be noted that the effects of anger are argued to be specific to reactive aggression. For example, Berkowitz (1989) specified that his theory applied only to reactive aggression. A study by Stadler et al. (2006) found that participants reported being more angry in situations of provocation that characterize reactive aggression. Examining participants' examples, anger is described as resulting from something that has occurred, therefore, reflecting situations of provocation. Anger has also been linked more specifically to physical forms of aggression rather than nonphysical forms such as relational aggression (Sullivan et al., 2010).

Participants' examples involving anger-generated responses emphasized physical aggression, which raises an interesting question of why anger leads to physical as opposed to nonphysical aggression. Participants suggested that feelings of anger occurred in response to provocations that were not limited to physical events. Considering the argument that anger leads to overly confident and optimistic appraisals of risky behaviours (see Debaryshe & Fryxell, 1998; Gambetti & Giusberti, 2009), it can be reasoned that participants think more positively about and downplay the risks associated with physical aggression. As discussed previously, compared to verbal aggression (including social and relational aggression), participants identified physical aggression as having short-term consequences and providing a quicker means of dealing with a problem. Therefore, anger may be better suited to biasing appraisals of physical aggression. In terms of verbal, relational, and social aggression, participants may have a clearer understanding of the long-term consequences being involved in such aggression, thus making it more difficult to bias.

Participants' understanding and experiences of aggression are clearly influenced by anger. Participants also stated that they experience anger on a daily basis. Anger is highly prevalent and has been found to impact people on daily basis (Averill, 1993; Gambetti & Giusberti, 2009; Pond et al., 2011). Csibi and Csibi (2011) reported that anger remains steady for boys but increases in girls from grade 6 to 7. Further, high school students were found to develop greater anger control with ages. In light of these findings, it is not surprising that participants in this study reported feelings of anger on a daily bases. These age trends in anger also help to explain why aggression-related suspensions (Molloy, 2007) reported in the method section were the highest for grades 7, 8, and 9. Participants' discussion of anger clearly highlighted that it plays a central role in their experiences and understanding of aggression.

When participants discussed the difference between play fighting and aggression, they acknowledged that play fighting is a form of aggression, regardless of whether or not it is between friends. Among participants, play fighting included both elements of intention and harm. This is in contrast to previous research that found compared to real fighting, harm was absent in children's definition of play fighting (Smith, Smees, & Pellegrini, 2004). However, the authors contended that such conventions would likely change as children get older and social dominance becomes more important. For the participants in the current study, play fighting was distinguished from aggression by the absence of anger. One boy clearly stated that it is "when somebody gets angry" that the play fight turns into aggression. This seems contradictory, because on the one hand they are saying that it is aggression because of intentions and harm; but on the other hand, they are saying it is not until anger is present that it becomes *real* aggression. What may be important to consider here is the degree of harm intended. For example, behaviour that results in bruises may be acceptable and considered play fighting, while breaking bones is not acceptable and considered aggression (see section 5.2: Discussing the results of topic four, for a more thorough discussion on how intentionality is associated with the severity of harm and designation of aggression). Clearly, participants are struggling with identifying the exact role anger plays. It seems as though anger is not necessarily a qualifying criterion for defining aggression in general, but rather a criterion for defining specific forms of aggression.

Within participants' examples, another important characteristic impacting how aggression is experienced was identified. This characteristic was labelled as tone and appears to address the underlying meaning that an event encompasses not only for those directly involved, but also those witnessing it. In other words, participants alluded to tone as the subjective meaning an event has beyond the objective behaviour that takes place. For example, you could

have an event in which a perpetrator says something to a target. In one situation, those involved consider the event to be innocuous, whereas, in another situation, the exact same words are said, but they are said in a different way and the event is considered to be aggression. Tone captures meaning and the *way* that the behaviour is done. Importantly, this is not referring to the objective way the behaviour is expressed, which would constitute the forms of aggression that have been discussed so far. For example, one participant said "there is a difference between someone saying like you are stupid and then like someone yelling it right in their face."

When considering tone, it is important to note that it is not the same as anger. Anger was discussed above as operating like a catalyst. As a catalyst, anger itself does not define aggression; it simply plays a role in its production. Tone on the other hand, is used to interpret an event as either aggression or not aggression. From an adolescent perspective, anger builds up and leads to aggression if not controlled. Tone is used to convey and infer meaning. There can be anger, but if controlled or translated through tone, the event is not considered aggression. For example, one girl described that in order to respond nonaggressively to an aggressive perpetrator, the target needs to approach the perpetrator with (a) as little anger as possible and (b) be calm. From the example, controlling anger will stem the possibility of being aggressive, while behaving calming will express a nonaggressive tone.

Surprisingly, tone is not something that has been well documented or examined in the aggression literature. One extensive area of research in aggression looks at how children process social information cues in aggressive and nonaggressive events. Specifically, reactive-aggressive children have been found to inaccurately attribute hostile intentions in others' behaviour and respond aggressively (de Castro, Merk, Koops, Veerman, & Bosch, 2005; Dodge & Coie, 1987; Dodge & Frame, 1982; Dodge, Murphy, & Buchsbaum, 1984; Moeller, 2001). In

other words, these aggressive children interpret the perpetrator's innocuous behaviour as intending harm. Dodge et al. (1984) had 8- and 9-year old children watch short videos in which a perpetrating child destroyed another target child's toy with variable intentions displayed. For example, in one of the videos hostile intention was displayed through "obviously purposeful destructive behavior accompanied by corresponding verbalizations and facial expression" (p. 164). Participants were then asked how they would respond if they were the target in the video. The authors referred to this process as intention-cue detection. Unfortunately, these authors and those using similar methodology (see Dodge & Coie, 1987) did not provide further information regarding the specific nature of the verbalizations and facial expressions used to convey hostile intentions.

More recent research has looked at the relation between emotional displays during aggressive interactions and social functioning in pre-school children (Arsenio, Cooperman, & Lover 2000; Miller & Olson, 2000). These studies are somewhat limited to this discussion because they focused on how emotional behaviour relates to peer acceptance rather than how perpetrators and targets convey and infer meaning through emotional display. However, they do provide insight into what an aggressive-emotional display may entail. For example, Arsenio et al. (2000) stated happiness displays consisted of vocal indices such as giggling, a little higher pitch, and facial indices such as elevated lip corners and raised cheeks. Conversely, anger displays included vocal indices such as increased volume and a harsh demanding quality, and facial indices such as narrowed eyelids and lips pressed together. The authors found that those with more frequent anger displays experienced social rejection.

It is unclear if the concept of tone, as discussed by the participants in the current study conveys meaning by strictly communicating the perpetrator's intention. Therefore, further

research is needed to explore the specific nature of the event's meaning that is conveyed through tone. It is important to note, however, that caution should be taken when using a survey-based approach for such research. Participants identified misinterpreting tone as a problem when dealing with text-based media, as it does not allow for tone and emotions to be communicated. For this very reason, studying the effects of tone on aggression is difficult and should not be done solely through written surveys.

Overall, the results from the analysis of this topic demonstrated that participants share unique experiences, reflective of the many different forms and functions of aggression that have been formally defined and studied. Unlike previous research that involved defining aggression and then ascertaining which types of individuals engage or do not engage in the specific behaviours, this study openly asked participants to share their experiences of aggression. While the results certainly demonstrated additional support for the types of aggression that have been identified through previous research, it also demonstrated that these participants experienced many forms of aggression as distinct behaviours. Therefore, it is problematic to use terms incorrectly and to amalgamate constructs simply because on the semantic surface the definitions appear to overlap. Until further research is done to compare the behaviours and experiences represented by the pure forms of these constructs, it is irresponsible and naïve to ignore the unique meanings and experiences they represent.

Further, this study identified two elements, anger and tone, that play a critical role in adolescents' meaning of aggression. If anger plays such a critical role, it should not simply be assumed, but it should be included in definitions of aggression. This is not to say that it should necessarily be included as a criterion for defining aggression in general, but rather it may be necessary to include it in defining the various forms and functions of aggression. For instance

previous research has found anger to relate specifically to physical aggression (Sullivan et al.,

2010) and reactive aggression (Berkowitz, 1989). Additionally, tone was found to be important

in conveying and interpreting the meaning of aggression. Unfortunately, research looking at this

element in more detail is currently absent from the field of aggression research. Through a more

thorough examination of these two elements and careful consideration of how adolescents define

and make sense of aggression, clearer definitions can be developed and used consistently. This

would not only allow researchers to better understand and interpret each other's work, but also

move the field of aggression research forward.

Chapter 3 - Topic Two: Exploring Adolescents' Conceptualization of

Acceptable Aggression

When discussing aggression it does not take much to convince people that it creates problems for both individuals and the greater community. The list of negative effects of aggression is extensive. For example, adolescent victims of aggression have fewer quality friends (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011), experience loneliness, depression, social anxiety/avoidance (Paquette & Underwood, 1999), and limited school engagement involving poor attendance and academic difficulties (Farmer & Xie, 2007). Perpetrators of aggression show elevated levels of hostility (Csibi & Csibi, 2011), callous-unemotional interpersonal styles (Frick et al., 2003), poor social adjustment, and depression (Banny et al., 2011). For a more thorough review of the negative effects of aggressive behaviour, see Banny et al. (2011) and Heilbron and Prinstein (2008).

Many of the negative outcomes of aggression are attributed to specific cognitive problems within the aggressor. For example, Hawley et al. (2007) stated that research typically reported that aggressive adolescents are rejected by their peers and are socially maladjusted. Research has also looked at aggressive behaviour as a result of internal cognitive deficiencies. For example, proponents of social information processing theories have argued that aggressive adolescents encode information from interpersonal interactions differently than nonaggressive adolescents (de Castro et al., 2005; Nas, de Castro, & Koops, 2005). As a result, some aggressive individuals have hostile attribution biases, in which they inaccurately interpret the benign actions of others as having hostile intentions, and therefore, respond aggressively (Bartol & Bartol, 2005; Crick & Dodge, 1994; de Castro, Slot, Bosch, Koops, & Veerman, 2003; Dodge

& Coie, 1987; Dodge et al., 1984). As it turns out, the malfunction in processing is related to the specific underlying functions of aggression. The breakdown in encoding social information and interpreting the actions of others, which leads to the hostile attribution bias, is responsible for reactive aggression (de Castro et al., 2005; Dodge & Coie, 1987). The encoding and interpretation stages are the first two stages of the model (Arsenio, 2010). For instrumental aggression, the malfunction in processing is argued to occur in the latter stages when it comes to evaluating possible response options (de Castro et al., 2005; Dodge et al., 1997). As a result, these aggressive individuals evaluate aggression to have more positive outcomes and fewer negative consequences than nonaggressive individuals. Regardless of the proposed determinants of adolescent aggression, the literature consistently paints a bleak picture for those engaging in aggressive behaviour, suggesting that the underlying problems are reoccurring and stable (Putallaz et al., 2007).

Interestingly, if one considers the prevalence of adolescent aggression, it would appear that there is a large proportion of adolescents who are or should be socially maladjusted and rejected by their peers. For example, a Canadian survey found that within the previous year, 21% of girls and 52% of boys reported physically attacking another adolescent (Chesney-Lind, Artz, & Nicholson, 2002). Even though these numbers are high, they only represent a fraction of the physical aggression that occurs. It is very difficult to estimate the prevalence of adolescent aggression because it is routinely underreported (Tyson, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2002). And the majority of incidences that are reported typically reflect direct-overt, physical aggression, which is generally not as common as nonphysical forms of aggression among adolescents (Xie et al., 2003). Surprisingly, the prevalence of nonphysical adolescent aggression is rarely presented in research articles. Although the exact reason for this is unknown, one reason could be that it is

more difficult to identify nonphysical aggression because it is reported to be less visible than physical aggression (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). A second reason could be that nonphysical aggression occurs so frequently that it is difficult to obtain accurate estimates. In a rare study examining the frequency of indirect, relational, social, and physical aggression, adolescents aged 11 to 15 years were found to encounter 33 aggressive events per week (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006). In comparing the four types of aggression, the study found verbal aggression to be the most frequently heard or witnessed event followed by social aggression. Physical aggression as a category was found to be the least frequent. Taken together, it can be safely assumed that adolescents engage in some form of aggression on a frequent basis.

Given the discussion above, it does not seem reasonable to assume that such a large proportion of adolescents are experiencing such detrimental effects due to aggression. Looking further at the long history and near universal existence of aggression, an argument can be made that aggression serves an adaptive function (Famer & Xie, 2007; Vaughn & Santos, 2007). Vaughn and Santos (2007) argued that consideration should be given to the argument that aggression is normal and can actually be used to resolve conflict in some contexts. Further, these authors argued that the cycle of aggression and reconciliation can serve to strengthen relationships, provided it has not caused permanent physical or psychological damage. On the one hand, aggression is and has been assumed to be an index of pathology, and therefore, aggressive adolescents are often considered to be socially unskilled and marginalized (Farmer & Xie, 2007; Hawley, 2007; Hawley et al., 2007; Bukowski, 2003). On the other hand, there is an aspect of aggression that has certainly been overlooked. For some adolescents, aggression may have positive and beneficial features and is considered acceptable. Before continuing, it is important to stress that the above statement is not meant to minimize the harmful consequences

that aggression has in society, nor is it intended to discredit the vast amounts of research that have clearly demonstrated that there are negative repercussions to aggressive behaviour. This study is expected to illustrate that there is another concept and series of experiences that need to be considered when studying aggression and when developing prevention and intervention programs aimed at ameliorating aggression's negative effects.

For some time, characteristics such as being manipulative, deceptive, and aggressive were stereotypes of an elite group of ambitious, successful, and powerful people (Hawley, 2007). While this implies a positive link between aggression and success, there is still a negative connotation towards such behaviour and a perception that it is rare. In fact, it is considered somewhat controversial to argue that aggressive behaviour is an adaptive, beneficial, and socially competent form of behaviour (Farmer & Xie, 2007; Heilbron & Prinstein, 2008). There is, however, a growing body of research that has demonstrated that the positive link may be more common. For example, many studies have found features such as attractiveness, athleticism, class leadership, and popularity are attributed to many adolescents who engage in aggressive behaviour (see Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007; Farmer & Xie, 2007; Lease et al., 2002; Xie et al., 2003). These are certainly desirable features that most people would wish to have.

It should come as no surprise that children and adolescents are motivated to be accepted by their peers and included in the peer group (Lease et al., 2002). When they are put together, as in a school setting, they establish distinct social groups (Farmer & Xie, 2007). Adler and Adler (1995) identified these as cliques that consist of friendships circles in which members develop close relationships with one another. Cliques are hierarchical in structure and operate as bodies of power. Importantly, they are dynamic; however, membership is screened and at the control of those within the clique. Even preadolescents are said to understand the underlying hierarchical

structure and how anything from an *inappropriate* behaviour to a group member's whim can affect one's status (Lease et al., 2002). Therefore, some aspects of this environment are within their control, while others are not. Bandura (2001) argued that when people do not have control they will exercise *proxy agency*. In this sense, they will use other people who have access to or wield influence to work on their behalf. Bandura further argued that to do this effectively one must master a set of knowledge and skills. Aggression serves adaptive functions when it comes to developing, advancing through, and maintaining social hierarchies. Often, those who have demonstrated success have been found to utilize aggressive behaviour to control their social world (Farmer, Hall, Leung, Estell, & Brooks, 2011).

The link between aggression and the successful navigation through social hierarchies discussed above has been attributed to social competence and intelligence. Initially, the assertion that aggression and social competence and intelligence are related appears contradictory. Hawley (2002, 2007) argued that competence has been associated with positive behaviours that are intended to support and attract people, rather than behaviours, such as aggression, that are typically assumed to harm and repel others. Similarly, Kaukiainen et al. (1999) stated that social intelligence has generally been considered synonymous with concepts of prosocial skills. However, the authors stressed that constructs such as social competence and intelligence should be considered neutral tools that enable one to accomplish interpersonal tasks. A socially competent and intelligent adolescent is one who can obtain what he or she desires by utilizing the most effective interpersonal strategies. If an adolescent is experiencing conflict, social intelligence not only affords the option of reacting peacefully but also aggressively (Peeters, Cillessen, & Scholte, 2010). It is important to note that the argument that aggression is linked to positive attributes such as leadership and popularity does not imply that all aggression, and

adolescents using it, will obtain these features. Rather, it is particular adolescents (i.e., those

who are socially competent and intelligent) who will achieve success.

To begin understanding why these aggressive adolescents achieve high social status,

researchers have looked at the role of social dominance. Social dominance results from

individuals having naturally different levels of resource control (Roseth et al., 2007). As a result

of the asymmetry in abilities to control resources, social hierarchies develop (Hawley, 1999).

From this perspective, resources include material, social (e.g., peer relationships and social

learning models), and information resources (Hawley, 2002, 2007). Those who are better

equipped to take and maintain control over resources are considered to be socially dominant.

Resource control implies particular behaviours while social dominance entails a relationship

status. There are two potential means of resources control (Hawley et al., 2007; Roseth et al.,

2007). First, aggression in all its forms (e.g., physical and nonphysical) can be used. Using

aggression would involve taking from, threatening, or manipulating others to gain and maintain

access to resources. Second, more prosocial methods, such as affiliation, reciprocation, and

alliance formation can be used to obtain resources.

Looking at the different methods of resource control and their ability to obtain social

dominance, researchers have found that individuals are more successful when aggression is part

of their repertoire than when it is absent (Farmer & Xie, 2007; Lease et al., 2002; Xie et al.,

2003). For example, children who did not display aggressive behaviour and who were

considered to be either unmotivated or unable to obtain dominance were neglected by their peers

and not seen as social competitors. Research has also uncovered that not all forms of aggression

are as successful and that the relationship between forms of aggression and the probability of

success follows a developmental path.

Hawley (1999) reported that socially dominant toddlers were those who could best employ strategies most consistent with overt physical aggression. As such, overt-physically aggressive toddlers were the most watched, imitated, and liked by their peers. However, over the course of childhood and adolescence, the appeal of such behaviour changes and such overt acts of aggression can be rejected. Therefore, the adolescents who are the most successful at resource control begin to rely more on nonphysical aggressive strategies (e.g., relational and social aggression). This change in acceptance also coincides with social cognitive development. Due to limited cognitive abilities, young children are limited to overt physical acts of aggression. However, as cognition develops, children and adolescents acquire the verbal skills to engage in relational forms of aggression. Relational aggression requires greater social competence and intelligence because individuals must have an understanding of interpersonal relationships in order to engage in social manipulation without it backfiring (Kaukiainen et al., 1999; Peeters et al., 2010). Roseth and colleagues (2007) found that those experiencing high social dominance are more effective at discriminating among various resource control strategies than low dominance individuals. For example, compared to low dominance individuals, high dominance individuals are better able to recognize when nonphysical aggression will result in more benefits and fewer consequences than physical aggression. It should be mentioned that the relation between social dominance and aggression does not mean that all aggressive adolescents will experience social success because some aggressive adolescents are in fact marginalized and maladapted (Robertson et al., 2010).

Socially dominant individuals enjoy greater access to resources, which translates into greater social centrality or visibility than those who are not dominant (Hawley, 2007). When looking at social visibility, it is important to consider a few related constructs, such as perceived

popularity, sociometric status, and social prominence. Perceived popularity is a direct indicator

of visibility and social impact (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004, 2007). Sociometric status serves as

an indicator of likability (Farmer et al., 2011). An unfortunate difficulty with this construct is

that it is represented by different terms throughout the literature, such as social preference

(Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Farmer & Xie, 2007; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003) and sociometric

popularity (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004, 2007; Lease et al., 2002; Peeters et al., 2010). It is

important to note that adolescents high in sociometric status are not necessarily ranked high in

perceived popularity (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). In other words, an adolescent may be well

liked by others, but is not actually highly visible or well known among the larger group or have

any social impact. Social prominence is an index of social value. Socially prominent

adolescents would express a number of characteristics that have a high social value such as

leadership, athletic behaviour, attractiveness, and popularity (Farmer et al., 2011). Aggressive

adolescents have been reported to rate high in perceived popularity, but low in sociometric status

(Banny et al., 2011; Farmer & Xie, 2007; Peeters et al., 2010; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003;

Robertson et al., 2010). Therefore, aggressive adolescents may experience high social centrality

and visibility (i.e., popularity), but are not necessarily liked by their peers. Aggression has also

been found to be a key component in attaining social prominence (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004;

Farmer & Xie, 2007). For example, Farmer and colleagues (2011) found that high prominence

youth, with low sociometric status, were twice as likely to be identified as aggressive. In other

studies, those using both aggression and prosocial methods to control resources were referred to

as bistrategic controllers, whereas those using only prosocial methods and those using only

coercive methods were referred to as prosocial and coercive controllers (Hawley 2007; Hawley,

et al., 2007). Interestingly, bistrategic controllers were reported to be dominant, preferred (i.e.,

high sociometric status, and therefore, well liked), and prominent. Prosocial controllers, were said to be dominant and preferred, while coercive controller were only said to be dominant. Therefore, it appears that prosocial behaviour is important for establishing sociometric status, and aggressive behaviour is important in terms of prominence and dominance.

Many of the research results discussed thus far were obtained using teacher and peer nomination methods. These methods involve providing participants with a list of names and then asking them to identify those individuals who fulfill certain criteria. For example, Lease et al. (2002) had participants nominate individuals who "can playfully tease others without hurting their feelings or making them mad" (p. 515). Participants are also asked to indicate which individuals they liked the most and which they liked the least. While these methods are good at examining the relations between specific forms of aggression and attributes of perceived popularity, sociometric status, and social prominence, they do not provide insight as to how adolescents experience or make sense of aggression that would be considered acceptable and even admired. The focus of this topic is to explore the meaning that adolescents have of acceptable aggression. Rather than asking adolescents to evaluate specific types of aggression, this topic will have them identify the contexts in which aggression might, if at all, be considered acceptable. Examination of this topic will also identify the manner in which adolescents make sense of *who can get away with aggression*. In other words, participants were asked to describe the characteristics of people who can behave aggressively and still be accepted. An understanding of the contexts in which aggression is considered acceptable will help to inform prevention and intervention programs that target adolescent aggression. For example, a key aspect of successful drug and alcohol intervention programs is that they acknowledge the positive features of drug-taking behaviour. With knowledge of the *other side* of aggression,

programs can be tailored to adolescents engaging in specific forms of aggression and experiencing different levels of social dominance.

3.1   Thematic analysis of topic two

Table 3.1 provides an overview of the themes that were identified when analyzing the data for topic two.

Table 3.1 *Themes for Topic Two: Exploring Adolescents' Conceptualization of Acceptable Aggression*

Theme Label	Theme Description
Social positioning	An index of one's vulnerability to being targeted for aggression. Social positioning also serves as a motivating factor for being aggressive and defending against aggression.
Reputation agency: Standing-up for yourself and fighting back	Participants stressed that it is very important for a target to stand-up towards a perpetrator. By standing up, the target acquires and maintains a reputation that he/she is willing to fight back.
Continuous cycle of aggression	Aggression was described as a cycle, which is difficult to end. At the root of this cycle is social positioning and specifically reputation agency, in which there are motivations and expectations to retaliate when being aggressed against.
The ones who get away with being aggressive	Some aggressive individuals have a small likelihood of being punished either formally or by their social network.
Subtheme –The influence of social positioning	Individuals who get away with aggression were described as having a high social position, especially in terms of social power.
Subtheme – The self control to get away with it	Those who get away with being aggressive were described as controlling their aggression and not being too reactive. It is important that these individuals are not aggressive towards those in their immediate social network.
The ones who do not get away with being aggressive	Individuals who are more likely to be punished for being aggressive were described negatively and ultimately lacking in social positioning.

(continued)

Table 3.1 *Themes for Topic Two: Exploring Adolescents' Conceptualization of Acceptable Aggression (continued)*

Theme Label	Theme Description
Not necessarily bad behaviour	Aggression was specifically considered acceptable when targets were standing-up for themselves. As a result, reactive aggression was considered more acceptable than instrumental aggression.
The context of unacceptable aggression	Participants identify specific contexts in which aggression is deemed unacceptable, such as unprovoked aggression, excessive aggression, and relational aggression.

3.1.1 Social positioning

One theme that developed throughout the group discussions was social positioning. Consistently, participants indicated that it is not acceptable to perpetrate aggression. While this may lead one to believe that all aggression is then deemed unacceptable, there were specific contexts in which aggression was argued to be acceptable. For example, if someone perpetrates aggression, participants argued that the target is allowed and expected to respond with a similar level of aggression. However, this did not explain aggressive behaviour beyond the initial action by the perpetrator and response by the target. In other words, it does not provide insight into why aggression might be used in the first place, and why aggression might escalate beyond the initial action and response. What seems to be at play behind what is considered acceptable and the escalation of aggression is the motivating factor of social positioning. In other words, there was some factor that seemed to govern the rules and expectations around aggressive behaviour. Social positioning captures an overall sense of where the individual stands in the social environment.

To begin, social positioning was conveyed through an expression of reputation agency. The term was chosen to reflect the notion that adolescents want to control their own reputation

when it comes to victimization. In other words, an aspect of social positioning is predicated on

the sense that *I will not stand back and allow you to dictate my reputation*. It is not acceptable to

start aggression, but what appears to be the goal is to finish or end the event. For example, one

boy said, "it's not OK to start things, but if you have to finish the fight or something, it's OK."

Another group of boys provided the following exchange:

> *Boy 1*: if you said man, do you want to fight me and then the person is like. That's pretty
>
> much a challenge straight up…. if someone was … what the hell man, do you want to
>
> fight me? I'd [be] … OK.
>
> *Boy 2*: alright, I ain't backing up.
>
> *Boy 3*: well no that
>
> *Boy 2*: that's like stepping down.

If an individual does not finish the aggressive event or does not stand-up to a challenge, his/her

social position is at risk of being harmed. As a result, the individual will be seen as weak or a

victim, which can lead to further targeting. This aspect of social positioning explains why just

walking away from an aggressive event is not a viable alternative for someone who is being

targeted. For example, one girl explained you cannot really just walk away "because you need to

kind of get the last word in. To feel … you're more superior." Walking away only serves to

relinquish one's social position not only to the other person, but also the larger social group. For

example, two girls argued:

> *Girl 1*: if they're wanting to win and they want to have more power. So you can't just …
>
> *Girl 2*: you're not really willing to … give up your strength if that makes sense.
>
> *Girl 1*: … some people try to be the bigger person and … stand there while the other
>
> person screams at them. But that just doesn't work.

Here the second girl struggles with the word *strength* because in this context it is not physical strength, but rather a social strength, or what has been labelled here as social positioning.

Social positioning further contains within it elements of chronological status (e.g., age, grade). For example, one group of grade 7 students described the importance, desire, and need not only to establish but also elevate one's social position upon transitioning into a new school environment from grade 6 to 7.

Girl 1: it's very harsh.

Boy 1: it's a big change from grade 6 aggression.

Girl 1: oh intense.

Boy 1: grade 6, you know, you're still little, you can't, well not little, but once you hit grade 7 you feel like a teen and more responsible and stuff. And ah you feel kind of, I don't know, more powerful I guess and more authority. So you go beat on people a lot more often than grade 6. Because there were hardly…

Girl 2: yeah

Boy 1: fights in grade 6.

Boy 2: in grade 6 you're at the top of the food chain.

Girl 1: yeah

Boy 2: and then you get to grade 7 and you're at the bottom and you feel that you need to work your way back up. And…

Girl 1: I just wonder if it's going to the same way.

Boy 2: be like a dog and mark your territory.

The participants highlighted how chronological status automatically changes when transitioning from one grade to another. When going from grade 6 to grade 7, which in the case of these

adolescents included a transition from elementary to middle school, their chronological status changed. In this case it dropped, as they went from the highest grade in elementary to the lowest grade in middle school.

Social power (i.e., number of peer friends and social connectedness) was also indicated as impacting one's overall social position. Without friends, a person can easily be singled out and targeted and it is seen as very difficult to stand-up for oneself. For example, one participant described:

> I was at this party and these two kids … made this kid get on his knees and they had bear mace to his head and I'm like, man, this kid's an idiot why would he be on his knees right now if you knew you were going to get bear maced…. It's a tough world if you don't have any friends. You have to be dominant.

Another element of social positioning that was identified by participants included physical dominance or toughness. When one group was asked why someone would "smack" around another person, one girl responded, "to show him that they have more power than the other person." In this case, the term *power* not only represents physical but also social power in the form of social positioning. If social positioning can be harmed by not responding, adolescents must make an important decision when faced with an aggressive event: be harmed physically/emotionally or have their social position harmed. In terms of toughness, one boy said, "tough is getting kicked in the head and just keep getting up and getting up and getting up." As this example demonstrates, choosing to protect one's social position can come with great physical and emotional consequences.

Overall, social position was identified through multiple indicators. First, reputation agency was expressed in which participants indicated the importance of standing up for

themselves so as not to appear as weak or a victim of aggression. Second, chronological status

was highlighted as bringing about an automatic change to their position for which they had to

compensate. Third, social networking was argued to affect the degree to which people are

targeted and their ability to stand-up for themselves. Finally, the fourth indicator was physical

toughness, which further highlighted the extent to which some adolescents will go to protect or

elevate their social position.

3.1.2 Reputation agency: Standing-up for yourself and fighting back

Targeting someone is considered a form of disrespect and challenge to his or her social

position. Some participants took very firm stances on how to respond. For example, one boy

stated, "if someone's … yeah you're a bitch…. man, I would fuck your shit up, man." In another

group, one boy said, "you can't just … back down to people. [If] somebody's punching you in

the face, you have to beat the shit out of them," while another boy added, "you have to at least

defend yourself." When targets choose not to stand-up and retaliate against the perpetrator, their

reputation for being able to defend themselves can be damaged. Participants argued that targets

could face further consequences beyond the harm resulting from the immediate aggressive event,

such as harm to their social positions and future victimization as a result. For example, one

group described how other adolescents would respond to a target who did not stand up for

himself:

Girl: wimp, you wimp and you're weak.

Boy 1: … couldn't fight back and yeah and then start call him stupid or something.

Boy 2: and then he'll be picked on by other people.

Girl: yeah.

Boy 2: because they'll realize oh wait he's not going to punch me back. Sure I'm littler

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than him and not as strong as him, but he's not going to punch me back no matter how

hard I hit him.

Another girl, described again how failing to stand up for oneself can result in bullying, "it just

teaches people to walk all over her, bully her because she is not going to do anything about it

she's just going to sit there and take it." In talking about a possible situation in which his friend

is a target, but chooses not to fight back against the perpetrator, one participant said about his

friend, "well then he'd be a bitch." Similarly, a girl said, "yeah I would help him, but I would

think he was a little bitch. Still I'd make fun of him," after which another boy said, "yeah I'd

probably kick him once, like a little girl." Choosing to run away was also found to have similar

consequences, as one group discussed:

> *Girl 1*: what happens if you're to the point … where there['s] actually going to be serious
>
> harm. Like that girl in Vancouver where they just … let her die.
>
> *Girl 2*: well then you can be a pussy and you can try to run away. But you know if it is
>
> … a group of people who are fighting you … would you rather stand there and fight a
>
> bunch of people or would you rather a chance and run like a little chicken?
>
> *Boy 1*: yeah you run though and they come find you and hurt you really bad.
>
> *Boy 2*: I would stand there and fight like a man.
>
> *Girl 1*: and get your ass killed.

By far, participants suggested that it is more honourable to fight back, rather than doing nothing

or running away in order to escape potentially serious harm.

If person X purposely harms person Y, who then retaliates and harms person X,

participants argued that person X deserved what happens. For example, when talking about

similar situations, participants said "you would have had it coming," "well then you're asking for

it," and "then you deserve it." Part of the rationale for this comes from the argument that fighting back is natural and expected if one hopes to maintain one's social position. In other words, perpetrators should expect the target to fight back, and targets are socially expected to fight back. Additionally, a number of participants described how it is a natural response to fight back. For example, one boy said, "well it's obviously our first response if you insulted me. You know, I'll, I'm going to beat the crap out of you." In another group, one boy said, "well I would think that he'd if after you push him, I'd think he would turn around and hit you." To which another boy immediately added, "I don't even think, I would just go after him."

Based on the discussions with participants, decisions to fight back appeared to be influenced by two factors: the perpetrator's social position in terms of social power and physical power and the type of aggression he/she used against the target. For example, one boy said the decision comes down to, "how big the other person is and how big you are." In another conversation two participants said:

> *Boy*: say she was bigger than you, twice your age. She was twice the size of you. She smashed you
>
> *Girl*: then I get my ass kicked I still wouldn't like punch her back, because if somebody twice the size of me hit me, then I would be asking for trouble by hitting them back.

In terms of the perpetrator's social position, participants identified the perpetrator's popularity or number of friends (i.e., social power) as a cause for concern. In some cases, they referred specifically to being outnumbered in the actual event or having to deal with the perpetrator's friends in the future. For example, one group of participants said:

> *Girl*: because the popular person will have.
>
> *Boy 1*: people aren't really scared of the person, they're scared of all their friends.

Interviewer: so you have that factor.

Boy 2: if the person has more friends, there are more people to worry about.

Girl: yeah that's what I was going to say.

Another boy said, "if you're … a small guy, man, you got … no chance against six other guys. Sometimes [then] you have to know when to back down." While participants agreed that when the target is outnumbered he or she can choose not to fight back, but doing so is still looked down upon and should only be done unless it is completely unfair. As one boy said:

If they are attacking you … I'd stand up for myself instead of getting your ass kicked like

a bitch. But if it's like 100% unfair the best thing to do is get the hell out of there.

Because try to do something unless you just want to stay there and get your ass [kicked].

Participants argued that the necessity to stand up for oneself is also dependent on whether or not the aggressive event is physical or verbal in nature. Unless facing situations in which the target is outnumbered, participants were clear that the target must stand up for him- or herself if the perpetrator is being physically aggressive. However, in situations of verbal aggression, some participants suggested the target could choose to ignore it or respond either physically or verbally. However, as one participant suggested, a verbal response is only effective if the target has a higher social position than the instigating perpetrator, as he said "or you can do something emotionally back like spreading rumours about them. That works if you have a high enough stance." Having more of an option when it comes to responding to verbal aggression is interesting, considering that verbal aggression is argued to be more harmful than physical aggression. One might assume that there would be greater expectations regarding how one must specifically respond to situations that are perceived to be more harmful. One explanation for this may be that while participants consistently argued that verbal aggression is more harmful,

adolescents as a collective whole are not willing to openly acknowledge it as being more harmful.

3.1.3 Continuous cycle of aggression

As alluded to above, when talking about aggression, there was definitely a sense that it exists as a cycle of retaliation. For example, one girl stated it "starts a vicious cycle… if I'm mad at you because you pushed me so I'm going to hit you." Another boy argued that the cycle starts, because "people take it too far and it almost becomes a little war." Demonstrating how easily aggression escalates, one boy provided the following example:

If he does the same thing by saying I'm sorry to you then you can pretty much be … OK and walk away. But if he bumps into you, and you're like what the fuck and he goes what the hell man, why you bumping into me? And you're just … no you didn't and then it just starts to a big fight.

When asked if it will continue indefinitely, one boy said, "it depends on who stops it. Someone eventually stops it. Someone get's scared." The reason why someone would eventually get scared is because the aggression is said to escalate to the point where an individual's social network gets involved and:

Boy 1: then there's kids beating ganging up on other kids.

Boy 2: kids going to hospital.

Boy 1: they just go to parties and start fighting.

Boy 2: people getting batoned, people getting stabbed.

Given the consequences of such a cycle escalating it is important to investigate why such a cycle begins. Participants provided two possible expectations that likely work in concert.

Consistent with what was discussed in the previous section, the social position

component of reputation agency identifies the motivation to respond and stand-up for oneself. Participants suggested that there is an expectation that they retaliate against someone who is being aggressive towards them, so they feel that they must retaliate. That expectation highlights the influence that social positioning has on them. In addition, participants also argued that some perpetrators purposely seek retaliation. One boy stated, "well why would you hit me in the first place, unless you wanted to fight? It's like you are going to come up and hit me and you're going to expect to walk away." When one girl responded, "but don't give them what they want. Just walk away and they'll be like … I don't know what to do." To which he replied, "it doesn't matter, I'm going to give them what I want to give them." Here the expectation is coupled with a clear desire to defend oneself and enact control over the situation.

Another apparent reason for the cycle of aggression is the target's desire to make the perpetrator feel worse than he or she was made to feel. In a sense it becomes a matter of social positioning. For example, one boy said:

> If you're angry … you want them to be hurt. You want them. They made you feel that way for a reason. You want to make them feel even worse than you felt. When you're not, you just want to, you want to prove them wrong, all right. You just want to show them.

Two other girls argued:

> *Girl 1*: but … in that situation … if they're wanting to win and they want to have more power. So you can't just ...
>
> *Girl 2*: you're not really willing to … give up your strength, if that makes sense.
>
> *Girl 1*: … some people try to be the bigger person and just … stand there while the other person screams at them. But that just doesn't work.

If the target wants the perpetrator to hurt as bad as he or she does, if not worse, then the cycle is inevitable. Again it becomes apparent that participants wanted to ensure they maintained agency and control over how the event ended. Social positioning is so critical that participants clearly felt they must retaliate, which of course could lead to further retaliation:

> *Boy 1*: it's too hard to walk away, without mouthing you off in front of all your buddies.
>
> *Boy 2*: you got to mouth him back, because then that aggression …
>
> *Boy 1*: you have to have, you have to get the last word on him …
>
> *Boy 3*: yeah
>
> *Boy 2*: everything I guess, I don't know.
>
> *Boy 1*: the last, the last say about it.
>
> *Boy 2*: if you don't do anything you're looked down upon.

3.1.4 Who are the aggressive ones?

In order to better understand adolescent aggression, participants were asked to describe the characteristics of those who engage in aggression. Specifically, detail was provided on two different types of perpetrators: those who *get away* with being aggressive and those who *cannot get away* with being aggressive. The concept of getting away with aggression was used to convey a sense that the perpetrator does not really get into trouble either formally or through his/her immediate and extended social network. In other words, peers tend to *accept* the aggressive behaviour. Please note that this does not imply that the target of the behaviour would also be accepting of the aggression, but rather those viewing the event externally find it acceptable.

3.1.4.1 The ones who get away with being aggressive

More generally speaking, those who get away with being aggressive were described as

being good people inside. As one boy said, they can "have a nice personality and still be aggressive." Another boy described these individuals as having charisma and said further, "it's kind of a prerequisite. That's why people like you, because you have charisma." Another group argued:

> *Boy 1*: they are not bad people …
>
> *Boy 2*: they could be … scared inside, man.
>
> *Boy 1*: yeah they could just be wanting to make friends or something, but they're just doing it by the wrong way.

Along with describing these perpetrators as being good inside or charismatic, these individuals were described according to the construct of social positioning. In other words, those who get away with being aggressive have a higher social position than those who do not get away with it. In particular, they demonstrate social power, physical toughness, and reputation agency. In addition to social position, participants also identified these individuals as demonstrating self-control.

3.1.4.1.1 The influence of social positioning

Perpetrators who are able to get away with being aggressive were consistently described has having a high social position in terms of social power. This means that among other attributes they are considered popular and have more friends. Two participants described how both the social power of the perpetrator, target, and observers, influence how the observers will respond:

> *Boy*: they probably, they were just … jok[ing] around and not really think much about it because they don't want to have … I don't know isolate themselves. So they would kinda be like oh good one and then they wouldn't really care. But then … the unpopular

people would probably just … turn around and be say a few things.

Girl: probably my class, if I was there and I had pushed someone … the popular girls or something, they'd just kind of look at me and go that was rude and … a mean [thing to do].

In this case, it appeared that to maintain social power (e.g., popularity) other popular kids would go along with and support the behaviour. Conversely, those with more social power would not support the aggressive behaviour of an adolescent with less social power, as in the case of the girl in the above example.

While some did not agree with the principle of gaining popularity through aggressive means, they certainly acknowledged that it is the way things are. For example one boy stated, "I think it's retarded when someone's popular off being just a fucking asshole." In some cases, participants argued that these individuals have friends because they remained friends while growing up. As one boy said, "some of them have been friends for … 12 years already. I don't think they want to be with them because they are scared of them or whatever, [but] because they were friends before." Others argued that they gain social power because other people "see them as … protection." In other words, by being around the aggressive perpetrator, others are less likely to become targets of aggression, and therefore, acquire social positioning. This notion ties directly to the element of the physical toughness these individuals are perceived to possess.

In terms of physical toughness, these perpetrators are "not always athletic. Some of them are just built naturally strong." Another boy added the description, "you know he's a good fighter. He puts on a show. Oh I like to go watch him beat the shit out of kids." Tied to this physical power is an issue of fear. These perpetrators are described as being feared:

Interviewer: why don't people call them on it and be like whatever?

> *Boy 1*: because they are big guys man
>
> *Boy 2*: it goes back to that they're bigger
>
> *Boy 1*: [other kids are] scared they'll get their teeth knocked out.

In another group, one boy said, "because nobody has the guts to stand up for the person and say hey that's not right. Or … tell somebody that they're doing it. Because they're afraid that person will come and … beat them up." In this example, the person with less physical power, and therefore, less social position, cannot question the more powerful person's behaviour without consequence. Further, these participants argued that because of this element of fear, in many cases these perpetrators are popular and have social power, but they are not well liked aside from their close friends. For example, one boy said, "nobody even like[s] them, you just hang out with them because I don't know," to which another boy quickly added, "they think they're popular because they're scared and they want protection sort of thing." Two boys described how not only does this type of perpetrator acquire social positioning through aggression, but so do their *friends*:

> *Boy 1*: people might get popular off fighting and being tough. The only reason they have
>
> friends is because they'll probably … back them [up]. That way, then they have some
>
> back up.
>
> *Boy 2*: you try to win by default there.
>
> *Boy 1*: so, that way then like if you get in trouble and you're friends with the guys that are
>
> … the big macho kind of guys are. And you give them a call up … ahh that's what I
>
> think. The tough guys are all used man.

Another characteristic that contributes to these individuals' social positioning, and allows them to further get away with aggression, is that they are seen as standing-up for themselves and

have a reputation for agency. As one girl said, "they just don't take shit." Another boy

described them as "if someone's going to come up to them and start shit, they're going to get

hurt for it." This is seen as an admirable trait. For example, one boy commented, "yeah they

like you because you got balls and you'll go out and punch somebody out in front of a crowd of

people or cameras, whatever."

The elements of social positioning, including social power, physical toughness, and

standing up for one's self (i.e., reputation agency) were clearly suggested by participants to

influence a perpetrator's ability to get away with being aggressive. However, these elements

alone will not entirely influence whether or not a perpetrator will be able to get away with being

aggressive. As one girl described, these individuals "are just like everybody else, except that

they are really violent." It is important to understand why these aggressive individuals and their

behaviour are accepted. Perhaps the most important characteristic identified by participants, was

that of self-control.

3.1.4.1.2 The self-control to get away with it

Participants clearly attributed these perpetrators with being able to control when and how

to be aggressive. As one participant said, "they've learned how to function and deal with

problems," while another boy stated, "some kids know when not [to] be, they know when to turn

off the aggressiveness." In terms of when to be aggressive, participants felt "they are just good

at hiding it." These individuals are perceived to be less reactive and explosive, which allows

them to dictate when and where the aggression will take place.

> *Girl*: I think it's different between people. Because … some people are more subtle and
>
> … some people are really really really aggressive. And … some people want to be and
>
> stuff.

Boy 1: … some people will [wait]. If they're going to explode on the person they'll go somewhere that they won't get in trouble.

Boy 2: … they'd go maybe over there, instead of right in front of the supervisor at the backfield.

Along with controlling when and where to be aggressive, participants also felt they controlled the very nature of the aggression. Some participants described their behaviour simply as being more *subtle*. Such a reference may be an indication that these perpetrators are more inclined to use nonphysical forms of aggression (e.g., indirect, relational, or social aggression), or perhaps instrumental aggression, which is more controlled than reactive aggression. Other participants provided specific examples indicating these individuals engage in more verbal and relational forms of aggression.

Perhaps the biggest factor as to why self-control is so important in getting away with aggression is that it allows the perpetrator to control who he/she will target. Many participants indicated they were fine with the aggressive behaviour as long as they were not the targets. For example:

Interviewer: these people that kind of get away with being aggressive, would you say that you like these people?

Girl 1: yeah, just as long as they're not like that towards me.

Interviewer: towards you?

Girl 2: yeah, I agree with her.

While aggression appears important in gaining social positioning, self-control is critical in maintaining it. Participants were adamant that aggression would be acceptable as long as they or their friends were not being targeted. Therefore, if an aggressive individual is explosive and

anyone around him or her has the potential to be victimized, his or her social position would be at risk. Ultimately, this would limit the potential for getting away with being aggressive.

3.1.4.2 The ones who do not get away with being aggressive

When participants were asked to describe the characteristics of those who *do not* get away with being aggressive, there were definite consistencies with what was said above. In other words, these individuals were argued to display many features in contrast to those described for perpetrators who do get away with aggression. Immediately, these individuals were described negatively. For example, in one group, one boy labeled them as "cocky," while another boy followed with, "they think they are all that." Another boy referred to them as "coke heads." It is not assumed that he meant these individuals are all using cocaine, but rather used the term to refer to their negative social position. In fact, these individuals were consistently described as having no social power. For example, when one boy described an aggressive individual who is not accepted he said, "nobody hangs out with him anymore from what I'm aware of." Another boy argued:

> *Boy*: they are just not accepted in general.…
>
> *Interviewer*: is that what it probably is?
>
> *Boy*: when they are totally outcasts. When they have nothing else to do but get angry at people for the fact of not liking them. Or … to take revenge on people for being more popular or something.

There was a clear sentiment among participants that the nonacceptance and diminished social position of these individuals is not a chance occurrence. Rather, as one boy described, these individual are solely responsible, "eventually they piss off enough people. They piss off enough people that it's just, yeah they get their ass kicked by a big group of people sort of

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thing." Another boy highlighted that these individuals also do not use discretion when choosing their targets, "they just do it to whoever they want."

Ultimately, those who do not get away with aggression simply lack the self-control that those who do get away with aggression have. One boy described how "everybody didn't want my brother coming to parties anymore because he, every party he goes to he punches out somebody." To which a girl replied, "well yeah, if you get too rowdy and just punch." Here his brother is displaying a lack of self-control leading to aggressive behaviour that is considered too frequent.

In a couple of groups, participants actually compared those with self-control and those without:

Boy 1: because the person that just goes off the wire or sometimes might have something wrong with him or her. Well the person that premeditated it is obviously…

Girl: motivated.

Boy 2: yes.

Boy 1: and not to mention that the person that just kind of flies off the handle like that, they can misinterpret something for the reason that they're doing it. So it can kinda end up in a bit of a more messy situation.

These participants suggested that a lack of self-control further leads to aggression that is unwarranted. As well, this behaviour becomes problematic as it becomes unpredictable. As a result, social positioning cannot be maintained, as those within the immediate social network have no guarantee that they will not become targets of the behaviour.

In another group the following comparison was made between those who are too reactive and those who display more self-control:

Boy 1: because they respond quickly, they respond quickly. If they wait and wait and eventually one day they snap and they actually do something proper about it…. they actually take out everyone of them.

Boy 2: that's like those kids who…

Boy 1: then they are not going to get teased anymore.

In this example, the boys suggested that over reactive aggression is also ineffective. In the example, the participants made reference to the school shootings that took place in Columbine, Colorado in 1999. It should be noted, that it is not assumed these participants are condoning school shootings, as that would be consistent with their negative views towards excessive aggression and murder (see section 3.1.6: The context of unacceptable aggression). Rather, this example should be taken to imply that a premeditated and self-controlled approach would be more accepted than one that is an explosive overreaction.

3.1.5 Not necessarily bad behaviour

Despite strong societal views that aggression is a form of bad behaviour, participants argued that in specific circumstances aggression is needed and considered an acceptable behaviour. One of the more obvious contexts in which aggression was considered *good* was in the line of work. For example, "if the police weren't aggressive, nobody would get arrested. So if they weren't aggressive towards criminals, nobody would get arrested."

Although some participants suggested that aggression is never good or acceptable, they often still managed to identify circumstances in which it would be ok. For example, one girl stated, "to be honest … maybe if I was getting pummelled and it was the only thing I could do. But I don't really think that fighting is ok under any circumstances. In anybody's position." While stating that she did not think fighting was acceptable, she still raised the caveat that in

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situations of self-defence it would be ok.

Throughout each group discussion, participants indicated aggression that is accepted, as well as times when adolescents are expected to be aggressive. In most cases, acceptance and expectations were found to go hand-in-hand and apply to the same contexts. When asked whether or not most adolescents are aware of what is acceptable and at times expected, one group responded:

Boy 1: most of the time.

Interviewer: most of the time?

Boy 2: people who don't know it's ok usually don't last long.

Interviewer: in what sense, last long?

Boy 2: eventually they piss off enough people. They piss off enough people that it's just, yeah they get their ass kicked by a big group of people sort of thing.

Therefore, participants implied that adolescents face strong social norms when it comes to aggressive behaviour.

Most frequently, aggression was considered acceptable in the context of standing-up for yourself. It is important to note that standing up for yourself contains situations of self-defence[2]. Examples of when it is acceptable to be aggressive included situations, such as "when somebody's beating on you," and "when someone besmirched your character." It was also considered acceptable if the person responding is not directly targeted, but rather his or her family or friends were targeted, but they are unable to stand up for themselves. These situations were acceptable, "because you're protecting somebody," and "someone you care about is being threatened."

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[2] The term *standing up for yourself* was chosen because it is thought to be broader than self-defense, which is typically thought of only in situations of physical aggression. Standing up for yourself includes situations in which someone is being targeted both through verbal and physical aggression.

While participants consistently agreed that responding with physical aggression was acceptable when being targeted by physical aggression, there was disagreement regarding what was acceptable when dealing with verbal aggression. For example, in one group, boys argued that it would be ok to physically attack someone who was verbally aggressive towards them. For example, one boy said it would be acceptable to "pretty much stop them from being a big mouth and shit. Then he knows what it feels like." However, one girl said, "why the hell would you do that?... someone calls you, starts calling you a name and you just run up and start punching them out." It should be noted that later she added, "I think it's funny, but," which only served to minimize how strongly she opposed the behaviour.

Other participants argued that it would depend on the nature of the verbal aggression. For example, one boy said aggression would be acceptable "when they are saying shit like showing pictures about you or edited pictures that sort of shit." Others argued that if it is repeated targeting, then aggression is certainly warranted. As one boy said, if "they do it and do it, and they're not stopping until something happens, that's something crazy," while another said, "if it's constant … day after day after day, you're going to have to do something about it." One girl stated, "I guess … if some girl is talking crap about me and I'll get really pissed off and go confront her and then … bitch and like the F word will come out," suggesting that it would be better to confront the perpetrator. From there if the perpetrator did it again, participants argued aggression would be acceptable.

Not only was aggression considered acceptable when standing-up for oneself, but many participants argued targets are expected to respond with physical aggression. For example, one boy said, "if you disrespect him then something is going to happen to you." Another boy said, "people around us though, they were … wanting us to fight. So it's like peer pressure." In

discussing an example where a target is being hit by a perpetrator, but does not fight back, one girl said, "if he's like hitting you and you're not hitting him back, then you're a bitch." In fact, participants identified a number of negative consequences a target could face for not being aggressive against the perpetrator. For example, targets could expect to lose social positioning and be called names such as "a pussy" or "wuss." Additionally, participants felt the target would deserve getting hurt, as one participant said, "you kind of almost deserve it because you don't do anything to defend yourself."

Interestingly, although some participants suggested that if a target is being attacked verbally he or she is expected to respond with physical aggression, there were multiple indications that such a response may be infrequent. For example, one girl stated:

I think it's expected but it's not often … it's not always appreciated, you know…. I think it depends on the kind of person you are. Not everybody is going up after hearing shit about themselves and be … screw you and start beating them up. A lot of people are just going to be … oh whatever, I'm not going to talk to that person anymore. Or you know solve it other ways.

Additionally, many participants argued that responding to verbal aggression with physical aggression would be excessive and therefore, unacceptable.

It should be noted that all of the contexts in which participants identified aggression as being acceptable involved reactive aggression. In other words, while it is considered acceptable for targets to respond aggressively, it is not acceptable for perpetrators to initiate aggression towards a target who had not previously harmed him or her. In discussing why it is ok, one group stated:

Boy 1: because then they're calling you on.

Boy 2: … they're making the first move.

Boy 1: or they're asking for it.

Boy 3: yeah.

Boy 1: either that or they don't expect you to get violent and you're going to get violent.

Interviewer: so there, you're basically saying just that they're giving you a reason?

Boy 2: it's teenage instinct to get

Boy 1: it's probably human instinct, not teenage

3.1.6 The context of unacceptable aggression

Although participants identified contexts in which aggressive behaviour is considered acceptable, they also identified times when it was clearly unacceptable or bad. In general, some participants identified being aggressive towards adults, or people who are trying to help as unacceptable. For example, one boy said, "you wouldn't just walk up to your principal and punch him." Another boy gave the example of when "teachers [are] trying to help you pass through your course, but you're lazy and you get mad because they're helping you and always nagging at you."

However, most of the examples that participants identified as unacceptable are consistent with unintentional aggression. In other words, unprovoked aggression is considered unacceptable. For example, one boy said, "when there is one kid sitting there at a bus stop and you and … five of your friends go up and your buddy punches him in the head and for no reason." Another group discussed an example in which a perpetrator accidently bumps into a target and the target starts hitting the perpetrator. One participant responded, "why the hell would you do that man? If he says it's an accident, sorry man, and starts walking away, that's when you have to accept it was an accident and not on purpose." Another group of participants

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gave the example, " just some random kid standing there and he's just minding his own business and some kid's like you're a fucking goof, you fucking fagot or something… then you're just like dude, why the fuck did you say that?" Some participants simply referred to such aggression as "not necessary."

In situations, where the aggression has been instigated, it was deemed unacceptable if it was excessive. One example of aggression that was always considered excessive was that of murder. Participants even deemed threatening to stab or kill someone as unacceptable. As discussed in previous sections, participants argued that targets must respond to perpetrators on the same level. In talking about how to respond to verbal aggression, one girl said, "if they are going to carry on then tell them to throw down. But you don't need to run over and start spazzing out on them. Like fucking Jesus."

In terms of specific forms of aggression, many participants also identified spreading rumours and talking about other people behind their backs as unacceptable. For example, one boy said, "you don't go on Facebook and talk shit behind their back. If you want to talk shit, you do it to their face." One girl had an issue with such behaviour because "they don't get to just talk about you. It's your life, your business. People can keep their mouths shut." Another boy said, "I don't think it's OK to spread rumours and … harass them. But I think it would be OK to tell them OK you can't do that."

One explanation as to why participants spoke so negatively about this type of aggression is because it limits the target's ability to respond and retaliate. Similarly, in situations of physical aggression, participants identified being angry and cheated if they did not have the ability to *fight* back. For example, one participant described how another groups of kids threw a drink at him from their moving car. Because they did not stop the car he did not have an

opportunity to stand up for himself. It appears as though, participants are objecting to the fact that these incidents challenge their social positioning, and do not afford them the opportunity to re-establish it.

3.2   Discussing the results of topic two

There is no doubt that aggression is problematic and results in a variety of negative impacts for those who are targeted. However, recent research has suggested that for some, aggression is socially supported (see Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007; Farmer & Xie, 2007; Hawley, 1999, 2002, 2007; Lease et al., 2002). The purpose of this study was to examine the capacity in which adolescents experience aggression as acceptable. The above results demonstrated that adolescents experience aggression as behaviour that is both good and bad. In other words, aggression is not understood as behaviour that results in a single set of homogenous outcomes. Instead, the behaviour is grounded in a social hierarchy and culture that enables users to negotiate the standing of themselves and others. While on the surface, aggression was argued to be bad in light of the impact it has on targets, participants clearly described contexts in which it served a critical purpose and was considered appropriate, acceptable, and necessary.

Underlying all contexts in which aggression was deemed acceptable was a theme of social positioning. For the purposes of this discussion, social positioning represents a multifaceted construct representing an individual's status within the social hierarchy. Social dominance as established by asymmetries in resource control is another construct related to status within social hierarchies (see Hawley, 1999, 2002; Hawley et al., 2007). Social dominance is predicated on the abilities of individuals to compete and control material and social resources (Hawley, 2002, 2009). Aggression is a strategy that is used to establish dominance. While the construct may appear similar to the social positioning proposed hear, there are some

important distinctions.

Social position consists of four elements: reputation agency, chronological status, social power, and physical toughness. First, reputation agency operates as a central motivating factor when a target responds to being aggressed against. One's social position is dynamic and can rise and fall according to one's behaviour and that of others. Acts of aggression were described as involving challenges from the perpetrator towards a target's social position. Participants clearly stated that when challenged, the target must stand-up and fight back. At risk in aggressive events is the target's social position. Should the target not fight back, he/she will be seen as weak, which will invite future targeting and victimization. But what is most important is that participants merely stressed the act of fighting back, rather than the outcome. Participants did not state that the target needs to *win* or harm the perpetrator, but simply stand-up to the challenge. Not fighting back diminishes the target's social position. By fighting back the target will not necessarily raise his/her social position, but rather demonstrate agency over his/her reputation, and therefore, establish a social position that he/she will fight back when challenged. This contrasts with social dominance, as dominance positioning is predicated on the successful obtainment and control of social capital through competition (Hawley, 2002). Social positioning on the other hand, contains an element that is not dependent on successful competition, but rather establishing a standing or reputation that attacks towards social position will be challenged.

The second element of social position entails chronological status consisting of age and grade. Chronological status automatically affects one's social positioning with each passing year. Participants conveyed, however, that this status is not strictly linear due to the organization of schools. Participants in this study were from a school district that mostly utilizes an elementary (kindergarten to grade 6), middle (grade 7 to grade 9), and high school (grade 10 to

grade 12) system. Therefore, participants described how they experienced the top social position in grade 6; however, after transitioning into a new school level they now occupied the lowest social position. As a result, they reported having to rebuild their social position through the use of aggression. This experience is consistent with previous research that has reported increases in aggression at similar types of transitions (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007; Roseth et al., 2007; Vaughn & Santos, 2007).

Similar to social position, a study looking at social dominance among toddlers included a factor of chronological age (Hawley, 2002). However, the study found that chronological age did not predict social dominance over the effects of physical size. However, this should not be surprising given the age of the study's participants ($M = 5.5$) and the positive correlation between physical size and chronological age in both girls and boys prior to puberty. Therefore, it is unclear exactly how the role of chronological age plays in social dominance as adolescents transition from one school to the next. Interestingly, Hawley and Little (1999) identified mental age as playing an important role in social dominance. This is distinct from chronological age, as it more accurately reflects cognitive development and social intelligence, which has been found to impact the types of aggressive behaviour that children and adolescents use (Kaukiainen et al., 1999; Peeters et al., 2010). Further, socially intelligent individuals are better equipped to use multiple strategies to access and control resources.

The third component of social position involves social power in terms of the degree to which the individual is socially connected. Without access to networks of *friends*, participants described how a person is singled out and targeted for aggression. Social power does not only consist of intimate-reciprocal friendships, but also includes the perceived popularity of the target. Perceived popularity identifies how visible a person is (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004, 2007), but

does not require that others within the social network like him or her. In terms of standing-up and fighting back, participants identified social power as a central component in deciding what to do. Participants clearly stated that a target has to consider the perpetrator's network, as it could become involved in the event immediately or in the future leading to the target being outnumbered. However, it should be noted that reputation agency has such an influence that participants stressed that being outnumbered only becomes a larger factor if the event is "100% unfair."

In drawing a parallel to the construct of social dominance, it is unclear the extent to which it entails social power or recognizes the influence of perceived popularity. Social dominance is described as the ability to compete for, attain, and defend both material and social resources (Hawley et al., 2007). Socially dominant individuals are described as being highly visible (Hawley, 1999, 2002; Lease et al., 2002). Neal (2010) further argued that aggression serves to establish social dominance as well as perceived popularity, thus linking the two constructs. Taken together it appears as though social dominance entails social power; however, to this author's knowledge, it is not stated within the social dominance literature the degree to which it affords individuals protection from aggression. Here social power is argued to be an element of one's social position, which ultimately serves as an indicator of his/her vulnerability to aggression. It seems probable that a socially dominant individual is less likely to be aggressed against due to his/her access to social resources, which requires a high degree of perceived popularity.

The final component of social positioning that was identified involved physical toughness, which is the willingness to be aggressive even though the one being aggressive may be harmed. This concept relates to reputation agency, because it identifies a motivation to fight

back regardless of the physical harm that a target may experience. By standing-up and fighting

back despite being harmed, targets are able to maintain and build upon their social position.

Even when participants talked about being outnumbered, they suggested that the target could still

retaliate, as it would demonstrate physical toughness. A construct of toughness is not addressed

in social dominance despite the status it affords an individual. While social dominance identifies

aggression as a method to compete for and maintain control of resources (see Hawley, 1999),

toughness is not a behaviour but rather a persona. Interestingly, it could be argued that

toughness as described by participants is counter to social intelligence, which involves achieving

one's goals through the most effective interpersonal strategy (Kaukiainen et al., 1999).

However, if social intelligence is viewed neutrally, potentially risky aggressive behaviour in the

context of social position acquisition does appear to the meet the criteria for socially intelligent

behaviour. Although the risk of or actually being harmed appears central to physical toughness,

it factors into social positioning, which ultimately protects one from future aggression.

Therefore, engaging in risky aggressive behaviour in order to obtain toughness may be an

effective and socially intelligent strategy.

There is another construct that bears resemblance to that of social dominance, as well as

social positioning. In his classic ethnography, Sahlins (1963) compared the leadership types

found in Polynesia to those in Melanesia. He argued that Polynesian leaders constituted chiefs

who inherited their power. Conversely, many Melanesian leaders were considered *big-men*[3]. In

a general sense, a big man becomes a socio-political leader through his own skill and

accomplishments (Roscoe, 2000; Sahlins, 1963; Sillitoe, 1998). In other words, big man status is

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[3] Sahlins' (1963) findings are argued to be an overgeneralization and oversimplification of the leadership found in these regions. Roscoe (2000) argues that there are many permutations of the big man within Melanesia, many of which blur the boundaries between to the categorizations of the chief and big man structures. The discussion presented here is meant only to highlight commonalities between social positioning and big man leadership in a general sense.

an informal position that is earned. The title itself does not grant the holder power, but rather it highlights that the individual experiences network centrality and uses social relationships to fulfill his own interests (Roscoe, 2000; Sahlins, 1963). Sillitoe (1998) argued that along with dominating socio-political exchange (i.e., the giving of wealth), the big man gains influence and commands respect through (a) fearlessness in warfare, (b) aggressive temperament, (c) verbal skills and persuasion, (d) specialized knowledge, and (e) a reputation for sorcery (i.e., the ability to cause illness and death through specialized means). As can be seen, big man status certainly parallels that of social dominance in which an individual is able to control resources through skilful manipulation of social relationships.

While big man status is reflective of a leadership style that is more global in terms of economic and political influence, it draws consistencies with social positioning, which is an index of social status and, more specifically, vulnerability to aggression. For instance, elements of aggressive temperament, skilled warfare, and the use of sorcery are inline with reputation agency and physical toughness. Further, the big man demonstrates social power in the form of perceived popularity. It is important to note that while big men gain status and popularity through positive accomplishments, they also gain it through negative accomplishments, which indicates that they are not necessarily liked by their followers. Taken together, the big man is less likely to be challenged and aggressed against. Sillitoe (1998) contended, however, that if the big man's interests fall out of sync with his followers' interests, his position could be in jeopardy.

There are a couple of areas that social positioning can be differentiated from the Melanesian big man. In terms of chronological age, Sillitoe (1998) suggested that big man status is predicated on the individual's current ability to perform; therefore, past success does not

guarantee a current or future reputation of success. The author further implied that big man status decreases later in adulthood. This may be similar to the finding that social positioning can increase with age, but decrease when entering a new social environment, such as going from elementary to middle school. However, it is not believed that the chronological change in status discussed by Sillitoe is related to the big man entering new social environments. Finally, big man status implies the end result of various social achievements, and therefore it is unclear how it parallels reputation agency, which suggests that the act of standing up for oneself is more important than the outcome. On that note, however, Roscoe (2000) argued that big man leadership should not be construed as a specific type of leadership, but rather a result of power-building processes. Along that perspective, there are certainly similarities between the processes involved in the construct of big men and the argument being made here with respect to the role of social positioning and adolescent experiences of aggression. Further research looking more in depth at the association between these two constructs is warranted.

3.2.1 Getting away with bad behaviour

In order to better understand how adolescents experience and make sense of acceptable aggression, participants were asked to describe the people who seem to *get away* with being aggressive and those who do not get away with it. Responses to these questions were clearly grounded in social positioning. To begin, perpetrators who can get away with being aggressive were said to have social power. As a result, those within the immediate social circle were said to support the aggressive behaviour. Conversely, participants argued that someone of a higher position could question the aggressive behaviour of a perpetrator with lower social positioning. The element of popularity was described in a capacity consistent with perceived popularity (see Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004, 2007) and sociometric status (see Farmer et al., 2011; Lease et al.,

2002). Specifically, these types of perpetrators were identified as having lots of *friends* (i.e., supporters or followers), but not necessarily being liked. In fact, some participants disapproved of perpetrator's gaining social power through aggressive behaviour. A question then is why are these perpetrators supported? Participants provided insight into this, by suggesting that those around them are able to acquire social positioning through association. Similarly, Bagwell and Schmidt (2011) argued that a social network affords protection. Participants further identified that even greater protection is offered through association with a perpetrator who is physically tough. Physical toughness also allows the perpetrator to further maintain his/her social position and get away with aggression, as those with a lower position are in fear of questioning it. Perpetrators who can get away with aggression were also described as being willing to stand-up for themselves, which is described here as reputation agency. In other words, they will not simply stand back and allow others to aggress against them and undermine their social position.

Participants described those who get away with aggression in ways that are both inconsistent and consistent with the social dominance perspective. Social centrality in terms of high visibility is a clear result of having access to material and social resources (Hawley, 1999). However, social dominance is also equated with social prominence (Farmer & Xie, 2007). Social prominence has been described as an indicator of social values, such as leadership, attractiveness, athleticism, and popularity (Farmer et al., 2011). Participants in this study, however, did not provide any indication that perpetrators getting away with aggression demonstrated leadership. Further, they specifically denied qualities of attractiveness and athleticism. The only overlap, which was discussed above was in the capacity of perceived popularity. Instead, participants conveyed elements of physical toughness and reputation agency, which have been combined into an index of social position.

One possible consistency with participants' descriptions of perpetrators who get away with aggression and social dominance involved the role of self-control. Participants stated that these perpetrators have "learned how to function and deal with problems," and "when to turn off the aggression." These statements appear to resonate with Hawley and colleagues' description of bistrategic controllers (Hawley, 2007; Hawley et al., 2007). Bistrategic controllers gain social dominance through the use of both aggression and prosocial means. By stating that these perpetrators are able to deal with problems and turn off aggression, participants leave open the possibility that these perpetrators may employ prosocial methods to address problems. It should be mentioned, however, that participants did not specifically identify prosocial methods nor were they asked, and therefore, future research will need to clarify this distinction.

There may be an alternative explanation as to what participants meant by *turning off* aggression. In further discussing self-control, participants also stated that perpetrators who get away with being aggressive utilize more subtle forms of aggression, which is most likely indicative of nonphysical forms of aggression such as relational and social aggression. Therefore, turning off aggression could have also been in reference to using less visible forms of aggression. Previous research has consistently found that adolescents using both physical and nonphysical aggression are more dominant (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Farmer & Xie, 2007).

Self-control was also found to make the perpetrator's behaviour more predictable. Participants stressed that they did not have a problem with the perpetrator's aggressive behaviour as long as they were not targeted. Discussions clearly highlighted that failing to control one's aggressive behaviour influenced whether or not a perpetrator would get away with aggression. Participants identified that specific perpetrators do not get away with being aggressive because (a) they lack social positioning, (b) they are too reactive, and (c) they misinterpret situations

which makes it dangerous to be around them. Issues of being over reactive and misinterpreting situations tie in with the model of social information processing and hostile attribution bias. Reactive aggression has been linked with cognitive deficiencies in the encoding and interpretation of social cues conveyed through people's behaviours (Arsenio, 2010; Dodge et al., 1984; Dodge & Coie, 1987). As a result of these cognitive errors, people over attribute hostile intentions to benign behaviours and respond aggressively. While the social information-processing model provides insight into why some adolescents are too reactive and misinterpret situations, the participants' discussions identified that this type of behaviour is maladaptive because it diminishes social positioning. More specifically, participant data add to the social information-processing model by highlighting that not all reactive aggression is maladaptive. As discussed earlier, participants indicated that reactive aggression is necessary in terms of reputation agency and physical toughness, and plays an important role in acquiring and maintaining social position.

Aside from specific characteristics of the perpetrator and target in terms of social positioning, acceptable aggression was also described in terms of the specific context of the behaviour. Consistently, aggression was considered acceptable in reactive contexts, provided it was not excessive, which would be deemed too reactive and problematic as described above. Unprovoked aggression, on the other hand, was described as unacceptable. These data contrast with previous findings that reactive aggression leads to negative peer status (Poulin & Boivin, 2000). Additionally, Prinstein and Cillessen (2003) found that instrumental aggression was positively associated with popularity for girls. In light of the data from this dissertation, it would appear that these previous results are capturing the social outcomes experienced by perpetrators who lack social position due to being too reactive.

Participants also classified relational and social aggression such as spreading rumours and talking about other people behind their backs as unacceptable. Interestingly, these actions may be considered subtle (i.e., indirect and less visible) forms of aggression, which were previously ascribed to the positive feature of self-control. These contrasting reactions highlight the complexity of adolescents' experience of acceptable aggression. Previously, participants seemed to exonerate these types of aggressive behaviour when considering it in direct contrast to uncontrolled, explosive aggression that is unpredictable. Whereas here participants maybe considering such aggression from the viewpoint of the target. Relational and social aggression limit the target's ability to react by modifying the responding context (e.g., the target would have to retaliate in person, whereas, the perpetrator aggressed via social media) and the time (e.g., the target may have to wait till the next day to retaliate). As such, the perpetrators use of relational or social aggression has impaired the target's ability to defend his/her social position.

Overall, participants expressed specific criteria under which aggression is accepted and expected. While some specific types of aggression (e.g., reactive aggression) were deemed more acceptable than others (e.g., instrumental aggression), acceptance was fundamentally grounded in a construct of social positioning. Social positioning operates as an index of one's vulnerability to aggression. One who is invulnerable to aggression is one who is willing to stand-up and fight back to protect his/her reputation, experiences chronological status, possesses social power, and demonstrates physical toughness. Aggression linked to establishing or maintaining these elements is considered to be acceptable. Further, perpetrators with a higher social position were found to get away with aggression, while those with diminished positions were not.

Participant's understandings and experiences of acceptable aggression reflected consistencies and inconsistencies with the construct of social dominance. Social dominance

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serves as an index of who experiences benefits (i.e., social prominence and centrality) of aggression. Whereas social positioning identifies the contexts in which aggression is deemed acceptable. Given the overlap between social dominance and the proposed construct of social position, future research is needed to explore whether or not the inconsistencies are more a matter of semantic differences.

Chapter 4 - Topic Three: Examining the Association Between Bullying and Aggression

When talking about aggression, the term bullying often emerges. In comparison to aggression in general, research into bullying is relatively recent. Olweus (1995) stated that while research on the topic began in the 1970s in Scandinavia, it was not until the 1980s and early 1990s that research began in other countries. Today, however, bullying is without question a *hot* topic. It seems as though accounts of bullying are routinely discussed in the media. Perhaps fuelling this interest are reports that high profile events such as school shootings can be traced back to incidents of chronic bullying (Unnever, 2005). While such events certainly catch attention, MacNeil (2002) pointed out that bullying rarely results in death. The author contended, however, that bullying still presents a plethora of problems for victims including, but not limited to, poor academic attendance and performance, anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, and social isolation. Not surprisingly, bullies have most consistently been characterized as aggressive (Camodeca, Goosens, Terwogt, & Schuengel, 2002; Olweus, 1995; Peeters et al., 2010). To further illustrate how negative bullying is, a recent documentary film was made titled *Bully* (Hirsch, 2011) that shares the stories of five adolescents who were victims of bullying. Interestingly, the Motion Picture Association of America gave the film an *R* rating (Scott, 2012). In a sense this rating agency stated that bullying, a common aspect of adolescent life, is too violent or graphic for adolescents to experience it without adult supervision.

Considering that the topic of bullying has become so popular it is surprising that there is little consistency regarding reports of its prevalence and frequency. In fact, a number of studies investigating bullying that even go as far as to ask participants how often bullying behaviour

occurs, do not actually report overall prevalence of participants being bullied or bullying others (see Peeters et al., 2010; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Granted the focus of these studies usually involves investigating the association between bullying and some other construct, which does not require reporting overall prevalence. However, researchers should be encouraged to report behaviour frequencies, especially when they have already collected the data.

In terms of prevalence rates, a large survey of 150,000 Norwegian and Swedish students found that approximately 15% of students were involved in bullying either as a bully (9%) or victim (7%; Olweus, 1995). In the United States, reports have suggested that 25% of children are bullied (Sentse, Scholte, Salmivalli, & Voeten, 2007). Another study suggested that as many as 50% of students reported being bullied and 65% stated that they had witnessed bullying (MacNeil, 2002). Pellegrini and Long (2002) went as far as arguing that most of the aggression occurring in schools involves bullying. It is clear from these estimates that although the prevalence of bullying is unknown, it is a frequent occurrence among adolescents.

Solberg and Olweus (2003) argued that consistency among prevalence rates is problematic because researchers do not adhere to the basic meaning of the concept of prevalence. Specifically, the authors identified five factors contributing to the inconsistency. First, individual studies utilize different data sources (e.g., peer nominations, self-reports). Second, different reference periods are used to measure the behaviour (e.g., how many times have you been bullied in the past year versus in the past month). Third, participants from one study to the next are often required to report their behaviour using different response options (e.g., a five-item rating scale or a yes/no dichotomy). Fourth, estimates are calculated using different measuring instruments (e.g., a single-item question or a multi-item scale producing an overall score). Fifth, a variety of different definitions of bullying are being used.

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This study is specifically concerned with the final point made regarding variability among bullying definitions. Similar to the study of aggression, the study of bullying is complicated by inconsistent definitions. To begin, it is not uncommon to see the terms aggression and bullying used interchangeably. For example, while discussing the frequency of verbal and physical aggression, Coyne et al. (2006) interjected with references to bullying and then continue with verbal and physical aggression. At no point did the authors state if the two terms refer to different or identical behaviours. In a study on social and physical aggression, Paquette and Underwood (1999) discussed the prevalence of physical aggression by citing estimations of bullying. In other words, these authors suggested that bullying is synonymous with physical aggression. As a result of using the term bullying interchangeably, it takes on the definition of the other term, if one was actually provided.

In other studies, the term bullying may be used consistently; however, no definition is provided. For example, Peeters et al. (2010) identified that perpetrators of bullying form a heterogeneous group. Surprisingly, at no point during the article did the authors provide any indication as to what bullying is. In their methodology, the authors identified using the bullying subscale of the Olweus bully/victim questionnaire. Because this is a subset of the full questionnaire, it is not clear if the bullying definition for the questionnaire (see Solberg & Olweus, 2003) was provided to participants. Perhaps authors do not feel the need to provide a definition of bullying because they assume everyone knows and agrees upon its meaning. Unfortunately, this is an oversight that makes it difficult to compare one study to the next and draw conclusions about bullying.

As bullying is so often linked to aggression, an important question to examine is whether or not bullying is a synonym for aggression, a type of aggression, or a unique behaviour.

Aggression should be defined as behaviour that is intended to harm another person (Bartol & Bartol, 2005; Berkowitz, 1988, 1989; Feshbach, 1964). Often times, bullying is recognized as a subset of aggression (Blake & Louw, 2010; Crapanzano et al, 2010; Law, Shapka, Hymel, Olsen, & Waterhouse, 2012; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Schoffstall & Cohen, 2011; Sentse et al., 2007). In some instances, however, researchers do not specify that it entails harmful behaviour, opting instead for language such as negative actions (Camodeca et al., 2002; Olweus, 1995). While harm would certainly result from negative actions not all negative actions would produce harm. Naylor et al. (2006) also stated that bullying does not need to involve harm, stating further that it also applies to situations of physical and psychological distress. Interestingly, these authors also argued that bullying is not dependent on intentional behaviour. In the absence of intention and harm, bullying would certainly not qualify as aggression; however, exclusion of these criteria is certainly the exception.

If bullying is accepted as an act of aggression, consideration would have to be given to whether or not it is a form of aggression or simply a synonym for aggression. As mentioned above, bullying is often typified as a subset of aggression, which indicates that it represents contextual elements setting it apart from aggression in general. One of these elements consists of repetition. For some, bullying is defined as a behaviour that is repeated over time (Blake & Louw, 2010; Camodeca et al., 2002; Crapanzano et al, 2010; Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Law, Shapka, Hymel et al., 2012; Olweus, 1995; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Schoffstall & Cohen, 2011; Sentse et al., 2007; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). In other words, bullying consists of behaviour in which the target is repeatedly harmed by the same perpetrator(s). Again, some studies argued that repetition should not be required (Naylor et al., 2006). In addition to repetition, bullying is also argued to represent a power differential between the perpetrator and

the target (Blake & Louw, 2010; Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Law, Shapka, Hymel et al., 2012; Naylor et al., 2006; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Privitera & Campbell, 2009; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Specifically, the perpetrator is seen as having more power than the target (Crapanzano et al, 2010; Sentse et al., 2007). Camodeca et al. (2002) specified that the imbalance could be either real or perceived. Other studies described the imbalance of power in terms of the targets not being able to defend themselves against the perpetrators (Csibi & Csibi, 2011; Olweus, 1995; Schoffstall & Cohen, 2011). An imbalance of power occurs when the target is smaller, outnumbered (e.g., multiple perpetrators aggressing against one target), and has fewer friends than the perpetrator (Crapanzano et al., 2010). Law, Shapka, Hymel et al. (2012) also stated that bystanders witnessing the event also shift power towards the perpetrator, thus contributing to the power differential.

The above discussion indicates that bullying is not simply a synonym for aggression in general as it represents repeated targeting of a person who in some form or another has less power than the perpetrator. However, it is still important to consider whether or not bullying represents another form or function of aggression. As discussed in Topic 1, aggression can be expressed in a number of different manners, such as overt/covert, direct/indirect, physically, verbally, relationally, and/or socially. Compared to covert aggression, overt aggression occurs when target is aware of the perpetrator's identity (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Csibi & Csibi, 2011). Indirect aggression occurs when the perpetrator harms the target through intermediary means (Laberspetz et al., 1988; Ramirez & Andreau, 2006) or by ignoring the target (Feshbach, 1964). Physical aggression utilizes physical force or a weapon to harm the target, while verbal aggression involves threats or hurtful words (Marsee & Frick, 2007; Xie et al., 2003). Relational aggression occurs when a perpetrator harms a target by damaging or attempting to damage

his/her social relationships and feelings of inclusiveness (Putallaz et al., 2007). Finally, social aggression is similar to relational aggression only it is indirect and covert (Xie et al., 2003; Xie et al., 2002), and can involve negative facial expressions and body language (Cairns et al., 1989). Bullying does not appear to represent a single form of aggression, as it has been reported to include physical, verbal, relational, and social forms of aggression (Blake & Louw, 2010; Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Law, Shapka, Hymel et al., 2012). While bullying is a broad form of aggression, encompassing the various forms of aggression, its characteristics involving a perpetrator's repetitive harm towards a less powerful target, identify it is a unique form of aggression.

Adding to the complexity of the forms of aggression in general and bullying specifically, researchers have begun to look at the role technology is playing. Cyber technology (e.g., Internet and cell phones) has become a fundamental aspect of the adolescent social world. Ninety percent of adolescents in the United States are estimated to regularly use the Internet, with 50% using it on a daily basis (Dempsey et al., 2011). Fifty-five percent of adolescents are reported to use online networking sites that require the creation of an online personal profile (e.g., MySpace, Facebook; Lenhart & Madden, 2007). With respect to cell phones, 72% of American adolescents have one by the age of 14, 48% of Canadian adolescents between 15 to 19 years of age have one, while in Europe 91 to 96% of adolescents the same age have a cell phone (Menesini, Nocentini, & Calussi, 2011).

The use of cyber technology affords adolescents an alternative forum in which to be aggressive. Similar to proposed distinctions between aggression and bullying, distinctions have been made between cyber aggression and cyberbullying. Cyber aggression is defined as behaviour intended to harm a target through the use of the Internet, cell phones, or other

electronic devices (Dempsey et al., 2011; Schoffstall & Cohen, 2011). Cyber aggression is said

to include harassment (e.g., sending abusive messages), denigration (e.g., posting embarrassing

pictures), impersonation (e.g., the perpetrator uses the target's cell phone to send messages to

others which will damage the target's social relationships), outing (e.g., sharing personal and

embarrassing information about the target), and exclusions (e.g., denying a target access to an

online activity; Dempsey, Sulkowski, Nichols, & Storch, 2009). These forms of cyber

aggression reflect many of the forms of aggression discussed above. Research findings indicated

that up to 53% of adolescents reported engaging in some form of cyber aggression (Dempsey et

al., 2011).

For some, cyberbullying is defined in concert with offline bullying, in which harmful

behaviour is repeated and there is an imbalance of power (Dempsey et al., 2011). Law, Shapka,

Domene et al. (2012) questioned this definition stating that the element of power imbalance is

difficult to discern in an online environment. The authors argued that victims feel more

empowered online and are capable of retaliating. As a result, the boundaries between the

perpetrator and victim/target become blurred. With respect to repetitive harm, the researchers

did raise an interesting argument. Creating a harmful website or posting hurtful comments can

be a one-time event; however until removed, their permanency does result in repetitive harmful

behaviour. Taken together, cyberbullying may not be a direct equivalent as bullying that is

simply delivered through cyber technology.

To further understand how bullying relates to previously defined types of aggression, its

underlying function should be addressed. Functions of aggression refer to the overall reason for

engaging in the behaviour. Aggression has been defined with respect to two functions: reactive

and instrumental. The fundamental purpose of reactive aggression is to harm the target in

retaliation for causing previous or potentially future harm to the perpetrator (Berkowitz, 1988; Dodge et al., 1997). Conversely, in instrumental aggression the perpetrator is primarily motivated by a distal goal beyond the proximal goal of harming the target (Dodge & Coie, 1987; Feshbach, 1964). Studies looking at the function of bullying have identified it along the same lines as instrumental aggression. Specifically, perpetrators are argued to use bullying to acquire resources (Pellegrini & Long, 2002) and establish authority over the target (Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012). A study by Camodeca et al. (2002) found that those who bully were found to score high on measures of both reactive and instrumental aggression; however, their study did not address the underlying reasons for bullying. As mentioned at the outset of this study, bullies are reported to be more aggressive than nonbullies, so it is not surprising that they would engage in aggression for various reasons.

The above discussion highlights that while there are consistencies in how bullying is defined there are a number of inconsistencies. Unfortunately, these inconsistencies are impeding the study of bullying as well as efforts to engage in prevention and intervention. If researchers are inconsistent in their conceptualizations of bullying, then it is difficult to compare results among studies. Ultimately, inconsistent definitions lead to different behaviours being considered under the same labels. MacNeil (2002) reported that in one study 50% of students said they had been bullied, whereas, teachers reported that only 15% of students were victims of bullying. While this finding may be a result of teachers simply not being aware of what was taking place, it may is also be an indication that teachers were using a more restrictive definition of bullying. For example, Naylor et al. (2006) found that, compared to teachers, students' definitions of bullying were less restrictive and often excluded indirect aggressive behaviours. The purpose of this study is to explore how adolescents make sense of and experience bullying. Understanding

how adolescents define bullying will further help to clarify how it relates to aggression in general.

4.1   Thematic analysis of topic three

Participants were asked to provide examples of bullying. Some examples of physical bullying were provided, such as "so that's like me walking around grabbing somebody smaller than me and throwing them up against the locker and punching them in the stomach everyday and taking his money," and "beating someone up." Interestingly, more examples involving verbal aggression were provided. For example, one girl said, "it can be like an emotional thing too, where it doesn't have to be physically bullying." Another girl followed with "it can just be like someone calling you a certain thing or like offending you in a certain way." Many of these examples involved name-calling. Other examples, included behaviour aimed at intimidating the target.

Two groups also made specific reference to *cyberbullying*, which they defined as "bullying someone like over like electronics." Although this behaviour takes place electronically, the perpetrator is able to create a social power differential by garnering support for his or her attack on the target. For example, one girl detailed how a girl was cyberbullied. Specifically, a group was created on Facebook to attack the target's physical features. Other people were then able to become members of this group and support the perpetrator.

While participants were able to provide examples of bullying, it should be noted that they could not be distinguished from aggression in general if only the specific behaviours were objectively considered. In other words, bullying did not consist of a specific set of physical or verbal behaviours that are distinguished from general aggression. For example, hitting someone or calling him or her names did not constitute bullying. Only if those behaviours were done in a

particular context did participants consider it bullying. According to participants, in order for an

event to be considered bullying, it must be reoccurring and there must be some degree of a power

differential between the bully and target. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the themes

generated while analyzing the data for this topic.

Table 4.1 *Themes for Topic Three: Examining the Association Between Bullying and Aggression*

Theme Label	Theme Description
Bullying, a relentless predatory behaviour	Bullying is described as a predatory behaviour. The perpetrator is argued to use strategies that isolate the target. The behaviour is also described as relentless in that it occurs over multiple events in order to wear down the target.
Who's the bully? A state of *litost*	Perpetrators of bullying are described as those who are in some state of internal torment and use bullying in an attempt to alleviate this state.
The bully victim: Not just anyone will do	Victims of bullying were said to possess two specific characteristics. First, they were said to lack reputational agency. Second, they were described as having less power than the perpetrator in terms of social positioning, specifically social power.
Bullying: Stopping the inevitable and unavoidable?	Bullying was described as something that is too common and difficult to stop. Participants suggested that standing-up is the only realistic way to deal with bullying.

4.1.1 Bullying, a relentless predatory behaviour

Participants were very specific in describing the predatory manner in which bullying is

conducted. For example, the following group of boys describes how the bully isolates his/her

victims:

Boy 1: something that takes an individual out of a group. And …

Boy 2: wears them down.

Boy 1: yeah just the one person then …

Boy 3: separates them.

Boy 1: yeah separates them from the group like little prey.

Boy 3: yeah …

Boy 2: makes fun of them, makes them feel horrible, makes them feel …

Boy 3: then leaves that one alone and moves on to the next one.

Along with isolation, bullying operates through continuous victimization of the target.
For example, one girl said bullying is "if you day after day do it." Another boy said, "When I
think bullying, I think … chronic, multiple times." Most participants agreed that bullying is
repeated over time. If it is a one-time event, then it was more often referred to as *picking on
someone* or *bugging*. For example, some participants were asked what they would say if a
perpetrator called a target a name. While one boy said, "if it's a one time-thing then it's just …
bugging," while another boy said, "if it's an everyday thing, then that's a different story."

Continuous victimization is aimed at wearing down the target. When asked what
happens to the target who is repeatedly victimized, participants said the following:

Girl: they usually get pushed around a lot more.

Boy 1: they break down more and more every time.

Boy 2: it just keeps getting worse.

One boy summarized the issue of bullying as:

Yeah, there's no way of solving the problem … if you ask them to stop, hell they won't
stop, because they know it gets you more mad. They're like OK he's getting to the point;
he's breaking, breaking. Let's keep doing this till we break him down.

At that breaking point are reactions referred to by some participants as *snapping* and possibly
suicide. Additional consequences of the repeated victimization were said to include fighting and

a fear of trying new things. One boy gave the following example, "you don't really want to try new stuff because you're afraid of that person's going to bully you for it."

Interestingly, some participants distinguished bullying from other types of aggression according to rationality and emotion. For example, one boy argued:

> But I think the difference between the two is bullying is more of a choice thing…. you get to choose to bully. Aggressiveness is kind of an emotion and sometimes they just kind of happen and you don't really realize it. And then someone finally gives you a little nudge or something and you're like oh … what am I doing?

This tied into the issue of anger that was discussed earlier in topic 1. For many participants, aggression was believed to stem naturally from anger, and therefore, it is an emotional and reactive response. Furthermore, it was also experienced as an uncontrollable response at times. In the above comment, the participant suggested that unlike aggression, the bully actively chooses to behave in that manner. Another boy in a different group supported this view stating, "I think [if] you're bullying someone, it's not anger at all. It's just you trying to make yourself feel better or trying to get amusement out of somebody else's discomfort and annoyment."

Consistently, participants agreed that there are two clear and closely related purposes to bullying behaviour. First, participants argued that the perpetrator strives to make others feel bad in order to make him/herself feel better. For example, one boy said bullying is "making someone feel inadequate just because you want to make yourself better." Another boy described a bully as "some guy that makes fun of everybody to get [you to] laugh at him, so he feels good." Finally, one boy said, "bullying is a form of aggression … strike fear in somebody so that you're bigger than them."

Second, participants also believed that bullying aims to get a reaction out of the target. In

some cases, the reaction is to humour the bully, which in many ways makes her/him feel better about her/himself. For example one boy said:

> Make them do something they don't want to do…. say it's a nice kid and you get him all mad. He's going to do something he didn't really do. And then they're going to laugh because he didn't really do it.

In this example, the participant is arguing that the perpetrator and bystanders will think it is funny to get a target to react and behave (e.g., freak or spaz out) in a way he/she normally would not. In other cases, it appears that the reaction, regardless of what it entails, is simply what the bully is after. When asked what you would do as a bully if your target did not respond, a group of boys responded:

> *Boy 1*: then you're probably keep doing that.
>
> *Boy 2*: then you'd probably get madder if they didn't do anything about it. You'll keep bugging them.
>
> *Boy 3*: because they're ignoring you, you know. I think with bullies, man, what gets them going is your reaction.
>
> *Boy 2*: yeah
>
> *Boy 3*: reaction is feeding them their energy, like an energy drink. You have to have it. It feeds you more and more and more. And then once you ignore them, they want to go harder and harder and harder.

4.1.2 Who's the bully? A state of *litost*

When participants described perpetrators who bully, there was little reference made regarding physical size. Some participants did suggest that bullies are stronger and pick on kids smaller than themselves. However, more emphasis was placed on how bullies experience a state

of *litost*[4] and use bullying to make themselves feel better by harming the target. For example, one girl said that bullies want to:

> Make themselves look bigger by picking on people who are smaller…. You're just trying to help yourself out, make yourself feel better by making somebody else feel worse. Oh well I don't have it bad as that motherfucker, boom, right. Now he's got it worse than me haha, right.

Two other boys described how bullying may be used to improve and maintain social positioning as discussed in Topic Two.

> *Boy 1*: I think the bully is the big guys that want to fight a lot of the people who are hurt the most. That's how they take their anger.
>
> *Boy 2*: either that or it's the person that's been rejected their whole life. It's the person that has no life.
>
> *Boy 1*: then once they get popular they want to keep it…. I think all of their friends are just fearing them. They don't want to be that friend, they just don't want to get beat up.

From these examples, participants identify the perpetrator of bullying as a person experiencing some capacity of torment. The aggressive behaviour toward the target then serves to address this feeling. It may stand to reason that bullying involves repeated victimization, as the behaviour itself is not able to remedy the perpetrator's feelings, and therefore, the behaviour continues. Similarly, if the bullying stems from the perpetrator's internal realization that his/her social position is at risk, the perpetrator needs to continuously perpetrate the aggression to maintain that position. This view was echoed in another group, when one girl said, "it's kind of like bullying. They just want a reaction out of it. So [they] can keep bullying them more."

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[4] Litost is a Czech word for which there is no known translation in any other language. It is a state of torment upon the insight or realization of one's misery or inadequacy. Further it links the perpetrator's anger from this state to a desire for revenge in which the target is made to feel as bad as the perpetrator (Crisp, 2007; Kundera, 1980).

4.1.3 The bully victim: Not just anyone will do

When describing the type of person who becomes a target of bullying, a few characteristics were identified. As alluded to above, it is not always an issue of size. For example, one boy said, "anybody can be bullied pretty much." In terms of specific personal traits, targets were described as the "nerdy kid," "some fat kid," or "some ugly chick." One participant even described being bullied because of his hairstyle. While these *names* or *titles* were commonly mentioned, there was no clear definition of these terms. For instance, when asked what makes a person *nerdy*, one participant replied, "if he wears glasses." It is doubtful that all kids who wear glasses are identified as nerds. Therefore, it is more likely that any characteristic has the potential to be targeted and there is a more fundamental element at play here.

One feature that was consistently identified was that the target is typically someone who does not stand up for him/herself or, as discussed in Topic Two, lacks reputation agency. Describing how a girl responded to being bullied, one girl said, "it just teaches people to walk all over her, bully her because she is not going to do any thing about it. She's just going to sit there and take it." In this context, standing up for oneself included both fighting back and telling a teacher.

When talking about either who bullies or who is targeted, the discussion focused on the relationship between the perpetrator and the target. Specifically, this relationship was highlighted by a power differential. In some cases, participants described a physical power differential, in which the perpetrator is simply bigger than the target. However, participants also emphasized a differential in chronological status (e.g., age and grade), and social power (e.g., friendships and popularity). As one boy argued, compared to the perpetrator, a target is "any

weaker kid than him." Ultimately, there is an inequality between the perpetrator and the target. As one participant suggested, this inequality leads to the target not having any control over what happens:

> Usually bullying is something is when there's a person too weak to like stand-up for themselves or … they're outnumbered by people and they can't really have a choice in what happens to them…. [the perpetrator] can rough them up and the person can't do anything about it.

It should be noted that the *choice* to reciprocate aggression, appears to be an important characteristic that participants feel distinguishes bullying from general aggression. For example, one group of participants argued that it is not bullying if those involved "both agreed to fight and they both think that each other is tougher or something." In other words, if the target of bullying actually stands up for him/herself, it is not considered bullying. If the choice to engage in aggression is controlled by only one person, there is a social power differential and the event is considered bullying. For further clarification, if the target of bullying stands up to the perpetrator, it is that specific event that would be considered aggression and not bullying. Therefore, standing up for oneself does not erase, override, or translate previous instances of bullying.

4.1.4 Bullying: Stopping the inevitable and unavoidable?

While talking about bullying, many participants argued that it is something that cannot be stopped. For example, one boy said, "bullying is something hard…. you can't stop it." It was also implied that it could continue for a long time, well beyond the school environment. One boy explained, "it's kind of like when you're in high school man. And … you graduated and then you see the guy three years later and he still is keep calling you…. they don't drop it."

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Some participants felt bullying is difficult to stop because it is too common, and for the bullies, it is a natural behaviour. In one discussion, one boy simply stated, "sometimes it's just natural for them." To which a girl agreed, "yeah … it's just natural that they usually have issues." In another group, participants debated if bullying mostly entails bigger kids picking on smaller kids. In response, one boy said, "everybody bullies, it's not just size," which further emphasizes the perception that bullying is both common and natural. Interestingly, one girl highlighted the predatory nature of bullying, and how bullies will target anything that is upsetting to the target:

> Some people use things they know will hurt you…. if you're like upset about something else they'll just take it to a whole new level. And … teachers think that we can avoid everything…. that aggression and … bullying and everything is avoidable but it's not.

Here she implied that as long as people are bothered by *something*, bullies will have a means to direct their aggression. Given the pervasiveness of bullying described previously, and the reality of everyday life containing elements that are potentially upsetting, bullying certainly appears unavoidable.

As participants indicated that bullying is common, the focus shifted on how to address it. While some, usually adults, may argue that it would be best to tell a teacher, some participants suggested this could make matters worse, but more importantly telling a teacher is simply not likely to happen:

> But here's the thing though, now [with] teenagers … if someone makes fun of you … you don't snitch, man. That's how you get beat up, man. So … you can't tell anybody about it.

Participants were asked what would happen if the target simply let the bullying happen. After

all, adolescents are commonly told that if they do not fight back, the bully will likely lose interest and leave them alone. Without question that does not seem to be the case:

> *Interviewer*: any other things that could happen if don't stand up for yourself?

> *Boy*: the bullying will be continued.

> *Interviewer*: it's just going to continue?

> *Boy*: yup, maybe get worse over time as … they decide oh he's definitely not going to do anything. So … not go tell a teacher or anything so he's just going to be able to [be] beaten on more by us or worse things.

In terms of dealing with bullying, and getting it to stop, many participants believe aggression is the most viable solution. For example, one boy argued:

> Bullying, it ain't going to stop … everyday it's going to go on. Who's going to stop it? No one. And then you're going to end up fighting again and you either have to smash his face to shut him up or you just keep on fighting until you win.

When talking about possible solutions to bullying, one girl also said:

> I think that to be honest sometimes aggression is the only way you can get your point across. And I mean it sucks to say that, and I wouldn't want to admit it. But if someone's bullying you, someone's picking on you, someone's bullying on you, someone's picking on you, eventually it comes a time where if nothing else is working. You've tried everything else, I mean why not?... what possibly are you going to lose? Oh so they pull you into the principal's office, well they should have done that earlier when this person had been bullying you for … so long.

In both of these examples, participants realize that there will be consequences for standing up to bullying (e.g., physical harm and getting in trouble). However, they acknowledge that there

really are no other alternatives available for them. Further, the potential benefits outweigh any potential consequences and certainly the harmful reality that they are currently experiencing.

4.2   Discussing the results of topic three

Reactions toward the impact of bullying have been mixed throughout the literature overtime. In 1945, bullying was cited as an annoying social factor (Zelig, 1945 as cited in Hertz & David-Ferdon, 2011). Bullying has also been labeled as minor aggressive behaviour (Giunta et al., 2010) to "the most common destructive social practices in any so-called civilized society" (Garcia-Gomez, 2011, p. 244). Throughout all discussions, participants clearly expressed that it is much more than annoyance and consists of behaviour that is harmful. Therefore, participants positioned their experiences of bullying in the context of aggression. Further, examples identified targets of bullying as feeling horrible and being afraid, which conveys that bullying is experienced as more than a minor aggressive event.

When describing specific acts of bullying, participants did not identify behaviours that could be distinguished from the forms of aggression. For example, participants argued that bullying could take the form of "beating someone up," or calling someone an offensive name. In other words, participants did not indicate that bullying is expressed in a unique manner that differentiates it from more typical forms of aggression. This is consistent with previous research that found bullying is expressed in direct/indirect, verbal, physical, relational, and social forms (Blake & Louw, 2010; Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Law, Shapka, Hymel et al., 2012).

The distinction between bullying and aggression became apparent when participants discussed the nature of the perpetrator-target relationship, the frequency of occurrence, and the perpetrator's motivation for being aggressive. Overall, participants described bullying as a predatory behaviour in which the perpetrator seeks to isolate the target from the group. One of

the key characteristics of bullying is the imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim (Blake & Louw, 2010; Naylor et al., 2006; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Olweus, 1995; Privitera & Campbell, 2009; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Isolating the target will certainly shift power in favour of the perpetrator. As discussed in Topic Two, social power is an important element in social positioning which serves as an index of vulnerability towards aggression. Through isolation a target has lower social positioning than the perpetrator and is therefore more vulnerable to aggression.

Together the data indicate that social positioning is the biggest factor at play in the balance of power and who is ultimately targeted for aggression. Often it is assumed that adolescents are bullied because of their personal or physical traits (e.g., clothing, weight, etc.); however, Olweus (1995) argued this view is a myth. Instead, he stated that victims display characteristics such as submissive reaction styles and physical weaknesses. The data from participants in this dissertation support and extend these findings by highlighting the role of social positioning. For example, participants argued that "anybody can be bullied" and that perpetrators will look for any *weakness* they can exploit. Further, participants described how perpetrators target those low in reputation agency, which is an element of social positioning. As such, these targets are less likely to retaliate. Interestingly, participants suggested that if the target was to retaliate, the specific event involving the retaliation may no longer be considered bullying. Given the results in Topics One and Two, the event would still be considered aggression, but just not bullying. This finding is similar to the argument raised by Law, Shapka, Domene et al. (2012), in which the boundary between perpetrator and target becomes blurred. When the target engages reputation agency and retaliates, she/he is reasserting her/his social position and subsequently removing the imbalance of power.

Tied in with the predatory nature of aggression, participants also argued that bullying involved continuous victimization of the target by the perpetrator. The repetitiveness characteristic was seen as a way of wearing down the target and further weakening him or her. Participants were very specific that a single instance would not constitute bullying. For example, participants described that if a perpetrator called the target a name, it would be considered bugging, but if the perpetrator did the same thing over and over again then it would be considered bullying. These findings are in direct contrast to Naylor et al. (2006), who openly asked participants from the United Kingdom to write down what they thought bullying was. The authors reported that only 7.9% of participants stated it had to be repeated. Aside from their participants being slightly younger (i.e., 11 to 14 years old) and from a different country, it is unclear why repetitiveness was not supported in their study.

Although participants were not specifically asked about cyberbullying, the issue was raised in two groups. In these discussions, participants defined cyberbullying within the context of bullying. As mentioned earlier, Law, Shapka, Domene et al. (2012) questioned the degree to which there is an imbalance of power in online aggression, which would constitute bullying. While the issue of power imbalance was not specifically explored within the confines of cyberbullying in this study, participants' examples suggested that the perpetrator's actions are supported and witnessed by others. For example, messages or online groups created by the perpetrator to harm a target are reposted or joined. By these actions, the perpetrator is acquiring social power and subsequently social positioning, which would elevate his/her power over the target. Further research is needed, however, to specifically examine how targets might respond and the reactions of others to those responses.

In terms of the underlying purpose of bullying, Crapanzano et al. (2010) argued that

definitions of reactive and instrumental aggression focus on the motivation of the perpetrator, but definitions of bullying look at the characteristics of the victim. This can be explained in two ways. First, reactive and instrumental aggression specifically reference the function that aggression plays, whereas bullying has typically been examined as a form of aggression. Further, the definitions of bullying concentrate on the repetition of the behaviour and the imbalance of power. The question that needs to be asked is whether bullying is performed for reactive, instrumental, or both reasons. Previous research has identified bullying as instrumental aggression (Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Pelligrini & Long, 2002). In some respects, participants in this study explained bullying in a manner more consistent with instrumental aggression than reactive aggression. First, participants identified bullying as a choice the perpetrator engages in, thus separating it from reactive responding. Second, participants argued that perpetrators of bullying are at times looking for a reaction, which again serves as a goal beyond the immediate harm inflicted on the target. Third, and most interestingly, participants consistently stated that the bully is looking to make him/herself feel better. This was interpreted as bullies being in a state of *litost*, which links the bullying to the perpetrators' internal state of torment. According to participants, the perpetrator repeatedly harms the target so the target will feel worse then the perpetrator feels. In light of the harm experienced by the target, the perpetrator then feels or at least anticipates feeling better.

Interestingly, a state of litost also coincides with reactive aggression. Kundera (1980) described this state in terms of anger that leads to behaviour that is believed to make the target feel as bad or worse than the perpetrator, which is then expected to make the perpetrator feel better. Berkowitz (1988, 1989, 1990) argued that anger is a central component to reactive aggression. Most importantly, anger can result from any state of negative affect. Therefore, in

the context of bullying, the perpetrator's behaviour does not need to be in response to previous provocation to constitute reactive aggression as a state of litost is in every sense a state of negative affect. As can be seen the state of litost plays a pivotal role in understanding the motivation behind bullying. Future research is needed to explore the associate between this concept and bullying.

While the discussion thus far shows that bullying contains elements that overlap with both instrumental and reactive aggression, it also identifies that the purpose of bullying is very specific. Typically, instrumental aggression is aimed at obtaining a distal goal beyond simply harming the target. Further, it can be argued that social positioning as discussed in Topic Two motivates such aggression. While social positioning plays a key role in terms of the predatory nature of bullying, it does not necessarily play a key role in the motivation of bullying as defined by participants. Due to the imbalance of power, the perpetrator already experiences a higher social position than the victim. While previous research has reported perpetrators use bullying to exert their authority (Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012), participants in this study suggested otherwise. Of course there was an exception, where participants described a bully who was once a victim and now uses the behaviour to maintain social positioning. It is anticipated, however, that this occurs rarely. Instead, participants emphasized that bullying is specifically used to make the perpetrator feel better.

There are motivational characteristics of bullying that are consistent with both instrumental and reactive forms of aggression, therefore, making it difficult to classify as either one or the other. Further, bullying denotes a very specific relationship between perpetrator and target that consists of a power differential. Bullying is also a form of aggression that is repeated over time. In light of the motivation and the relationship between the perpetrator and target,

bullying should be considered distinct from reactive and instrumental aggression. In other words, the functionality of aggression should be interpreted as a trichotomy instead of a dichotomy. Such an approach would still identify bullying as aggression, but clearly distinguish it from other functions of aggression according to its unique motivation and perpetrator-target characteristics. Future research is needed to explore the viability of this distinction. It should be noted that in order to clearly determine whether or not bullying, reactive, and instrumental aggression constitute unique functions of aggression, a measurement system similar to that developed by Little, Jones et al. (2003) will be required to control for the various forms of aggression, which have been found to somewhat confound the study of the functions of aggression.

During discussions of bullying, participants raised issues concerning its prevention or intervention. Overall, participants explained that there is not much that can be done to stop it for a number of reasons. First, they indicated that it is simply too common a behaviour. Second, they argued that it is a typical behaviour for perpetrators, which coincides with the perspective that bullying results from an internal state of *litost* as described above. Third, they argued that telling a teacher will not result in any improvements and may actually make matters worse. Blake and Louw (2010) reported similar results. Sixty-three percent of participants did not feel schools could do anything about bullying, and 50% of participants who were bullied did not report the event to teachers.

Consistent with the interpretation that bullying is seen to involve an imbalance of social positioning, participants argued that it is important for the target to stand-up to the perpetrator. If the target does not stand-up then and engage reputation agency, the behaviour is said to continue or get worse. Participants felt the only solution available is to fight back. Fighting back will

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serve to establish social positioning and affect the imbalance of power. As fighting back is not usually a supported alternative and can also lead to further escalation, prevention and intervention is needed to address three aspects of bullying. First, consistent definitions are needed. Previous research has suggested that teachers' definitions are too restrictive, therefore limiting their awareness and ability to intervene (MacNeil, 2002). Second, strategies are needed to help perpetrators deal with the state of *litost* they are experiencing. Finally, targets are in need of strategies that will help them establish social positioning, which will reduce the overall power imbalance between them and the perpetrator(s).

Overall, this study demonstrated that participants experienced bullying as aggressive behaviour in which perpetrators repeatedly harm targets who experience a lower position than them. In other words, bullying is (a) a harmful behaviour that is (b) repeated and (c) directed towards a target that is weaker than the perpetrator. Therefore, bullying should not be used as just another word for aggression as it clearly constitutes a unique context. Further, data indicated that bullying constitutes a function of aggression that is unique from both instrumental and reactive aggression.

Chapter 5 - Topic Four: Identifying the Role of Intentionality in Adolescent Aggression

Researchers have argued that the element of intentionality is important in distinguishing whether or not a harmful act was accidental or carried out with a desire to cause harm (Feschbach, 1964; Tedeschi et al., 1974). Although limited, research looking specifically at the influence of intentionality on judgements of aggression found that harmful acts were rated as more aggressive if they were intended (Berkowitz, Mueller, Schnell, & Padberg, 1986). Intentionality is also argued to play a large role in provoking aggression. For example, a number of studies have found that aggressive adolescents misinterpret interpersonal behaviour and over-attribute hostile intent to others' actions, and therefore, respond with aggression (Crick & Dodge, 1994; de Castro et al., 2005; Nas et al., 2005). Further, the results from Topic One demonstrated that adolescent participants self-identify intentionality as a component in defining aggression.

Research on intentionality in general has found a number of interesting results that are highly relevant to the study of aggression. However, before discussing these results it is necessary to first discuss what intentionality is and what it is comprised of. Malle and colleagues argued that people have a natural tendency to want to make sense of their world, adapt to it, and shape it (1999; Malle & Nelson, 2003). To do this, people develop explanations for their own and others' behaviour (Malle, 1999, 2006). Intentionality has been identified as a key aspect of this process and also serves as a guide for social interaction (Knobe & Burra, 2006b; Malle, 1997, 2006). For example, Malle (1997) distinguished between reason and cause explanations. Reason explanations identify why a person acted a particular way; whereas, cause explanations identify the factors that led to an unintentional behaviour. In one study, Malle found that

participants attributed more intentionality to behaviours that were explained by reasons compared to those explained by causes. Following up, Malle found that when participants were told that behaviours were intentional, they provided more reason explanations than cause explanations. This clearly illustrates that people make distinctions about intentionality based on reason and cause situations.

Ultimately, Malle, Moses, and Baldwin (2001) argued that intentionality is foundational to the process of social interaction for three reasons. First, intentionality is a core component of individuals' shared understanding of purposive behaviour. Second, intentionality provides an ordered understanding of behaviour relating intentions to actions. Finally, the ascription of intentionality serves as a means of evaluating social behaviour through the assignment of blame and responsibility. Each of these three reasons will now be explored in greater detail.

According to the first point made above, intentionality is a component of shared understanding. This indicates that as social beings, people not only have a concept of intentionality, but compared to one another there are similarities. Malle et al. (2001) described two meanings behind the word intentionality. Early on, Brentano (1874, as cited in Malle et al., 2001) defined intentionality as a property applied to mental states directed toward an outcome. Malle et al. (2001), however, used the term intentionality to refer to features of an action that would guide people to label it as being purposeful. The term *shared understandings* can be thought of as *common sense*, *cultural beliefs* about the world. When a concept represents shared understandings, the concept is referred to as a folk concept. Bruner (1990) argued that it is through folk concepts that people establish a folk psychology explaining why they themselves and other people do the things they do. Based on their shared nature, folk concepts are culturally derived, as they utilize the language and symbols of a given culture. Further, Bruner described

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that, like other aspects of culture, folk concepts are not stable, but rather subject to change and retranslation.

Previous research has identified that people share a similar concept of intentionality that influences their interpretations and perceptions of social behaviour (Adams, 2006; Knobe & Burra, 2006b; Malle, 1997, 1999, 2006; Malle & Nelson, 2003; Nadelhoffer, 2005;Young, Cushman, Adolphs, Tranel, & Hauser, 2006). Malle (1997) provided participants with scenarios and found consistent agreement among participants' ratings of which behaviours were intentional or unintentional. Most importantly, this agreement was independent of whether or not participants were provided formal definitions of intentionality. In light of these results, Malle concluded that intentionality is not simply a theoretical construct used by researchers, but a folk concept used by individuals to judge behaviour. Additionally, Malle and Nelson (2003) contended that concepts of intentionality are dynamic, because they are culturally situated and change over time. This indicates that the concept of intentionality contains elements consistent with Bruner's (1990) description of folk concepts.

The above findings have important implications for researchers who define aggression as intentional. Simply providing a formal definition of aggression is not sufficient to override folk concepts. Malle and Nelson (2003) argued that folk concepts could interfere with formal definitions. The authors stated that folk concepts are used to the point that they can consistently explain phenomenon. Therefore, if participants already utilize a folk concept that effectively applies to aggression, the introduction of a new formal definition in a research study could simply result in confusion and difficulties in interpreting what is happening. The findings of Topic One indicated that adolescent participants had a shared understanding or culture of aggression that included intentionality. However, it is important to examine how adolescents

understand the concept of intentionality.

Malle et al.'s (2001) second point was that intentionality provides order to the relationship between intentionality and behaviour. This relationship is best understood by examining the compositional elements of intentionality. In their initial study, Malle and Knobe (1997) asked participants to describe what it would mean if they said somebody did something intentionally. Responses were found to include four components: intention, desire, belief, and awareness. An intention to act is comprised of desires and beliefs. Desires entail wanting a particular outcome, while beliefs relate an action to that particular outcome. In other words, one believes an action will produce a specific outcome. Intentions are decisions to perform an action and link together desires, beliefs, and actions. Finally, awareness describes the actor's mental state and introduces a requirement of minimal conscious awareness. Awareness links intentions (i.e., decisions) to actions being performed intentionally. If an actor intends an action (i.e., desires to do something) because of desires and beliefs, but is not aware that the action fulfilled the intention, the action will be identified as being intended, but not intentional. In other words, the action will be seen as being intended, but the action in terms of its outcomes will not be seen as intentional. This discussion raises an interesting point regarding the use of the terms intention and intentionality, which are often used synonymously. Intentionality refers to the quality of an action that renders it purposive (Malle et al., 2001). Conversely, intention is a person's decision to perform an action.

In previous models of intentionality (e.g., Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965) skill was identified as an important component; however, Malle and Knobe (1997) found that participants did not openly reference skill. Because their initial study focused on relatively straightforward behaviour (e.g., watering plants, applauding), the authors reasoned that skill likely plays more of

a role in complex behaviour. After conducting an additional study, Malle and Knobe (1997) concluded that desire and belief are requirements for intention and when an action is intended, skill and awareness are requirements for the action to be identified as intentional.

While the research on intentionality folk concepts was conducted with a university student population, there is no reason to suspect that older adolescents (i.e., adolescents in middle and high school) would not have similar folk concepts. To date, research has not been conducted to examine the intentionality structure (i.e., the presence of intent, desire, belief, awareness, and skill) of adolescent aggression. Considering further that adolescent aggression consists of different forms and functions, it would be informative to examine how that structure maps onto the different contexts of aggression.

Finally, Malle et al. (2001) argued that folk concepts of intentionality impact social interactions by guiding the moral evaluation of behaviour in terms of assigning blame, praise, and responsibility. Nadelhoffer (2005) added that intentionality often elicits moral judgement. Many legal systems focus on the presence or absence of intentionality in charging and sentencing offenders (Malle & Knobe, 1997; Malle & Nelson, 2003; May, 1999). For example, first-degree murder, which carries the most severe penalty, is premised on intentionality; whereas, the lesser offence of manslaughter is assigned to events of accidental murder in which intentionality is absent. Malle and Nelson (2003) argued that people tend to assign more blame to situations that are considered intentional compared to those not considered intentional. While initially this may appear as an effective tool for social evaluation, researchers have consistently reported an asymmetry in assigning blame or praise to social behaviour depending on the presence or absence of intentionality (Adams, 2006; Knobe & Burra, 2006a, 2006b; Malle, 2006; Mele, 2006; Nadelhoffer, 2005; Young et al., 2006).

According to Malle (2006), intentionality would be predicted to amplify any type of evaluation to the same degree. While one study found the degrees of both blame and praise assigned to an actor increased when intentionality was ascribed to the situation, the degree of blame increased nearly three times as much as praise (Malle & Bennett, 2002). Such results indicated that intentionality judgements are more susceptible to the morality associated with the behaviour than the mental state of the actor (Knobe & Burra, 2006b). Knobe (2004) conducted a study using two scenarios in which the chairman of a company approves a program that is directly expected to increase company profits. However, depending on the scenario, the chairman was also warned that implementation of the program may either harm or help the environment. Consequently, in one scenario participants are told that after implementing the program the environment was harmed, while in the second scenario they were told the environment was helped. Eighty-seven percent of participants rated the harmful event as intentional, while only 20% rated the helpful event as intentional. Knobe and Burra (2006b) stated that ascriptions of intentionality are judged separately in situations where blame is assigned.

A qualitative study with relatives of convicted murderers found that they often described the circumstances of their relatives' crime as unintentional so as to reduce the level of ascribed blame (May, 1999). The results of this study and those discussed above demonstrate that there is a relationship between intentionality, blame, praise, and responsibility. For example, it appears as though situations that are perceived as morally negative will be rated as more intentional and ascribed more blame than situations perceived as morally positive. In light of the findings discussed in Topic Two, there is evidence to believe that adolescents do not ascribe the same moral judgements to all aggressive behaviour. For example, the results of Topic Two indicated

that reactive functions of aggression were considered more acceptable than instrumental. As well, participants were accepting of aggression when it involved defending social positioning. Therefore, the form of aggression could impact ascriptions of intentionality and responsibility.

The purpose of this analysis was to develop an understanding of how the meaning of intentionality influences the meanings outcomes of aggression. First, this topic examines the meaning that adolescents attribute to performing an aggressive act intentionally. This will allow for a further evaluation of whether or not adolescents understand aggressive behaviour to be intentional. To further assess the intentionality of aggression, this topic explores adolescents' responses and portrayals of aggression for the five components (i.e., intention, desire, belief, awareness, and skill) necessary for a behaviour to be considered intentional as suggested by Malle and Knobe (1997). Second, this topic will look at how adolescents make sense of aggression that is harmful and aggression that intends to cause harm but does not actually succeed. This aspect of the study will shed light on to the contextual features of the behaviour that produce harm. In other words, this will identify whether or not intentionality is an element in adolescents' meaning of harmful aggression.

5.1   Thematic analysis of topic four

Following the procedures and recommendations from previous research on intentionality (Malle, 1997; Malle & Guglielmo, 2006), participants were directly asked what it means to intentionally behave aggressive. Without question, the term *intentionally* was difficult for a number of participants to understand. Even if *on purpose* was used in exchange for intentional, some participants still had difficulties, such as "you'll have to elaborate on that, I don't understand," or "I need more of an example. I don't fully get it, you can do a lot of things on purpose." Despite the initial difficulties when such a question was presented, participants were

still able to wrap their heads around the concept and engage in valuable discussion. As a result, participants identified intentionality with such terms as "they wanted to do it," and the perpetrator was thinking about it. Table 5.1 provides an overview of the themes generated for topic four.

Table 5.1 *Themes for Topic Four: Identifying the Role of Intentionality in Adolescent Aggression*

Theme Label	Theme Description
Intentions and anger	The presence of anger was said to influence the ascription of intentionality. Participants described how intentional aggression can involve an unintentional target.
Components of intentionality	Participants identified intentionality as consisting of five components: (a) the behaviour has a specific goal, (b) the perpetrator has thought about the behaviour ahead of time, (c) engagement in the behaviour, (d) the behaviour has more intensity, and (e) obtaining the goal.
Intentionality, instrumental, and reactive aggression	Participants described how intentionality is associated with instrumental and reactive functions of aggression.
Harm's role in experiencing aggression	Participants detail the association between harm and aggression.
Subtheme – Aggressing is intended harm	Participants considered an event to be aggressive if the perpetrator intended to harm the target.
Subtheme – Intending harm makes for more harm	In contexts where harm is intended, the resulting harm was argued by participants to be more intense.
Subtheme – Some aggression is more harmful than others	Participants argued that verbal forms of aggression are more harmful than physical forms. This experience is grounded in the long-term effects that verbal aggression has compared to the short-term effects of physical aggression.

Some participants were able to make sense of the concept by focusing on the end result of the aggressive event and comparing what is intended and what is not. For example:

It's … if you hit someone and you meant to hit them and they fall and knock themselves out, well that is not intentional…. you just meant to hit the person because you are mad at them for like something. You didn't want them to fall down and … get a concussion or something. You just wanted to kind of show them what's up.

In this example, the participant stated that although the perpetrator meant to hit the target, the overall event is not intentional, because the perpetrator did not want the target to fall down and hurt him or herself. What makes this issue complex is that participants acknowledge that the purpose of aggression is to harm the target; therefore, it is difficult to argue that the harm was not intentional. Perhaps more specifically, it is the extreme nature of the harm that occurred that is what was not intentional. This notion was supported when another boy talking about a similar example stated, "you intended to fight him, but not to the extreme of him going to the hospital. Maybe give him a couple of black eyes and a broken nose."

Many participants argued that regardless of the outcome of the event, intention is a core component of aggressive behaviour. For example, a group of boys stated:

Boy 1: well you can push somebody and they could fall and it might not hurt, but it's still violent

Boy 2: no it's like aggression.

Boy 1: it's intentional harm.

Boy 3: what's going on around it and intending harm is what violence is.

Along this line of reasoning, one girl asked, "isn't it all purposeful…. How can you accidently [be] aggressive to someone?" She argued further, "well you should be totally conscious of what

you're doing and you know where it's coming from." Here she suggested that when perpetrators are aggressive, they are aware of what they are doing and have a sense of what will happen as a result. And she stated further, it should only be considered unintentional in circumstances where the perpetrator is not aware of what is happening, "to be not purposeful, is if you're drunk or something. Because then you're not … fully there and being … I really mean to hit this person."

5.1.1 Intentions and anger

Interestingly, participants raised the issue of anger and how it changes the nature of whether or not the event is considered intentional. A few participants suggested that being angry negates identifying the event as intentional. For example, one girl said, "a lot of the time when you're angry, you don't really think about the consequences. You [are] just kind of thinking in the moment." Therefore, when aggression is motivated by emotion, a person is not necessarily thinking clearly and subsequent behaviour should not be considered intentional. Another boy gave the following example as being unintentional, "you get really pissed off and whack the wall."

Surprisingly, however, a number of participants argued that the presence of anger is a condition of the event being considered intentional. For example, participants stated that intentional aggression occurs when people are "pissed off" or in a "bad mood." Initially, these examples appeared to be in contradiction to what was discussed above, but after closer examination it appears these participants are differentiating between the intention of acting aggressive and the intended harm of a specific target. One boy gave the example of when a hockey player "slams the door on the way out kind of thing. Then you know it's not the door's fault." Another boy said, "people slamming their car doors and stuff…. the car didn't do anything, but whatever happened before that they were mad." Finally, one boy also said, "to be

in … a really bad mood or something, like wrong place, wrong time kind of thing." In these examples, participants stated that even though the perpetrator is angry and the behaviour is intended to harm, it is not intended to harm that specific target. In other words, the target is not necessarily an intended target, but because the perpetrator is responding out of anger, the target becomes collateral damage. Therefore, intentional aggression can involve harming an unintentional target.

5.1.2 Components of intentionality

When participants discussed intentionality and purposely engaging in aggression they highlighted five components that together comprise intentionality. First, participants argued that the perpetrator expects the behaviour to have a specific goal. For example, one girl said, "they do it on purpose [*pause*] because they wanted to feel better about themselves." Another boy described, "because they are going out of their way to make you feel like crap."

Second, participants argued that the perpetrator has given thought to the specific behaviour he or she wants to engage in. For instance, one boy simply stated that the aggression would be "premeditated." Another boy said, "they were thinking about it ahead of time." When asked what exactly is being thought about, he said "how you are going to beat them with a bat or punch them in the face [or] are you going to shove their head through a wall." While not all intentional aggression has to be thought out with as much detail as this, other participants still argued it "is sort of planned out in a way."

The third component, simply involved engaging in the actual behaviour. Once a perpetrator performs the behaviour, it would be difficult to say the behaviour itself was an accident. For example, one participant said, "it's one of those things where you can't exactly go back and try to fix it because you're just digging your own grave." While the perpetrator may

not be able to say the behaviour was an accident, he or she may in some cases claim that there was no intention to cause harm. Participants suggested that this might certainly be an option because the fourth component entailed intentional aggression as having more intensity. For example, one girl explained, "I think if you say it on purpose, you have more … umph behind it." Another participant explained, "if it's meant to be harmful or something, you are going to [be] … thinking about that for a long time." Through the process of identifying a goal and the behaviour that will bring about that goal, it can be understood how engaging in the behaviour will turn out to be more intense.

The final component that was identified by some participants involved actually obtaining the goal. For example in one group, participants were given a scenario in which a perpetrator plans to injure the target to the degree of needing hospital care, and in fact does just that. Participants agreed that the event and resulting harm would be considered intentional. However, there is flexibility with this component as it is not a strict requirement for distinguishing an event as intentional. For example, participants highlighted that an event can still be considered aggression even if the target is not harmed, but the perpetrator intended harm. Therefore, identifying a goal, planning the behaviour, and engaging in the behaviour with some degree of intensity are strict elements of intentionality.

5.1.3 Intentionality, instrumental, and reactive aggression

The discussion of intentionality has so far highlighted that having a goal in mind, some form of planning, and then engaging in the behaviour is grounds for labeling the aggressive event intentional. It would seem likely then that participants would be more willing to identify instrumental types of aggression as intentional. In instrumental aggression, a perpetrator initiates an aggressive event for reasons beyond retaliation for being previously harmed by the target. As

a result, reactive aggression appears exempt from being designated as intentional. For example one girl said:

> You do it because of a reason that has to do with you…. if it has to do with you then it's on purpose but if it's … their fault that you are doing it, then it's not. Because that's where … self-control comes into play, because you can't help it because they're idiots.

In another group, the following discussion took place:

> *Interviewer*: the example of I'm sitting here doing whatever, somebody comes in and hits me and so you're saying what they did was on purpose?
>
> *Girl*: yes.
>
> *Interviewer*: but then if I hit them back, then you wouldn't say what I did was on purpose?
>
> *Girl*: it wasn't on purpose, but it's not necessarily the right thing to do but it wasn't on purpose.

In both of these examples, the target's behaviour, although it is aggressive, is not being labeled intentional because he or she is only reacting to the perpetrator's aggression.

As described above, however, participants did identify that aggressive behaviour stemming from emotions such as anger, can still be considered intentional. Examining the above two examples, the issue may come down to whether or not one is trying to attribute intentionality of the entire event to either the perpetrator or target, or attribute intentionality to each actor's individual behaviour. While it may not be accurate to say the target intended the entire event, it may also not be accurate to completely absolve the target's reactive behaviour of intentionality. Interestingly, one participant argued:

> He may hate you for a specific reason and he's thought out why he hates you and he's

just going to, he's premeditated that he's going to kick your ass. It's just that the

situation has now come.

As this participant suggested, a target can still engage in intentional behaviour regardless of

whether or not it is a reactive context. The important factor involves the degree to which the

target has thought about the potential aggressive behaviour.

5.1.4 Harm's role in experiencing aggression

Harm was identified as an essential element of an event being experienced as aggression.

In other words, aggression is said to occur when a perpetrator does something to harm a target.

As mentioned earlier, it is not necessary that harm was experienced directly by the target for an

event to be considered aggression. The event will be labeled as aggression as long as the social

network is aware of it or the event has the potential to cause harm. To begin understanding the

role of harm in aggression, it is first important to examine how harm is interpreted and

experienced by participants. In terms of physical aggression, participants described harm using

terms, such as *pain*, being *smashed*, and broken bones. As for verbal forms of aggression, harm

was experienced as "wears you down," "pisses you off," "hurt feelings," "get's inside your

head," "not feeling right," "being disrespected," and "emotional damage."

5.1.4.1 Aggression is intended harm

The issue of whether or not the perpetrator intends to harm the target was considered by

participants to be a central element in aggression. For example:

Boy 1: if you … throw your shoulder into someone as hard as you can, it's pretty obvious

that they don't like you and if you don't like the other person then I guess you're going to

want to fight them.

Boy 2: Yeah if it was an accident and that person is not intending to harm you, so you

don't really get mad about it because it was just an accident.

If the intention to harm was not motivating the event, participants argued that the event should not be considered aggression even if the target was harmed. Participants were asked how they would interpret an event in which a perpetrator jokingly shoved a target, who then tripped and hit his head on a wall. Participants responded:

Boy 1: unintentional harm.

Interviewer: so it's an unintentional harm. Would you say that was aggression?

Multiple participants: no.

Interviewer: would you say that it was violent?

Multiple participants: no.

Interviewer: so why not?

Boy 2: because they are not intentionally doing it.

This criterion also applied to verbal forms of aggression. Participants were asked to describe specifically when spreading a rumour would be considered aggression and when the same event would not be considered aggression. One boy replied:

Because you are meaning for them to get angry and it's … intentional harm to them.

When sometimes you just heard something and are … oh hey that's what I heard right.

You're just letting people know sort of thing.

According to this participant, the distinction was whether or not the perpetrator wants to hurt the target. If the perpetrator was saying things about a target without the intent to harm him or her, then others would argue it was an action of spreading information rather than aggression.

5.1.4.2 Intending harm makes for more harm

The intentionality of harm was also found to play a critical role in the degree of harm

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participants perceived. For example, participants argued that if a perpetrator intends to fight the target, the goal is to cause more harm than what would be inadvertently experienced through accidental harm. As one boy said, "well most of the time when you're thinking you're going to go beat somebody up, you're not just going to go and hit them and they're going to be fine. You're thinking you're going to do something to hurt them." Other participants agreed with this:

Boy 1: if you're thinking you're going to go and after school you're going to go and do something to that kid, you're not just going to go up and just hit him once, you're going [*pause*]

Boy 2: just keep going at him.

Another boy said:

It's a lot more harmful when you are wanting to hurt the person and to the point … where you're not wanting to hurt the person [and] hit him, [he] falls, [and] you're like OK I won. He gets back up and you start again. But … if it's where you hit him and you're so angry you just keep hitting him and there's blood all everywhere.

In light of what participants argued in terms of going too far and exceeding the *accepted* level of aggression (see Topic Two, section 3.1.6), it is unclear exactly how far the boys in the previous two examples would go. For example, another group argued:

Boy 1: when you're fighting someone, you don't want to intentionally put them in the hospital. You just want to make them so they won't do whatever they were doing to you that you made you want to fight them right… Let's say, you're getting picked, you're getting picked on. Even when you are fighting that guy who was picking on you all that time, there is a limit.

Boy 2: … don't kill him.

Boy 1: basically don't do too much harm, just do enough harm to make them back off.

Only do what is needed.

Similar to other discussions, these participants argued that aggression should not be excessive. It is not completely clear what would be objectively considered excessive aggression. However, considering that participants perceive physical aggression to have predominantly short-term impacts (e.g., bruises and broken bones that heal; see Topic One, section 2.3.2.1), it could be argued that excessive physical aggression would be an event resulting in long-term and permanent impairment. If intentionality impacts the degree of harm that is experienced, it can be reasoned that instrumental aggression is more harmful than reactive and more likely to be considered excessive than reactive aggression. This would also be consistent with participants' perceptions that reactive aggression as opposed instrumental aggression was more acceptable (see Topic Two, section 3.1.5).

In terms of verbal aggression, the point at which aggression becomes excessive is less clear. Verbal aggression was argued to have much longer-term impacts than physical aggression; therefore, the same comparisons between short- and long-term impacts that were made for physical aggression cannot be made for verbal aggression. Participants did, however, provide insight into one element of verbal aggression that could help clarify the context of excessive verbal aggression.

As mentioned above, intending harm is considered critical in defining a verbal event as aggression. However, participants also implied that the degree to which the perpetrator manipulates the event has an impact on how harmful the event is perceived and experienced. Participants argued that the further a rumour is from the truth, the more harmful it is. A rumour that is obviously not true would be considered more harmful than a rumour that is either true or

even inaccurate but still within the proximity of being truthful. For example, one group of participants described how spreading a rumour about a breakup that occurred would not be considered overly harmful, even if details were false. As one boy stated, "changing what a breakup really was is nothing basically," to which another boy added, "it's just something that can be passed on and ignored." Participants also discussed an example in which a group of perpetrators edited photos of a target and posted them online. Because these photos were said to be completely false and made accessible to the greater social network, the event was described as being more harmful than any other event discussed, which included stabbings and shootings. In terms of the social network's access to the aggression, one girl said, "if you put it on Facebook everyone knows," another girl added, "everybody is going to make fun of them after that," which was later followed by a boy who said, "you may not even know the person that well and you still make fun of them."

It is also worth mentioning that when it comes to verbal aggression, there are some specific actions that many participants considered to be extreme and excessive. Specifically talking about verbal aggression, one group said:

Girl 1: even … really bad things … things that can get people like killed or like booted right out of town.

Boy 1: like calling someone a pedophile[5].

Girl 2: yeah or saying they raped someone or something.

Boy 1: yeah.

Girl 1: and they didn't do it.

Boy 1: yeah that's worse.

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[5] Calling someone a "pedophile" or "goof" was specifically raised during a number of the focus groups. Consistently, participants described this action as having serious implications for both the perpetrator and target.

5.1.4.3 Some aggression is more harmful than others

Across all groups, participants consistently attributed more harm to nonphysical aggression than physical aggression. In comparing the two forms of aggression one group of boys stated:

Boy 1: I can deal with pain easily.

Boy 2: you get punched in the head you just get back up man…. the pain will go away. Something verbal will not. It's stuck with you because you wake up and they pick like one thing. Like the mole or your big ears. You look in the mirror one day and you're like uhh crap well I guess they're right. And you feel bad about it.

Boy 3: then you go and chop it off or something.

Boy 2: yeah and you try your hardest to fit in, but they just don't let you, man.

Later the first boy from this group added:

I think it's because like me, I have an abusive father, I can take pain like nothing, right. But when I was in grade six, man, I had … lumpy hair and shit. That's why I always wear a hat, man.

Possible explanations provided by participants as to why verbal aggression is experienced as being more harmful than physical aggression highlighted the long-term effects it has. For example, one boy said verbal aggression was more harmful:

Because with the words you have them … burned into your mind. You can't stop thinking about that. And then you start trying to do yourself to make those words go away. Then when you get hit, you can say you have a couple of bruises. The bruises will go away later.

In another group, one boy further described the long-term impact of verbal aggression, "you

know there is pain and then there's something you have to deal with for a long time… pain goes away. Something that someone chews you down over, it stays with you… it doesn't leave."

Verbal aggression was also said to be more harmful, because "it's more emotional harm" than physical aggression. As one participant said, "I would say verbal is worse man. Because there's some people that can actually take a punch and I think chewing me down with verbal would … make me hurt more inside." One girl argued that verbal aggression attacks the target's self-esteem and confidence, leading to further negative consequences.

Along with asking participants which form of aggression do they believe is more harmful, they were also asked if harm is experienced to a different degree by those involved in the same event. For example, participants were verbally asked on a scale from 1 to 10, 10 being the most harm, to compare how harmful an event is. In an event where a perpetrator is aggressive towards a target and the target retaliates with aggression, the perpetrator's behaviour was said to be more harmful than the target's. When participants considered the perpetrator's behaviour, it was likely perceived as being more intentional than the target's behaviour, which is more reactive. Additionally, participants argued that retaliation is an expected component of adolescent aggression. Therefore, the perpetrator would be more prepared for any aggression directed at him or her, whereas, the target would not have likely expected the aggression.

5.2   Discussing the results of topic four

Consistent with the most common definitions of aggression (see Berkowitz, 1989; Feshbach, 1964), the above results further confirmed those discussed in Topic One in which participants experienced aggression as a behaviour that is intended to harm the target. The results also demonstrated that participants have a shared understanding of the concept of intentionality. While describing intentionality in the context of aggression, participants

distinguished between intention and intentionality similar to Malle et al. (2001). Participants agreed that aggression involves a perpetrator intending to harm a target; however, experiencing harm alone does not automatically qualify the event as intentional. For example, if a perpetrator hits a target who then trips and hits his head, which requires medical attention, participants would argue that the overall outcome of sending the target to the hospital was not intentional, even though the perpetrator intended harm.

In their previous study, Malle and Knobe (1997) identified desires (i.e., wanting a specific outcome), beliefs (i.e., expectation that a specific action will result in the desired outcome), and intentions (i.e., a decision to perform the action) as components of intentionality. Participants in this study provided examples consistent with these three components. They argued that intentionality involved being aggressive on purpose in order (i.e., belief) to get a specific outcome (i.e., desire). Examples of outcomes included perpetrators feeling better about themselves or simply making the target "feel like crap." Further, participants argued that intentionality entails a plan of some sort, in which the target has given thought to engaging in aggression (i.e., intention). Malle and Knobe (1997) also identified awareness as a component of harm. Participants in this study did not commonly raise the issue of awareness. The exception was one participant who stated all aggression should be considered intentional unless the perpetrator is intoxicated and aware of what he or she is doing.

Similar to the Malle and Knobe (1997) study, participants did not make reference to skill. The authors concluded that skill is an issue in complex behaviour, such as throwing darts. It is likely that aggression would be considered a complex behaviour, therefore, it is interesting participants did not address this component. Participants did imply, however, that events should be classified as intentional only when the outcome matches the intent, which was illustrated in

the example above. Even when a perpetrator intends harm to a target, engages in behaviour to harm the target, the event was not considered intentional because the target was injured in a manner and degree not planned by the perpetrator. Alternatively, it could be argued that the event is not considered intentional because it was not the perpetrator's skill that brought harm to the target. However, because participants did not reference skill more directly by talking about some perpetrators being better at aggression than others, it is not clear how skill factors into their understanding of intentionality. Further research is needed to explore the role that skill plays in adolescent aggression.

While participants did not identify the components of awareness and skill, they did identify additional components, not discussed in previous research. First, participants specified that actually engaging in the intended behaviour is critical. Participants argued that after performing a behaviour it is difficult for the perpetrator to then say it was an accident. It stands to reason then that it would be difficult to say someone did it intentionally if they did not actually perform the behaviour. It should be noted that Malle and Knobe (1997) did not discuss this first point specifically, but rather may have assumed it. For example, the authors stated that awareness of an action fulfilling the intention is necessary for intentionality. To discuss whether or not one is aware of the results of his/her action, it can be assumed the action is performed. It is worth keeping in mind that participants in this dissertation directly stated performing the action, whereas in the previous study it was not.

Second, intensity was considered a characteristic of intentionality. In other words, participants argued that when a behaviour was intended the perpetrator used more force, effort, or "umph." Participants felt this resulted from thinking about and having a plan for the behaviour. Finally, participants also identified that actually obtaining the desired goal should be

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considered. This appears similar to the argument raised above regarding the distinction between intending a behaviour and an event being labeled intentional. The perpetrator may intend a behaviour, but if the end result is different than expected, the overall event including the resulting degree of harm will not be classified as intentional.

While there were some consistencies between this study's results and the findings of Malle and Knobe (1997), there were also some inconsistencies as well. It is unclear exactly why the two studies are inconsistent in identifying the components of intentionality. One possible explanation relates to the different participants used in the two studies. Malle and Knobe used university participants. Not only were their participants older, but they also represent a different academic trajectory than half of the participants (i.e., half of the participants attended the alternative school system) used in this study. Additionally, the previous study had participants write their responses as opposed to responding orally. Participants in this study indicated difficulty with the concept of intentionality. While many participants were able to provide insightful responses, they may have had more trouble articulating their experiences than Malle and Knobe's participants. These discrepancies may also highlight that adolescents simply have a different folk concept of intentionality than university students. This argument would be consistent with Bruner's (1990) view that folk concepts reflect the language and symbols of the culture in question. Consequently, the differing results may highlight the cultural variations between adolescents and university students' understanding and experiences.

Participants raised an interesting argument with respect to the role of anger in the context of intentionality. Specifically, some participants stated that anger negates the classification of an event as intentional. These participants suggested that the event is not intentional because the perpetrator is not thinking about the consequences. As a result, the components of desire, belief,

and intent would be in question. However, other participants stated that anger was necessary for classifying the event as intentional. As discussed in Topic One, participants clearly grounded their understanding of aggression in the context of anger. Previous research has also identified anger as a central aspect of aggression (Berkowitz, 1988, 1989, 1990; Buss & Perry, 1992; Crick et al., 1996; Gambetti & Giusberti, 2009). The potential discrepancy regarding anger appears to be a further reflection of the distinction between intent to perform a behaviour and the intentional nature of an event (Malle et al., 2001). Participants understand aggression as a decision to harm the target. By also considering anger as the emotional precursor to aggression, the intent to harm and the presence of anger are linked together in the context of aggression. However, participants also experience anger as clouding judgement and "when you're angry, you don't really think about the consequences." Berkowitz (1990) argued that this occurs because anger is a primary response that occurs before higher-order cognitive processes begin to operate, such as considering alternative behaviours and their consequences. For participants, anger was described as impacting who or what the perpetrator harms. In other words, the anger may lead the perpetrator to harm an unintended target. Malle et al. (2001) argued that intentionality refers to a feature of the event that renders it purposive or not. Therefore, the unintentional nature of who or what is targeted is contributing to the paradoxical relation between anger and participants' understanding of intentions.

The discrepancy between intent and intentionality was furthered when participants argued that reactive aggression, unlike instrumental aggression, is not intentional. Participants argued that the event as a whole is not intentional, because the perpetrator is retaliating against the target for causing previous harm. Because the perpetrator did not preplan the behaviour, it is deemed unintentional, even though he or she is intending to harm the target. Interestingly, one

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participant argued that reactive aggression should not completely absolve the event of intentionality, because the perpetrator has likely given thought to responding with aggression previously. It just happens now that the perpetrator is presented with the opportunity. Brown (2006) found that decisions to engage in future behaviour (i.e., intentions) were significantly associated with both instrumental and reactive adolescent aggression. In reactive aggression, adolescents may not have the specific desire, belief, and intent for the event, but they appear to have desire, beliefs, and intentions for the general context of reactive opportunities.

Although aggression is typically defined as the intent to harm, harm is argued to differ in both form (e.g., physical and emotional) and severity (Graham et al., 2006). Harm is not simply an experience that is either present or absent. In discussing intentions, participants argued that intentional aggression would result in a higher degree of harm. As mentioned earlier, participants stated that intentional aggression is going to be more intense. Further, even when a target retaliates against a perpetrator, participants attributed more harm to the target, because the perpetrator's behaviour is seen as more intentional. Interestingly, however, participants also stated that the intent should not be too excessive and cause too much harm. As such, participants highlighted the relation among intentions, harm, and what is acceptable aggression. Analysis in Topic Two found that participants consider excessive aggression unacceptable. In this topic, participants disassociated intentionality from excessive aggression. This finding is not surprising in light of research results on the asymmetry in assigning blame or praise depending on intentionality. When an event is considered intentional more blame is ascribed to the perpetrator (Malle & Bennett, 2002). May (1999) also found that events are more likely to be labeled unintentional to reduce the degree of blame assigned to convicted murderers. In terms of aggression, participants in this dissertation removed culpability by arguing that aggression

resulting in excessive harm, which was considered unacceptable, was not intentional.

Participants also argued that in the context of nonphysical aggression, more harm is associated with the degree to which the perpetrator manipulates the event. For example, a rumour was said to be more harmful the further it was from the truth. Similarly, aggression involving malicious editing and posting of photographs was said to be very harmful. These behaviours require more effort on behalf of the perpetrator and reflect greater planning, which is directly tied to desires, beliefs, and intentions. These findings are consistent with previous research looking at cyber aggression that found photo editing and hostile website creation to be the most harmful behaviours (Law, Shapka, Domene, et al., 2012; Menesini et al., 2011).

While talking about the degree of harm experienced by various types of aggression, participants consistently attributed more harm to nonphysical aggression. Participants described this type of harm as emotional harm, which lasts longer than physical harm. This finding somewhat contrasts previous findings in which relational aggression was considered the most harmful, followed by physical, and then verbal and social aggression (Coyne et al., 2006). The authors argued that verbal and social aggression have shorter-term effects than physical and relational aggression. Additionally, other studies have reported that girls experience more harm than boys when it comes to nonphysical aggression (see Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011; Crick et al., 1996; Hess & Hagen, 2006; Paquette & Underwood, 1999). It is not clear why previous research has not consistently found both boys and girls to experience nonphysical aggression as more harmful than physical aggression. In this dissertation, both boys and girls consistently identified nonphysical aggression as more harmful than verbal aggression. The studies discussed previously used quantitative methodologies. Therefore, it could be that boys are more willing to admit to the harm experienced through the nonphysical aggression in a qualitative, open-ended

focus group setting. This setting not only establishes rapport with the participants, but some boys gain an opportunity to see that others, including boys, share their harmful experiences.

Overall, this analysis further supports that intentions play a pivotal role in adolescents' understandings and experiences on aggression. While adolescent participants in this study shared similarities with university students used in previous research (see Malle & Knobe, 1997), in terms of the components of intentions, they also expressed unique components. Perhaps most importantly, they identified an association between intentions and the intensity of the behaviour. As a result, this study provided a unique adolescent perspective on the structure of intentions within the context of aggressive behaviour.

5.3   What we have learned so far

Taken together, the four topics regarding adolescent aggression that have now been discussed shed considerable light on how adolescents make sense of aggression. In Topic One, it was shown that adolescent participants considered aggression to be purposeful behaviour that causes harm. This understanding applied to both physical and nonphysical forms of aggression. However, this does not serve as grounds to consider all aggression equal. Participants' experiences clearly conveyed that physical aggression is linked to short-term effects, whereas nonphysical aggression (including verbal, relational, and social aggression) is linked to long-term effects. As a result of these unique experiences, forms of aggression (e.g., physical and verbal) should not be linked together according to direct/indirect or overt/covert criteria. What also emerged from the analysis of this topic was the grounding of aggression in both anger and tone. Participants conveyed that anger plays a critical role in the development of aggression, while the meaning of the event is conveyed and interpreted through the perpetrator's tone.

Topic Two explored the contexts in which participants considered aggression to be acceptable. Because aggression takes place within a social hierarchy, it can be used to navigate standing within that hierarchy. Social positioning was identified as a central theme to understanding the contexts in which aggression was considered acceptable. Social positioning represents a multifaceted index of social standing and vulnerability to being a target of aggression. Social positioning was found to contain four elements: reputation agency, chronological status, social power, and physical toughness. Aggression that is linked to defending social positioning is in many cases likely to be considered acceptable. And perpetrators who occupy a high social position are more likely than those in a low social position to get away with being aggressive.

Topic Three examined how participants situated the concept of bullying within aggression. While participants identified bullying as aggression, analysis revealed that it is not simply synonymous with aggression, but rather serves as a unique type of aggression. In particular, bullying was not expressed as a specific form of aggression. Instead, it was distinguished in terms of the function it serves the perpetrator. Bullying was described as a perceived means for the perpetrator to resolve some aspect of inner turmoil. On the surface, this simply appears consistent with the perspective of instrumental aggression, in which aggression is used to obtain a distal goal beyond the proximal goal of harming the target. However, bullying was characterized by a power differential that exists between the perpetrator and target. Evidently, this power differential was characterized as the perpetrator having a higher social position than the target. Bullying was also characterized as repeated aggression towards the target. As a result of these unique features, it was argued that aggression should be classified as

a trichotomy that includes bullying as a dimension as opposed to the traditional dichotomy consisting of only instrumental and reactive aggression.

In Topic Four, participants were found to distinguish between intention and intentionality. For example, while a perpetrator may intend to harm the target, the event will only be considered intentional if the target experiences harm in the same manner and degree the perpetrator intended. Interestingly, participants' conceptualization of intentionality included components of desires, beliefs, and intentions, which are consistent with previous research (see Malle & Knobe, 1997). However, they included three additional components: performing the behaviour, intensity, and obtaining the desired goal. Analysis further revealed an important link between anger and intentionality. Anger was described by some participants as negating intentionality and by others as a necessary context for intentionality. Ultimately, anger appeared to influence whether or not the target was the intended target of the aggression. For example, the presence of anger can lead to an unintended target being harmed. Because intentionality characterized the entirety of the event and its outcome, rather than just the decision (i.e., intent) to harm a target, the ascription of intentionality in the presence of anger was complicated. Finally, intentionality was also found to relate to the degree of harm experienced by participants. Aggression in which the perpetrator put more effort into manipulating the event, which tied back to desires, beliefs, and intentions, was described as being more harmful.

While the above discussion highlights how adolescents experience and make sense of aggression, it is important to outline how the information learned from the results can be applied. The significance of thematic analysis in this area of research lies in its relevance. Themes are not only academic constructs, but also potential directives for grounding recommendations in the current experiences of those who would benefit from intervention. The following chapter

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focuses specifically on intervention strategies for adolescent aggression. First, it reviews some

of the common approaches that have been used and perspectives for intervening in aggression.

Second, it presents an additional theme that speaks specifically to intervention that was identified

when analysing the participants' data for the previous topics. Finally, recommendations are

made for future intervention strategies that are grounded in the findings of this dissertation.

Chapter 6 - Can Anything Be Done About Aggression? A Word on Aggression and Intervention

The prevalence of aggression is unknown because it is commonly underreported (Tyson et al., 2002) and there is a clear asymmetry in the types of aggression that are reported (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Xie et al., 2003). In particular, direct overt, physical aggression is typically reported to authorities, such as teachers. Similar to reported aggression, authorities are more likely to detect and intervene in aggressive events that are more visible, such as direct overt, physical aggression. Xie et al. (2003) reported that school authorities intervened in 55% of physical events, compared to 36% of verbal, and approximately 20% of social and relational aggressive events. Further, there is a debate as to whether or not adolescent aggression is more or less common today than it was previously. However, while it is unclear just how many adolescents are negatively affected by aggression, there is little disagreement that something needs to be done to intervene in this harmful behaviour.

Hawley et al. (2007) argued that aggressive behaviour rarely goes into spontaneous remission. Therefore, programs are needed to help adolescents deal with aggression. The authors added, however, that aggression is resistant to change and difficult to treat. Vaughn and Santos (2007) argued that despite researchers recognizing the harmful effects of aggression and working to explain it for over a century, levels of aggression have not declined. This suggests that existing strategies are not effective. One likely explanation relates to how aggression is conceptualized. As discussed in the previous four topics, aggression is not a homogenous behaviour, but rather it is expressed in different forms and serves different functions. In reference to bullying, MacNeil (2002) stated that a single intervention approach would not be

effective, but rather a combination of approaches is needed. Currently, there is an absence of strategies designed to address the many different types of aggression. Before going into detail regarding intervention strategies, it is important to consider where and when intervention would be most effective.

6.1   Where and when should intervention take place?

Researchers have stressed that intervention strategies will be most successful if implemented early due to the difficulty in trying to change aggressive behaviour (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Kellner & Bry, 1999). Researchers have also argued that these strategies should be employed within the school environment before and after school, as well as during lunch and other breaks (Williams, MacMaster, & Ellis, 2002). Astor, Pitner, Benbenishty, and Meyer (2002) reported that most adolescent physical aggression occurs between 3:00 pm and 4:00 pm on school days. Although these events occurred off school grounds, the authors contended that they resulted from school dynamics and should be considered school fights. It should not be surprising that adolescent aggression occurs most frequently at school, as this is where adolescents spend a substantial portion of their waking hours during the week. School-based intervention not only addresses aggression within the environment it most frequently occurs, but it also affords the opportunity to utilize group-based strategies that impact a number of students in a cost-efficient manner (Petras et al., 2011).

Interestingly, high-school students are said to develop a more fixed understanding regarding whether or not aggressive behaviour can be modified. Compared to younger adolescents, older adolescents have been found to believe that peer aggression will not change (Yeager, Trzesniewski, Tirri, Nokelainen, & Dweck, 2011). As a result, they are less likely to intervene. Further, they focus more on punishment as a way of responding, which can include

retaliation. Therefore, it is likely that older adolescents may be more resistant to intervention strategies at this stage, and efforts should be made to intervene earlier.

In light of the discussion in Topic Two, intervening too early may be problematic. Aggression has been found to follow a developmental trend (see Di Giunta et al., 2010; Heilbron & Prinstein, 2008; McDonald, Putallaz, Grimes, Kupersmidt, & Coie, 2007; Roseth et al., 2007; Tisak, Maynard, & Tisak, 2002; Xie et al., 2003). Specifically, physical aggression is more prevalent in childhood and declines in adolescence while nonphysical aggression (i.e., verbal, social, and relational) increases during adolescence. One explanation is that nonphysical aggression requires a higher degree of social competence and intelligence to be successful (Kaukiainen et al., 1999; Peeters et al., 2010). Sullivan et al. (2010) also suggested that relational aggression occurs more frequently because adolescents begin to spend more time with peers, which places more importance on the adolescent social hierarchy. It is important to note that nonphysical aggression does not completely replace physical aggression in adolescence, thus both nonphysical and physical aggression are present during adolescence. Interventions that take place in childhood or even early adolescence are likely to focus on physical aggression and miss addressing the developmental trend of nonphysical aggression.

Previous research has found that aggression is more frequent at times of transition (Roseth et al., 2007). School suspensions are also found to peak during transition periods, especially from elementary to and during middle school (Petras et al., 2011). While some researchers have suggested that aggression serves as a response to the stress of these transitions, Cillessen and Mayeux (2007) argued that aggression is a strategic response to the transition. At each transition, the social hierarchy is reorganized and aggression serves as a means to re-establish it (Vaughn & Santos, 2007). In Topic Two, results indicated that chronological status

(e.g., age and grade) played a pivotal role in social positioning. Participants identified that being in the senior year at school afforded adolescents a higher social position than those in lower grades. However, this positioning changes at periods of transition. Participants described that aggression was required to reassert social positioning.

In light of the above discussion, middle school presents a critical time to employ aggression intervention strategies. This is not to say that intervention should not take place during all grades, because aggression is certainly present at all grades. But what the discussion highlights is that there is a developmental trend in aggressive behaviour that must be considered. In childhood and the early elementary years, a focus on physical aggression is appropriate. Whereas in later elementary school and beyond nonphysical aggression becomes more prominent and should be emphasized. In light of Yeager et al.'s (2011) argument, waiting until high school to intervene is not likely to be effective as these students have developed views that aggressive behaviour cannot be changed or modified and are more likely to respond to perpetrators through retaliation. Therefore, the middle school years present an ideal time to implement intervention that can demonstrate that aggressive behaviour can be modified. Additionally, aggression appears to be more prevalent at times of transition. Efforts should be made to increase intervention strategies at key transition periods such as the beginning of each school year especially at the start of middle and high school.

6.2   Looking more closely at aggression intervention

One strategy that is used for dealing with aggressive behaviour is to remove adolescents from the school environment through definite and indefinite suspensions. In fact, school removal is reported to be the most common strategy for addressing behavioural problems and has been growing in popularity (Petras et al., 2011). In the United States, 3.7% of all students were

suspended in 1974, whereas 6.6% of all students were suspended in the 2002-2003 school year. Yeager et al. (2011) argued that often punishment-based strategies result from perceiving perpetrators through fixed labels such as predators and morally defective. The reality of such punishment strategies is that they do not work. For example, 40% of suspensions are reported to involve repeat perpetrators (Petras et al., 2011). Astor et al. (2002) argued that suspensions simply deprive perpetrators from education resources without providing additional programs. Petras et al. (2011) argued that being removed from school places those suspended at higher risk for a number of outcomes, such as academic failure and negative school attitudes. The authors further reported that school removal is not consistent across race, sex, or socioeconomic status. For example, African Americans, boys, and those living in poverty were suspended the most frequently in their study. Additionally, the majority of recommendations for suspensions are generally made by a small number of teachers. The authors stated that teachers of *low-aggression* classrooms (i.e., classrooms with few students considered to be aggressive) are more likely to recommend removal of aggressive students than teachers of *high-aggression* classrooms. From this discussion it is clear that school suspensions are not implemented consistently across aggressive behaviours and do not appear to be effective.

Aggression intervention has also focused on addressing attitudes towards aggression and social norms. Meyer et al. (2004) evaluated the *Get Real About Violence* program, which focuses on these cognitive aspects of aggression and aims to have adolescents think before they act. The authors found that both the control and experimental (i.e., the group receiving the program curriculum) group performed more negatively at post-test compared to pretest. It should be noted that the experimental group did improve on some test items and digressed on fewer items than the control group; however, the experimental group did more negatively

overall. The authors suggested that the program was not successful because the underlying model was flawed. While the program addressed the cognitive aspects of aggression (e.g., considering consequences and benefits), it did not address the emotional component.

The results presented in Topic One clearly highlighted that adolescent participants understood aggression as having an emotional component, which was consistently referred to as anger. This finding was consistent with previous research that identified anger as a determinant of reactive aggression (see Berkowitz 1988, 1989, 1990; Buss & Perry, 1992; Pond et al., 2011). In his cognitive-neoassociationistic model, Berkowitz argued that anger is a primary reaction to negative affect that is engaged prior to higher-order cognitive processing. Therefore, anger must be addressed in order for intervention to be successful. As with the example of the *Get Real About Violence* program (see Meyer et al., 2004), addressing the cognitive aspects of aggression alone are not sufficient.

Anger management programs have become a common strategy for aggression intervention (Cornell et al., 1999). Debaryshe and Fryxell (1998) stated that anger management should address physiological regulation, social information processing, and behavioural strategies. For example, the *Student Created Aggression Replacement Education Program* (SCARE) is a 15-session anger and aggression-management program for young adolescents (e.g., adolescents in grade 7 to grade 9; Bundy, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 2011; Hermann & McWhirter, 2003). The program teaches students to (a) recognize anger and aggression, (b) manage anger, and (c) defuse anger and aggression in others. The SCARE program was found to successfully reduce state and trait anger; however, it is unclear how effective it was in reducing aggression. In an earlier study, the authors stated "anger-related treatment gains" were not maintained after one year (Hermann & McWhirter, 2003, p. 296). Unfortunately, it is unclear if

this is in reference to aggressive behaviour. Aside from official school records of aggressive

behaviour considering physical aggression, the study only assessed perceptions of aggression and

attitudes of violence. In a later study with younger adolescents, the SCARE program was

combined with five booster sessions following a 6-month period after the standard program

(Bundy et al., 2011). The authors reported enhanced program and long-term effects with respect

to anger; however, they did not assess aggressive behaviour.

Although it is unclear just how effective the SCARE program is in reducing all types of

aggressive behaviour, it does have two specific components that should be considered in

aggression intervention. First, the program utilized group intervention. Not only do group

settings allow for programming to be cost effective, but more importantly they allow

opportunities for participants to develop skills through modeling and role playing (Blake &

Hamrin, 2007). Second, although the program was delivered to *at-risk* adolescents in an

alternative school, they were not selected strictly on the merits of their aggressive behaviour.

That is, the program was not only provided to the most severe cases. Often intervention is

provided on an individual basis for the most aggressive individuals. For example, *The*

Aggression Replacement Training (ART) program provided prosocial skills training, anger

control training, and moral reasoning education to adolescents hospitalized for severe and

disruptive aggression (Blake & Hamrin, 2007). Letendre and Smith (2011) argued that many of

the interventions designed to address girls' physical aggression provided social skills training for

individuals. Farmer and Xie (2007) reported that research has found social skills training to have

at best moderate effects. The authors argued the likely explanation for this is because these types

of programs only intervene at the level of the individual and do not address the social

environment in which aggression occurs.

By focusing on individuals displaying aggressive behaviour, intervention strategies are limited by addressing only the most visible forms of aggression and they focus on aggression as a maladaptive behaviour. As discussed throughout Topics One and Two, aggression is not always visible to those external to the event. For example, aggression can be hidden through covert and indirect means, and aggressive individuals may also be popular, attractive, athletic, and class leaders (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007; Farmer & Xie, 2007; Hawley, 2007; Lease et al., 2002; Xie et al., 2003), which makes them less likely to be identified as problematic and in need of intervention. Further, by focusing on aggression as a maladaptive behaviour, intervention strategies are neglecting the rewards that many adolescents receive from being aggressive. As discussed in detail throughout Topic Two, adolescent participants identified that aggression serves as a means to obtain and maintain social positioning. Any potential rewards of aggression must be considered because they support the behaviour and minimize the potential for intervention to affect change (Famer & Xie, 2007). For example, Farmer et al. (2011) argued that intervention should take into account individuals' social prominence (i.e., social value). Intervention for those who are low-prominence should target their social vulnerabilities. Conversely, for those who are high-prominence, intervention needs to diminish the capacity for aggression to enhance their status. For example, aggressive adolescents should not be provided leadership roles such as team captains (Neal, 2010).

When taking into consideration the social dynamics of aggression, researchers have a made a number of recommendations. First, social networks have been identified as homophilic, in which aggressive adolescents associate with other aggressive adolescents (Neal, 2010). As such, it is recommended that opportunities should be provided for aggressive peers to interact with new peers. While Farmer et al. (2011) recommend a similar strategy, they stressed careful

monitoring when socially prominent aggressive adolescents are linked to those who are rejected and vulnerable as this may lead to further victimization. Neal (2010) also recommended the development of larger social networks, which could be achieved through various means such as having adolescents work on larger group activities and routine changes to classroom seating plans. On the surface, these recommendations appear feasible; however, in light of social positioning, caution should be used before implementing these strategies. One potential problem is that they will disrupt social hierarchies, which could put adolescents in a constant state of transition. Because aggressive behaviour is heightened during periods of transition, adolescents may continuously engage in aggression to establish and maintain their social positioning. Future research should be conducted to evaluate the effect these modifications to classroom environments have on all forms of aggression.

While there are apparently efforts being made to identify how intervention strategies can address the role aggression plays in the social environment, intervention strategies need to also consider how aggression is addressed by both parents and authorities. During the focus group discussions adolescent participants in this dissertation often raised concerns regarding the intervention of aggression. While some of these issues have been discussed previously (see section 4.1.4 concerning interventions for bullying), there is one theme that addressed interventions specifically, and therefore, should be discussed in further detail.

6.3   Failing to legitimize adolescent aggression

During the focus group discussions, participants touched on key issues that were relevant to the intervention of adolescent aggression. These data were analyzed and one theme was generated. This theme highlighted a disconnection between adult perceptions of adolescent aggression and the reality participants experienced. As a result of this disconnect, participants

described receiving conflicting messages from adults. As one participant suggested, this may result from adults applying their own past experiences to that of today's adolescents. For example, one girl stated:

> I think that teachers or adults or whatever, need to forget how it was for them…. just put that behind you, whatever. Whether it's the same or whether it's different, forget that and start listening to what we have to say.

By relating what adolescents are currently going through to their own experiences, adults make the situation about them and as this girl described, they do not actually listen to what adolescents have to say. Another boy sharing this perspective stated, "I get the fact they've all been kids before… the generations change a lot. And not just in the style as my mom thinks." In more detail he added that aggression has changed both in type and severity in comparison to his mom's youth, "now we have the cyberbullying, we have I, I think truly, we have more intense emotional bullying." One girl stated that she believes many adults simply forget what it was like growing up as she said, "sure they lived there and putting aside that times have changed, but often I think [they] forget how hard it can be. Just … everyday life, like walking down the hallway… well it's not that easy."

Regardless of whether adults believe adolescent aggression is simply a phase similar to their own experiences, or they have simply forgotten the difficulties and hardships of adolescence, participants described in detail how adults continuously minimize the impact of adolescent aggression. In many cases, participants felt their experiences were ignored. As one girl argued, aggression should not be trivialized, "if I'm being bullied, I'm not going to come to you for some little thing. If I'm coming to talk to you about that, it's probably significant for me." Here she implied that she is not asking for every event to be legitimized by adults, but

rather those that are significant enough to share with an adult. Another girl highlighted that adults focus on the specific nature of the event to determine if it was harmful rather than focus on what was actually experienced in terms of harm. For example, one girl argued, "if it's your friends who are doing it, [adults are] just … oh they're just teasing you." Towards the adult she replied, "no, they're being mean. It doesn't matter if they are my friends or not … it shouldn't be an excuse." She went on and described that a double standard exists in which an event among friends is not a problem, but if the behaviour was not among friends then there would be cause for concern.

One boy argued that only those who are directly experiencing the event can truly understand what is happening, "unless it's … happening to you, you don't really understand how much it's hurting… teachers don't really understand that… you actually get really pissed off when somebody calls you a name or something." In these specific situations, participants felt they are given responses that attempt to minimize the experience, "they just say that it's a name … just drop it." Another participant added he hears "just forget about it." But the problem is not what lies on the surface, as one girl explained, "if it's a name whatever. But a lot of time it's not just a name." Looking at the surface of the event, adults are correct in that a name is a name. But what is being missed is that the word has a meaning and is intended to harm the target. Here the act of being called a name constituted aggression because it was an attack on who the target was as a person. For instance, participants went on to argue "but a lot of time it's not just a name." One boy described in more detail that it's something "you've been called your whole life." Further, calling someone a name is seen as a means to get inside someone's head. When adolescents are simply told the event is of little significance or they should not let it get to them, not only do they not receive any help, but Fatum and Hoyle (1996) argued they come to learn

that adults are of no help in these types of events. In the future, these adolescents will not seek help from adults. In addition, Lopez and Emmer (2002) reported that in no situations did violent offenders suggest they would rely on authority figures to help them handle conflict.

In terms of adults legitimizing aggression, it may come down to a matter of whether or not the behaviour in question is visible. The examples recently provided emphasize verbal forms of aggression, such as name-calling. Therefore, one could question if legitimization is mostly a problem with verbal aggression. Participants were asked if adults responded differently to the types of aggression. Overall, there was no clear consensus as to one type of aggression being viewed more seriously than another. Some participants argued that physical aggression was seen as a more legitimate form of aggression than verbal, while others felt the other way. Where the issue seemed to lie was whether or not adults were aware of what was taking place. For the most part, participants suggested that if adults, such as teachers, are not made explicitly aware of what is going on, they are not likely to intervene. As a result, there does seem to be more emphasis on physical aggression because it is more visible. As one boy demonstrated, if "someone gets… beaten up it's more obvious…because you can't really tell if somebody's… getting hurt from words." In response to this, another boy added, "it's just that physical violence is a lot more visible." For example, participants seemed to agree that if a fight were to occur in the hallway at school during a break, teachers would intervene, whereas, an event involving spreading rumours would not likely yield a response unless the teachers found out. These comments clearly highlight a fundamental problem with aggression intervention. As described earlier, adolescents underreport aggression to authorities, and to make the situation worse, participants clearly described that they do not feel their experiences are legitimized. As a consequence, they are less likely to report aggression in the future. Unless aggression occurs directly in front of an

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authority it will not be detected and intervened. With no adults or authority to turn to, adolescents will create their own cultural responses.

While bringing aggression to the attention of adults is paramount to adult legitimization of adolescent aggression, it alone does not guarantee legitimacy. According to the discussion with participants, adolescents appeared to want two things from adults when they talk to them about aggression. First, they want recognition that they have been harmed, and therefore, aggressed against. Second, they want insight or guidance as to how to respond.

At the beginning of this section, examples were provided demonstrating how participants often felt ignored or that adults minimized the event when they tried to talk to them. Additionally, when telling adults about aggression, participants stated that the attention shifted to their own behaviour and the role they played in causing the aggression. For example, one boy described the conversation with his parent as, "it's the lecture about what you did wrong. They turn it around to make it look like it's your fault." Such a reaction appears to be very common, and perhaps what is most frustrating to adolescents, is that it is the automatic reaction regardless of what took place:

> *Boy*: or like the famous thing that my mom says whenever I tell her I had a bad day, she [says], what did you do?
>
> *Interviewer*: so automatically it's your fault?
>
> *Girl*: yeah … I talk to a grown up yeah and my friends they're just being mean to me and I don`t understand it. I didn't do anything. Are you sure [*mimics her mom's voic*e], are you sure you didn't do anything? Yes mom, I retraced my steps.

Participants were asked if this type of a response was more likely to come from parents or if it was also consistent with how teachers responded. One boy stated, "they kind of do the same

thing as parents do…. what did you do? But more in a legal way…. So are you sure there's

nothing you did to provoke this?" Ultimately, these adolescents are looking for recognition that

the behaviour was aggressive and that it is not their fault.

Finally, participants articulated the disconnection they experience when talking to adults

when they discussed how adults expect them to respond to aggression. Without question,

adolescents are most often told to just walk away. For example, adolescents have been told that

enduring these events makes them stronger (Fatum & Hoyle, 1996; Lajoie, McLellan, & Seddon,

1997). Participants consistently agreed that walking away was not a viable response. From their

perspective, many participants felt it could make matters worse. For example, one girl said,

"well if you walk away … some kids will make fun of you." Another girl added, "I was getting

into a fight or something and then you just … leave…. they'll make fun of you. Call you names

and stuff. Say that you're scared … it's kind of worse." Other participants stated it is hard to

walk away because they would feel like a "loser" or that "you can't stand up for yourself."

Consistent with what was discussed in Topic Two, walking away will only further harm the

target's social positioning. If adolescents do not engage in reputational agency, participants

argued that the aggression will get worse and they will be targeted further.

Participants reported they are frequently told to simply avoid confrontation and

aggressive perpetrators. For example in their guide to bullying, Lajoie et al. (1997) identified

avoiding the perpetrator as a key step to staying safe and preventing bullying. Many

participants, however, highlighted the difficulty in trying to do this. As one participant stated,

"teachers think that we can avoid everything…. that aggression and … bullying and everything

is avoidable, but it's not." Another girl stated, "yeah, but it's not something you can avoid…. if

you walk away then you're considered weak or … it just doesn't, it's not something you can

ignore." To clarify why it is so difficult, one boy explained, "It's not just at school also. But …

you see them around your house and … taking the bus home or whatever. And … you can't

walk away or ignore them." Most participants agreed that ignoring or walking away would not

work, because aggression is not something that will just go away on its own. As one boy said:

> It ain't going to stop…. everyday it's going to go on. Who's going to stop it? No one.
>
> And then you're going to end up fighting again and you either have to smash his face to
>
> shut him up or you just keep on fighting until you win.

Another participant said:

> If you … don't fight, you … do the right thing and you walk away. And you don't say
>
> anything, I bet you that person that night or even the next time he sees you, it's going to be
>
> the exact same thing, exact same thing.

Together, participants conveyed that being told to walk away or simply ignore aggression fails to

legitimize the harm that they experienced and could continue to experience should they follow

the advice.

Along with advice to ignore aggression, participants reported being told that they should

tell a teacher if they are being victimized. Participants frequently responded that doing so would

be a bad idea because "snitches get stiches." One boy suggested that this would also make the

situation worse because "if you get … picked on [and] tell a teacher, they just come back even

worse." Another participant indicated that this would not stop the behaviour as the perpetrator

will try to be more discrete "or pick somebody else who won't tell." Participants also told how

the message to go and tell a teacher is contradictory to what they were told growing up, in terms

of being a "tattle tale."

Throughout all the interviews, there was only one example provided where telling a

teacher about aggression had a positive response. As one boy recounted:

I have a friend from [*name of school*] he just got recently bullied and he wasn't doing anything about it and it was getting worse and worse. To the point he got a punch right in the gut. Then he told a teacher and then the bully got suspended. Then all his friends were happy that he did that because nobody in the school liked [the perpetrator]. And so they were thinking ok and now recently the bully hasn't been doing anything to anyone. So it's like a 50-50 [chance].

Here the participant provided an account of when telling a teacher was a good thing. However, a few elements should be highlighted. The behaviour was repeated over time and the perpetrator was clearly referred to as a bully. Further, this perpetrator was described as not being liked by many kids, suggesting he was overly aggressive. But what is most interesting is that in light of describing how telling the teacher resulted in the perpetrator being suspended, the participant still felt that telling a teacher and getting a positive outcome is hit or miss.

Ultimately, participants agreed that the best response is to stand up for yourself and *fight* back. As one participant said, if "somebody's getting aggressive towards me, I'm going to get aggressive back because show them I'm not afraid and that they need to back down or they're going to get beaten."

6.4   Recommendations for responding to aggression

Without question the ideal place for aggression intervention is at school. Increased effort should be made to increase strategies during times of transition, such as at the beginning of each school year and the beginning of middle and high school. Suspension records clearly indicate that new strategies are needed during middle school as they are commonly used to deal with aggressive behaviour. For participants in this dissertation, grade 7 marked the beginning of

middle school. Interestingly, at the early stages of the two focus groups conducted with grade 7

students, responses tended to be more *politically correct*. In other words, these participants

suggested that the appropriate way to respond to aggression was to talk it over or tell a teacher or

an adult. However, as the discussion progressed, these participants also argued that when

starting a new school aggression was needed to make a name for yourself. It appears as though

these participants are caught in a position of conflicting views such as parents'/teachers' views

and their peer networking views. This may indicate an early stage of development in which the

role of social positioning is beginning to be recognized. The initial transition into middle school

may mark an important threshold as to when the message of telling an authority starts to lose its

credibility. Therefore, if such a specific message is to be effective, it should be concentrated at

this transition period.

In terms of the specific structure of intervention programs, anger management strategies

have been shown to reduce anger, which is a core emotional component of aggression. With that

said however, the success of anger management will be limited to reactive aggression. Anger

has only been specifically linked to reactive aggression as a determinant (Berkowitz, 1989).

Therefore, additional strategies will be needed to intervene with the other proposed functions of

aggression: instrumental aggression and bullying (see section 4.2 for more detail regarding

intervention specifically for bullying).

Based on the data from adolescent participants in this dissertation, intervention strategies

need to legitimize how adolescents experience aggression. It does not matter if the aggressive

event is between friends, associates, or strangers, nor does it matter if the event involves

physical, verbal, relational, or social aggression, the bottom line is the behaviour was intended to

harm. Therefore, intervention has to acknowledge and target all forms and functions of

aggression if it is to be effective and accepted by those it aims to help. Further, it has to be realized that aggression is everywhere and commonplace. Aggression takes place in the public hallways of schools, on the Internet, within the confines of intimate friendships, and in the entertainment world (e.g., film, music, etc.). Intervention cannot wait for *aggressive individuals* to be identified either by authorities or the self-reports of perpetrators and victims. In other words, intervention must be school and society wide.

Intervention strategies must also take into consideration social positioning. Current strategies do not account for the motivating force of social positioning. Intervention strategies that address the construct of social positioning should incorporate means for adolescents to establish social positioning without having to use aggression. For example, adolescents who are isolated do not have social power, which places them at risk for being targeted. By incorporating methods for all adolescents to interact and build social networks, isolated adolescents can develop social power. As discussed in Topic Two, adolescent participants described their need to defend social positioning. Too often adolescents receive messages that they should walk away from perpetrators who are targeting them. Similarly, Lajoie et al. (1997) recommended that targets should not react to bullying, because bullies loose interest in targets who do not react. Unfortunately, this advice is in direct contrast to how aggression is experienced. Participants continuously described that they have to retaliate or risk further harm. Not responding or walking away is a means of forfeiting social position. Standing-up for yourself should not have to involve fighting back or being aggressive, but it is all participants feel they can do. From the data, and consistent with previous research, adolescent participants did not believe that reporting aggression to authorities would be effective. Intervention strategies need to provide a forum in which adolescents can report aggression to authorities who will legitimize their experience and

take action to stop the behaviour. When this takes place, reporting aggression will become a viable means for targets to stand-up for themselves. Overall, such actions should adhere to the recommendation made throughout this section. In addition, school authorities must take into consideration social positioning. When a perpetrator is being aggressive, efforts must be made to not only improve the positioning of targets, but also minimize the ability for the perpetrator to further build and maintain social position. For example, Neal (2010) argued that removing social rewards such as minimizing opportunities for aggressive children to assume leadership roles.

Finally, when intervention strategies are implemented, efforts should be made to evaluate their effectiveness in terms of all types of aggression. As discussed previously, nonphysical forms of aggression are often ignored. By only focusing on one type of aggression, the effectiveness of the intervention will not be fully understood. Further, the emphasis must be on intervention strategies that address all aggression or else intervention will always be limited and incomplete.

Chapter 7 - Challenges to the Research

As with all research, this dissertation encountered a number of challenges that impact not only the collection of data, but also the interpretation of data. The following sections will discuss each category of challenges separately. The discussion of challenges will highlight the difficulties that were encountered through the dissertation process. These challenges should not be thought of as negatives or shortcomings of the research, but rather issues that delayed the overall process, as well as those that should be considered in future research. Following this section, challenges more specific to the interpretation of data are discussed.

7.1   Challenges encountered during the research process

Overall, the most significant challenges experienced during the research process were in relation to the collection of data. The first challenge was encountered prior to commencing data collection when the methodology for the dissertation was modified. Initially, participants were going to be asked open-ended questions by means of a pen-and-paper survey. During a meeting with the principal and a small group of teachers from the alternative school system, concerns were raised regarding participants' potential negative reactions towards such a task, as well as their ability to write insightful responses. As a result, the pen-and-paper format was abandoned and the decision was made to collect data through focus groups. Although this delayed the start of collecting data, the information gathered by means of focus groups far outweighed the cost. Without question, focus groups afford a greater opportunity to build rapport with participants that simply cannot be equalled through a survey format.

The second challenge was encountered when informing individual teachers about the study prior to recruiting participants. After learning the topic of the research was on adolescent aggression, teachers assumed that the researcher was only interested in those students who frequently engaged in fights. This was not surprising because school authorities are more likely to pay attention to and intervene in incidents involving physical aggression than other forms of aggression (see Xie et al., 2003). As a result, it was clearly stated to teachers that the research was concerned with the types of aggression that occur everyday and that all students would be able to contribute. Similarly, those participants who did choose to participate were also told the research was concerned with all types of aggression and not just extreme types or those that were physical and highly visible. In light of the data that were collected and the examples presented in each of the topics, it appears that a well-rounded range of events was discussed.

The third challenge involved eliciting responses from participants. The idea for this research stemmed predominantly from quantitative studies that involved asking adolescents or their peers, parents, or teachers closed-ended questions about aggression. Further, these inquiries tended to focus on topics much more narrow than the overall focus of this dissertation, which was on adolescents' understanding of aggression. Thus, a broad approach was initially used in developing the questions for the interview guide. During the first focus group it quickly became apparent that some of the questions being asked of participants were too general and abstract. This was more specific to the topics of defining aggression and intentionality. It should be noted that it was anticipated to some degree that adolescents would have difficulties with some of the topics and participants were never directly asked "how would you define aggression." Instead, for example, participants were asked, "give me an example of when you or somebody you know did something that you thought was aggressive."

In response to this early challenge, the methodology was again modified. In particular, the interview guide was redeveloped to better elicit responses. This again resulted in a delay before continuing with further data collection. During the focus groups, all efforts were made to have participants focus on concrete examples and avoid talking in the abstract. As mentioned in the procedure section (see section 1.4.2), the procedure was slightly modified in the latter stages by having participants begin by writing an example on paper before they were asked questions. This procedure appeared to help participants focus more quickly on specific examples.

A fourth challenge occurred after completing the focus groups at the alternative school. It was at this point decided that it would be beneficial to collect additional data from the regular school system. However, at this point in time, the school year was nearing completion and data collection would have to resume the following school year in the fall. Unfortunately, it took considerable time to make arrangements to get into the regular school system and data collection did not resume until the following spring rather than that fall.

A fifth challenge was experienced at the beginning of some of the focus groups when a few participants tried to provide more technical responses, which are more consistent with the language and structure one would find in formal dictionaries than the adolescent social environment. A likely explanation for this was how the research and researcher were introduced to participants, which for ethical reasons had to highlight the university affiliation and technical aspects of the ethics protocol. However, once the discussions began, the researcher worked to build rapport and increase participants' comfort with the topic. Reviewing the transcripts it is apparent by the degree to which participants disclosed sensitive examples that rapport was established and participants refrained from trying to provide technical responses.

Overall, participants at times struggled in trying to communicate their thoughts and ideas

regarding aggression. Whenever possible, attempts were made by the researcher to convey this struggle when the themes for each topic were presented. Again it should be noted that some of this difficulty was anticipated and at times embraced. There should be no doubt that the topics addressed throughout this dissertation would be difficult for anyone to discuss whether they are children, adolescents, adults, or even researchers working in the field of aggression. Therefore, future research should not shy away from these topics or the methodology that was used in this dissertation to study them. The struggle encountered by participants is a likely indication that they are simply not used to talking about aggression in a way that requires them to reflect on their experiences and share their thoughts about what it means to them in such a forum.

One final challenge that should be addressed involves the language that was used by participants to communicate their experiences and interpretations of those experiences. Without question, the language was at times coarse and difficult to comprehend. But with this said, the challenge did not come in terms of discomfort with the language that was used. In fact, the participants were encouraged to communicate using their own language and not censor their discussion. Instead, the challenge came in the form of trying to relate the language being presented to the formal literature and research on the topic of aggression. During the presentation of the themes and meaningful units composing those themes, only the gender of participants was presented while the type of school participants were from was not. One may wonder then whether the language used was more characteristic of one type of school (e.g., alternative system for at-risk adolescents) than another. During analysis of the data, there was no indication that certain language was specific to one group or another and instead was reflected by all participants. The only exception was the conversation with the participants from grade 7. In the early stage of their focus groups, these younger participants conveyed more politically

correct discussions regarding how to respond to aggression (see section 6.4 for more detail regarding how these participants were initially responding). Again, as mentioned earlier, these views did change over the course of the discussion and become more consistent with those from the other focus groups.

The goal of this dissertation was to examine how adolescents understand and experience aggression. Further, it involved exploring adolescent folk concepts of aggression. As mentioned earlier, Bruner (1990) argued that folk concepts reflect the language and symbols of the culture being studied. Because of the importance of capturing the language, every effort was used to reproduce throughout the presentation of the thematic analysis results the language used by participants. The issue of language also highlights a potential problem with typical quantitative studies that use measures to survey the presence and frequency of aggressive behaviours. For example, Little, Jones et al. (2003) developed a 36-item scale in which participants respond to each questions with a 4-point scale from *not at all true* to *completely true*. One item was "to get what I want, I often say mean things to others." Language that is more congruent with participants from this dissertation would describe this in the manner of "talking shit about them" or "saying shit you're not supposed to." Another example from the scale includes, "to get what I want, I often hurt others." Participants in this dissertation would more likely describe this event as "if they do it again then I would smash them." While the underlying concepts of the various statements are consistent, it is unclear the extent to which adolescents are able to relate to the language that is being used in the scales developed to measure adolescent aggression. Future research is certainly needed to explore this challenge and the effects it may be having on the results and conclusions that are drawn from such scales.

7.2   Challenges to the interpretation of data

There are three fundamental challenges regarding the interpretation of the data that should be discussed in detail to assist the reader in determining the potential of the findings and conclusions. First, this study was conducted with a relatively small group of adolescents (i.e., 45 participants); therefore, caution must be taken before generalizing any of the results. In fact, it should be explicitly noted that the purpose of this research was not to identify and generalize findings from a small group to the larger adolescent population. Instead, the purpose was to explore how adolescents make sense of and experience aggression and from there identify areas for future research. With further respect to the sample design, a purposive and convenience sample was used. Although this sample included participants from a school district's alternative and regular education programs, further efforts were not made to ensure the sample was representative of the larger adolescent population. Evidently, this further limits the potential to generalize results beyond the groups of students who participated. However, this is not to undermine the significance of the data. There was no evidence to indicate that participants were unique from other adolescents. And based on the data and examples they provided, all participants appeared to be actively engaged members of the adolescent population.

A second challenge to the interpretation of the data centers around the notion of trustworthiness. Just as issues of validity and reliability are important to quantitative research, the issue of trustworthiness is important for judging the findings of qualitative research (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). With respect to trustworthiness, the question becomes how can we trust the quality and merit of the interpretations (Krefting, 1991). The interpretations of the data in this dissertation are those of the researcher. While the majority of the analysis utilized an inductive approach, it is recognized that the researcher played an active role in identifying

patterns and constructing themes. A number of steps were taken to help ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings. First, the researcher was involved in every step of the research study. The researcher was involved in researching the literature and conceptualizing the study. As well, the researcher facilitated all focus groups, transcribed the audio files, conducted the data analyses, and wrote the dissertation, therefore, ensuring full emersion in the data. Second, trustworthiness can also be assessed in terms of consistency between the dissertation's findings and previous research. Results from this dissertation were found to support previous research in a number of ways. As well, results yielded numerous new findings indicating that the analysis was inductive and not strictly guided by previous research. Third, initial observations and interpretations from earlier focus groups were, when applicable, presented to subsequent focus groups in a manner of member checking. This process not only helped to ensure that interpretations were consistent with participants' perspectives, but it also provided opportunities for clarification. Finally, participants' quotes pertaining to themes and interpretations were provided to allow for the transparency in the data analyses.

The third fundamental challenge affecting interpretations involves the completion of the data collection. Knowing exactly when to stop collecting data is always a challenge when conducting qualitative analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1998) identified saturation as a criterion for determining when data collection should stop. Saturation is reached when additional data collection fails to yield new findings. In this study, data collection ended when participants no longer provided additional information to address the research questions. However, there are no clear rules determining when saturation should be assessed. In terms of this study, saturation was determined according to very early stage or preliminary interpretations of the data from field notes. In other words, data collection was stopped prior to transcribing audio files and

commencing with the more rigorous process of data analysis, which continued right up to the

writing of this report. This study raised a number of questions that will need to be answered with

further research. Every effort was made to identify these instances to ensure that future research

can build on the results of this study.

Chapter 8 - Putting It All Together

The purpose of this research was to understand how adolescents experience and make sense of aggression. Specifically, this research examined how adolescents (a) define aggression, (b) experience aggression that is acceptable, (c) conceptualize bullying in association with aggression, and (d) make sense of intentionality in the context of aggression. Throughout the literature there is wide-spread inconsistency in how aggression in general is defined. Results in Topic One found that adolescent participants self-defined aggression as a behaviour in which a perpetrator intends to harm a target. This finding was consistent with the most commonly used definitions of aggression (see Berkowitz, 1988; Feshbach, 1964). Further, participants provided examples of aggression that were consistent with previously defined forms such as physical, verbal, relational, and social aggression. As a result, participants demonstrated that adolescent aggression exists in multiple forms and the underlying characteristics include intent and harm.

Importantly, participants were found to experience most of the different forms of aggression as distinct behaviours. For example, participants distinguished between the duration of outcomes for physical and verbal aggression. Specifically, they shared experiences in which the effects of physical aggression were only short term, while the effects of verbal aggression were long term. As a result, this study demonstrated an inherent problem when researchers amalgamate physical and verbal aggression together based on overt/covert or direct/indirect characteristics. Participants also described social and relational forms of aggression. Most examples of relational aggression involved the use of cyber technology. Therefore, while the examples were consistent with formal definitions of relational aggression (e.g., behaviour intended to damage a target's social relationships; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), cyber technology

was described as providing many of the benefits of social aggression (e.g., being nonconfrontational and hiding the perpetrator's identity). In light of this blurring of the boundaries between relational and social aggression, it seems reasonable to combine the constructs into one (e.g., simply call it social aggression) and distinguish it further using the overt/covert and direct/indirect classification criteria.

What was most interesting was that participants clearly associated aggression with the emotion of anger. While few definitions of aggression have included anger as an element, anger has been studied as a determinant of aggression for a long time. In particular, anger is seen as a primary response to negative affect and leads to aggressive responding (Berkowitz, 1990, 1994). Participants identified anger as a contributing factor in terms of reactive aggression. Further, anger was also associated with physical aggression. Additional research is needed to better understand the role that anger plays in adolescents' conceptualization of aggression. From this study it appears as though participants specifically understood anger as a factor producing aggression as opposed to a defining element of aggression in general.

The results of Topic One further identified tone as an important characteristic in adolescent participants' understanding of aggression. According to participants, tone is used by perpetrators to convey the intent to harm and is used by targets and external observers to infer meaning. In other words, participants described tone in a way to suggest it may be the most important factor in interpreting aggressive behaviour. Further research is needed to examine the nature and extent to which a perpetrator's intentions are conveyed and inferred through tone.

Topic Two specifically looked at the capacity in which adolescents experience acceptable aggression. The contexts in which participants experienced aggression as acceptable were characterized by social positioning. Social positioning was conceptualized in this study as a

multifaceted index of an individual's social status and vulnerability to aggression within the social hierarchy. Social positioning was found to consist of four elements. First, reputation agency motivates targets to respond and stand-up for themselves. Second, chronological status consists of age and grade and automatically adjusts social positioning from year to year. Third, social power is based on the degree to which an individual is socially connected in terms of friendships and perceived popularity. Fourth, physical toughness entails an individual's willingness to be aggressive regardless of the potential to be harmed.

Social positioning operates as both a motivating factor behind aggression and an indicator of who can get away with being aggressive. In terms of motivation, individuals with a low social position are more vulnerable to being aggressed against. Therefore, when adolescents are targeted they have a choice to either stand-up and defend their position or not stand-up and have their social position harmed which will increase their vulnerability to future aggression. When participants talked about acceptable aggression it was in the context of defending one's social position. Social positioning was also found to play a role in terms of who can get away with aggression. For example, those who had social power and physical toughness were said to get away with being aggressive. Evidently, those who were said to not get away with aggression were described as lacking social positioning, being too reactive, and constantly misinterpreting situations.

Social positioning has important implications for developing intervention strategies for aggression. Reputation agency was identified as a component of social positioning in the sense that adolescents risk harm to their social position if they do not stand-up for themselves. As a result, interventions that do not provide adolescents with a means to defend their social position will not be accepted by adolescents, and therefore, only experience minimal success at best.

Interventions should also include strategies to help adolescents with low social positioning elevate their position by means of social power. Such strategies would involve means for them to build social networks with peers. Further, these interventions must also limit the ability of perpetrators to acquire social positioning by means of aggressive behaviour.

Topic Three examined how adolescents conceptualize bullying in relation to aggression in general. Participants expressed that bullying can consist of all forms of aggression. What distinguishes it from the other forms of aggression is that it constitutes (a) predatory and (b) repetitive behaviour. In terms of predatory behaviour, participants argued that perpetrators single out targets who are weak in terms of social positioning. This is consistent with formal definitions of bullying that highlight the power differential between the perpetrator and target (Olweus, 1995; Pellegrini & Long, 2002). With respect to repetitiveness, participants clearly stated that bullying did not constitute a single isolated behaviour, but rather repetitive aggressive behaviour for the purpose of wearing down the target.

When describing why a perpetrator engages in bullying, participants described a couple of reasons that distinguish it from the other two forms of aggression (i.e., reactive and instrumental aggression). First, perpetrators were said to choose to bully as opposed to responding to provocation, which distinguished bullying from reactive aggression. Second, perpetrators were said to be looking for a reaction from targets. Third, perpetrators were described as being in a state of *litost*, in which bullying is used in an attempt to make themselves feel better. While the second and third reasons are consistent with instrumental aggression, their specificity is unique to bullying and not other functions of aggression. Additionally, the nature of the relationship between the perpetrator and target and the repetitiveness of the behaviour further distinguished bullying from other types of aggression. Therefore, it is proposed that

bullying should be treated as a unique function of aggression. As such, aggression should be classified according to a trichotomy of (a) instrumental aggression, (b) reactive aggression, and (c) bullying.

Topic Four looked specifically at how adolescents' understanding of intentionality influences their experiences of aggression and in particular the degree of harm aggression results in. Similar to previous research (see Malle et al., 1997), participants in this study distinguished between aggressive intentions and performing aggression intentionally. By their very definition of aggression, participants understood aggression as the intent to harm, but an event was only perceived to be intentional if the resulting harm of the target resulted from the perpetrator's behaviour and was consistent with the degree of harm he/she intended. Inconsistent with previous research, participants added that intentionality consisted of further components, such as performing the intended behaviour, obtaining the desired goal, and most interestingly, intensity. Participants argued that intentional aggression was more intense. As a result, intentional aggression was seen as being more harmful. Intensity was not limited to only physical aggression, because participants argued that in the context of nonphysical aggression harm is related to the extent to which the perpetrator manipulates the event. For example, editing and posting pictures on the Internet requires more effort, and therefore, greater desires, beliefs, and intentions to harm the target.

Interestingly, the association between anger and aggression added a further level of complexity to participants' understanding of intentionality. For some, anger was argued to negate intentionality, because anger was argued to impair perpetrators' thinking. Conversely, other participants argued that anger was a necessary component of intentionality. In light of the association participants made between anger and aggression, in particular anger operating as a

precursor to aggression, participants were linking anger to the intent to harm. But because anger is also argued to cloud the perpetrator's judgement, ultimately unintended targets may be harmed. Therefore, it appeared as though it was because of the unintended targets that participants classified the entire event as unintentional. Due to the role that intentionality plays in the degree of harm that is experienced, future research is required to further investigate the association between anger, aggression, and intentionality.

Taken together, these results demonstrate that adolescent participants self-identified and supported many of the elements of aggression that have been theorized in previous research. But, what is most important is that participants did not simply support one area of research when they discussed aggression; rather they supported a multitude of different perspectives. For example, participants provided definitions of aggression that were consistent with definitions of general aggression, but as well, they identified distinct contexts of reactive, instrumental, bullying, physical, verbal, relational, and social aggression. Therefore, these results emphasize the need for future research to consistently define and distinguish the many different types of aggression. Unfortunately, the amalgamation and inconsistent use of terms has led to a body of literature that is confusing and it has become difficult to compare the results from one study to the next. If adolescents experience aggression in unique ways, it is time for researchers to recognize this in order to advance the field of adolescent aggression research.

The methodology used in this study helped to identify from participants' experiences, a unique construct of social positioning. While it bears some resemblance to previous constructs identified through quantitative methods, it provides a clear rationale as to the factors motivating adolescents to behave aggressively. Most importantly, it has clear implications for adolescent aggression intervention strategies because it accounts for the acceptable side of aggression.

While it may be uncomfortable for some to think about aggression as having an acceptable side, it is something that must be considered, because as this study demonstrated, adolescents are not only aware of it, but they also experience it.

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Appendix A: Student and teacher information, assent, and consent form

Student Information and Consent Form
Thoughts About Aggression Study

Jonathan Brown, a graduate student from the University of British Columbia Okanagan is conducting a research study at your school. <u>You are invited to participate</u> in this study, which is looking at some of the things students your age think about aggression. The following provides some important information about the study. If you have any questions after reading this information please contact the researcher, Jonathan Brown, at (250) 807-8789 or his supervisor Dr. Cynthia Mathieson (UBCO College of Graduate Studies) at (250) 807-8773.

WHAT:
- The study is looking at what adolescents your age think about aggressive behaviour.
- The study will ask participants what they think aggression is, and what are the characteristics of people who engage in aggressive behaviour.
- The study involves participating in a focus group (i.e., a small group discussion facilitated by the researcher).

WHO:
- You along with other students in the central Okanagan are invited to participate in the study.

WHY:
- Information gathered from the study will help researchers to understand some of the ways adolescents think about aggression.
- Such information will help to develop future prevention and intervention programs that will help decrease the negative effects of aggression.

WHEN & WHERE:
- The study will take place in a week or two here at your school.
- The focus group for this study will take place during school time and will require a maximum of 1 hour to complete.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:
- If you would like to participate in the study, you will need to complete page 4.
- You will also need to get your teacher's permission to participate in this study.
- Participation in this study is **not a requirement** of your school. **You may choose not to participate**. You will not be penalized if you do not participate.
- Even if you choose to participate, you **do not have to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with**. You may also withdraw from the study at anytime.
- Because of the general nature of the questions asked in the questionnaire there are no anticipated risks to you.
- If you choose not to participate in this study, you will continue to work on regular school work as assigned by your teacher.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE:
- A maximum of five adolescents and the researcher will be involved in each focus group. Teachers, parents, school administers, and other students not participating in the focus group will not have access to any of your responses.
- To help protect confidentiality, those participating in the focus group will be asked not to share the other participants' responses.
- For note taking purposes, the discussion will be audio recorded.
- **Only the researcher** (Jonathan Brown), his supervisor (Dr. Cynthia Mathieson), and a research assistant will have access to the information collected. All notes and audio files wick be kept in a protected and confidential manner.
- Participants will be asked about what they think aggression is and what types of people engage in it.
- Participants **will not** be asked to talk about their specific experiences with aggressive behaviour.

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW
- A small number of Participants will be asked if they would like to participate in a follow-up interview to discuss the results of this study and provide additional feedback in approximately 1 month.
- These will be individual interviews conducted by the researcher.
- These interviews will be **completely confidential**. Teachers, parents, school administrators, and other students will not have any access to any participant's responses.
- Those participating in the focus group **do not** have to participate in the follow-up interview.

- The follow-up interview will require a maximum of 30 minutes to complete.

QUESTIONS?
- If you have any questions regarding the proposed study you can contact Jonathan Brown at (250) 807-8789.
- You may also contact Dr. Cynthia Mathieson, supervisor of this research project, at (250) 807-8773.
- If you have any general questions about your rights as a participant please contact the UBC Office of Research Services at (640) 822-8598 or if long distance email to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:
- The information collected for this study will be used in Jonathan Brown's Ph.D Dissertation.
- Results of the study will be summarised and presented in research papers, conferences, and a report to your school district.
- The information provided in all reports, papers, and presentations cannot be used to identify you.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Brown

Student Assent:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to your class standing.

By signing below, you agree to participate in this study, but again you may withdraw at any time. Your signature also indicates that you received a copy of the consent form for your own records.

_____
Student Name (please print)

_____   _____
Student Signature   Date

Teacher Consent:

Please fill in the appropriate circle.

Ⓨ   I consent to _____ participating in this study.
                    (please print student's name)

Ⓝ   I do not consent to _____ participating in this study.
                    (please print student's name)

_____
Teacher's Name (please print)

_____   _____
Teacher's Signature   Date

Participant Focus Group:
Question Guide

OKANAGAN

1. Give me an example of someone being aggressive
    a. Why would the person do that?
    b. What is the person thinking?
        - Do you think they are thinking of an outcome?
    c. Why else might someone do that?

2. Give me an example of someone being a bully
    a. Why would the person do that?
    b. What is the person thinking?
        - Do you think they are thinking of an outcome?
    c. Why else might someone do that?

3. Give me an example of a time when it is OK to be aggressive?
    a. Why in this instance is it OK to be aggressive?
    b. What would happen if the person was not aggressive?

4. Can you think of a person who is often aggressive, but never gets in trouble (by teachers or peers)?
    a. Exactly how is he/she aggressive (what types of behaviours does he/she engage in)
    b. How would you describe this person?
    c. Why do you think he/she can get away with it?

5. Give me an example of a time when it is **NOT** OK to be aggressive?
    a. Why in this instance is it not OK to be aggressive?
    b. What would happen in this case?

6. Can you think of a person who is often aggressive, but always gets in trouble (by teachers or peers)?
    a. Exactly how is he/she aggressive (what types of behaviours does he/she engage in)
    b. How would you describe this person?
    c. Why do you think he/she doesn't get away with it?

7. Tell me about a time when you or someone you know intentionally (or purposely) acted aggressive

a. What were you thinking
- What did you want to happen?
- Did you know what would happen?
- Did you think you were going to be successful?
- Is all aggression intentional?
b. Why did you decide to use aggression?

8. Is all aggression harmful?
   a. What makes some aggression more harmful than others?
   b. Are there certain types of aggression that are more harmful
   c. Are there certain reasons for behaving aggressively that are more harmful?

9. Describe an act of aggression you **WOULD NOT** consider to be harmful.

What have I missed asking you about that is important for me to know?