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EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES ON CURRENT EXPRESSIONS OF VERBAL AGGRESSION AND ASSERTIVENESS

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By

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EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

ON CURRENT EXPRESSIONS OF VERBAL AGGRESSION AND

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By

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out if there is a relationship between verbal aggression and assertiveness. Specifically, the aim was to establish the extent to which demographic factors, family of origin variables and early life exposure to trauma affects the occurrence of verbal aggression and assertiveness in day to day interactions. Data was collected using an online survey and results from 321 participants were analyzed. Results from the study indicated that age, gender and exposure to verbal aggression have a significant effect on the occurrence of verbal aggression. None of the variables were found to have an effect on the occurrence of Assertiveness. Implications of these are discussed in the results section.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Verbal aggression has been noted as perilous to the collective society and significantly affects individuals' daily lives (Hamilton, 2012). It is considered a destructive form of communication and has been reported to result in violent crimes, and intensified violence between spouses (Infante, 1995). Assertiveness, on the other hand, has been found to be a critical aspect of effective communication, establishing and maintaining positive relationships as well as effective conflict resolution. It involves the ability to make choices and stand up for oneself without infringing on the rights of others (Sigler, Burnett, & Child, 2008).

While these two constructs are different, Tucker, Weaver, and Redden (1983) highlight the challenges faced when identifying the differences between verbal aggression and assertiveness. First, to the layman, the definitions of these two constructs are not distinct. People may recognize what is considered good or bad social skills, but they cannot state the difference between assertiveness and verbal aggression. Secondly, in any given situation, verbal aggression and assertiveness will depend on the perception of the individual receiving the communication based on the context of the conversation (Tucker et al., 1983). To investigate whether the individuals would identify the difference between the two constructs, Tucker et al. (1983) found that participants identified descriptors of assertiveness and verbal aggression as the same construct, having

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no distinction. The study concluded that the two constructs might continue to be used interchangeably unless a clearly defined operational definition is available.

Operational Definitions

Thompson and Berebaum (2011) noting the tendency to phrase verbal aggression and assertiveness interchangeably, designed a study of the two concepts, and noted that many reviews and instruments used in research confuse the two concepts of assertiveness and aggression. Thompson and Berebaum (2011), therefore, sought to design a measure based on the definition that assertiveness is a method of actively reacting to a situation of interpersonal conflict with the primary aim of getting one's needs met. Consequently, they described two ways of responding to a situation assertively as Aggressive Assertiveness and Adaptive Assertiveness. Thompson and Berebaum (2011) defined aggressive assertiveness as behaviors that enable an individual to get his/her needs met forcefully while infringing on other people's rights. Adaptive assertiveness, as determined by Thompson and Berebaum (2011), refers to active behaviors that enable one to express himself/herself effectively without violating other people's rights and is, therefore, considered a socially acceptable manner. For the purposes of this study, verbal aggression will be operationally defined by the definition of aggressive assertiveness; while the concept of assertiveness will be represented by the definition of adaptive assertiveness. The two constructs will also be referred as verbal aggression and assertiveness.

Social Learning Theory

This study proposes the social learning theory as a theoretical foundation for understanding the influence different demographic and social variables have on assertiveness and verbal aggression. According to Bandura (1978), human behavior is influenced by the interaction of one's cognitive, behavioral and environmental influences. Miller (2016) reports that often children emulate behavior because they observe it being reinforced in the environment. According to this study, children often observe behaviors, imitate the behaviors and control their behaviors by repeating to themselves statements of approval or disapproval. Based on this, it can be inferred that children will learn verbally aggressive and assertive behavior based on what they observe in their environment in different situations, and how the behaviors observed are rewarded.

Problem Statement

While conducting the literature review for this study, it was noted that there was no recent literature in the United States about assertiveness. A majority of the studies were from the 1970s to the 1980s after the Senate approved the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972. This observation suggests a gap in the literature that represents the changes that have occurred in the society since then. This study aims to add to the research on assertiveness and provide an understanding of the current society's opinion on the matter. Another reason for an interest in this study is that in the current political climate in the United States, many people with varied opinions have been very vocal; and the response is that more people of dissenting opinions are expressing their displeasure in this climate

of open expression. While one is engaging in communication reflecting the definition of being assertive, the effective response of the intended or unintended recipient of the communication may be negative (i.e., hurt, angry, anxious), which is not the intent of expressions of assertiveness (Tucker et al., 1983). Assertive communication aims to effectively communicate an opinion or a perspective while maintaining a level of respect to the feelings of the person receiving the information. Also, the very same communication or action may be received by another recipient as an invitation for discourse and continued conversation. What is assertive to one may be perceived as aggressive to another and vice versa, hence the persisting confusion in day to day communication as well as in the literature.

This study proposes to provide more information on the etiology of assertive and verbally aggressive behavior and the degree to which the points of etiology contribute to the presence of each construct. The primary objective of this study is to examine the degree to which demographic background information (age, racial/ethnic status, majority/minority, sex), family of origin (socio-economic status, parenting style), and self-reported experience with early childhood trauma contribute to the variance in individuals' self-reported engagement in behaviors defined as verbal aggression and assertiveness as measured by using The Adaptive and Aggressive Assertiveness Scale (AAA-S; Thompson & Berebaum, 2011). Examination of the results of a Pearson product correlation matrix will be used to identify the relationship between the two constructs. The results of the regression add to the literature by providing more

information on the extent to which each of the independent variables influence the occurrence of each of the dependent variables.

Etiology of Verbal Aggression and Assertiveness

The effects of verbal aggression on the recipient include damage of self-concept, anger, embarrassment, hurt feelings and may eventually lead to physical aggression between the two parties involved in the communication (Infante, 1995; Roberto, Meyer, Booster, & Roberto, 2003). Evidence of the need to monitor and address the consequence of individuals' long-term exposure to verbal aggression is apparent in a study by Greico-Spillane (2000). The study reported that children who had previously been exposed to aggressive environments at home were observed to develop aggressive tendencies and symptoms of depression. The study by Greico-Spillane (2000) was conducted to examine the lifestyles of aggressive teens and how it may affect their current behavior. The participants of the study consisted of 25 teenagers considered as offenders and a comparison group of 25 teenagers randomly selected from different schools within the same county. Individual interviews were conducted with the experimental group to establish previous charges of assault, terroristic threats or any other violations of the law. Data was collected using rating scales to identify the rates of individual aggressiveness and perceptions of abuse and violence in the participants' families. The results of the study indicated that the aggression levels for the offender group were higher than that of the control group. The study also established that the offender group had experienced more cases of violence in their families than the non-offender group. This study added to the research that supports the conclusion that there is

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a direct correlation between the family of origin influences and the degree to which an individual engages in verbal aggression. The results of this study also indicate that verbal aggression has adverse effects on the development of children and adolescents with some of them becoming both physically and verbally aggressive.

Trauma may take many forms as a result of events experienced either directly or indirectly (e.g., experiencing violence at home or community, sexual assault, being involved in or witnessing an accident). Allen (2011) conducted a study to determine the effects of psychological abuse on adult aggression. The study focused on three types of aggression (aggressive attitude, verbal aggression, and physical aggression) and involved 236 participants, predominantly Caucasian with an average age of 19 years. Data was collected using rating scales that were completed by the participants. Results of this study indicated that there was a positive correlation between participants' reported experiences of psychological abuse and their expression of different forms of aggression. The study also established that conflict in relationships predicted aggressive behavior. Poor interaction skills result in the child developing poor relationship skills and increase the chances of relational problems as an adult. These problems may end up in higher chances of increased verbal aggression. This study supports previous studies that have reported that exposure to trauma may lead to the expression of verbally aggressive behavior (Routt & Anderson, 2011).

Assertiveness in individuals is influenced mainly by status, roles in society, level, and manner of assertiveness expressed by parents. Individuals with the same level of education have been found in most cases to exhibit similar levels of assertiveness despite

gender, culture, or ethnicity (Parham, Lewis, Fretwel, Irwin, & Schrimsher, 2015). In a study, to examine the differences in assertiveness across different cultures, Parham et al. (2015) concluded that white American males were most assertive, followed by African American women then followed by Caucasian women. African American women were found to be more assertive than their male counterparts. These studies highlight the differences in assertiveness based on culture and gender. Children of assertive parents, who grow up observing their parents and seeing assertive behaviors being rewarded, are likely to learn assertive behaviors. Children brought up by assertive parents are more likely to be more assertive when compared to those whose parents are less assertive (Martin & Anderson 1997).

Spanking vs. Traumatic Abuse

Discipline in some families is enforced by spanking. Researchers have defined spanking as an act that is meant to inflict pain on a child, to correct or control his/her behavior and involve explicitly hitting the child with an open hand on the buttock or extremities without causing physical harm or leaving bruises (Afifi et al., 2017; Kazdin & Benjet, 2003). MacKenzie, Nicklas, Brooks-Gunn, and Waldfogel (2014) conducted a longitudinal study to better understand the effects of frequent spanking over time. The study took into consideration several risk factors including maternal cognitive functioning, divorced or separated parents, parents' level of education, parents' reported cases of depression or anxiety, exposure to drugs and alcohol. The study established a significant correlation between spanking and externalizing behaviors, including

aggression. The study also concluded that children who had been exposed to more risk factors were affected more by spanking.

The results of the study by MacKenzie et al. (2014) were supported by a more recent study by Afifi et al. (2017) who examined the association of spanking with poor adult health problems. Data for this study was collected using self-reports from adults who were members of a healthcare maintenance organization in California seeking health checks at an out-patient clinic. The study involved a comparison between the effect of childhood spanking and childhood emotional and physical abuse (e.g., using objects to hit, pushing, and kicking). Findings established that a history of spanking, just like a history of emotional and physical abuse during childhood, is highly correlated with suicide attempts as well as alcohol, drug, and substance use.

In a literature review to study the effects of spanking, Kazdin and Benjet (2003) highlighted three different perspectives held by groups of scholars. The first perspective is that spanking, like corporal punishment, results in harmful effects on children in the long run as it encourages and models violence while the second perspective which is deemed as unpopular stipulates that spanking results in positive behaviors, including respect for authority (Kazdin & Benjet, 2003). With these groups in mind, it is important to note that Kazdin and Benjet (2003) established a common trend during the study. Spanking has been associated with lower quality of parent-child relationships, antisocial behavior in children, increased cases of criminal behavior in adults in the long run, and children reporting being victims of abuse or becoming abusers in adulthood. The third perspective highlighted by Kazdin and Benjet (2003) is held by scholars who do not

support spanking, but also believe that the effects of spanking may not necessarily result in a positive or negative impact on development. According to this group, the effects of spanking depend on the context surrounding its use, as well as the frequency and intensity of its use. The belief is that there is no scientific support for the impact of spanking and, therefore, an "overall judgment" should not be passed about it. While Kazdin and Benjet (2003) highlight the different schools of thought for the overall impact of spanking on children, many researchers have concluded that spanking has adverse effects on children in the long-run (Afifi et al., 2017; Kazdin & Benjet, 2003; MacKenzie et al., 2014).

The definition of spanking that involves the use of open palms and not causing bruises separates it from the definition of corporal punishment and physical abuse; which may include the use of excessive force and objects to inflict physical pain. For this study, it is essential to highlight the difference between spanking and severe physical abuse. Physical abuse according to Coid et al. (2001) is often reported as one of the causes of trauma during childhood and will be one of the indicators of trauma for this study. Spanking for the purposes of this study will be based on the operational definition of inflicting pain on a child by striking the extremities or buttocks using an open palm. The study will also be conducted on the premise that spanking may not necessarily cause harmful effects (e.g., increased aggressive behavior) to children.

The effects of verbal aggression and assertiveness as highlighted above cannot be understated. A better understanding of the two concepts and being able to differentiate between the two can help in having a different approach to situations that may otherwise

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be harmful. It may also help the recipient to analyze a situation and come up with solutions that may mitigate the effects of verbal aggression and/or assertive behavior. It is also important to conduct more studies on assertiveness and verbal aggression as they have been found to continue developing through adolescence and into young adulthood.

Several researchers have reported the relationship between direct and indirect exposure to trauma in early childhood and aggressive behavior. Children who were exposed to trauma have been reported to exhibit problem behavior like aggression and criminal behavior (Allen, 2011). However, not all children who have been exposed to trauma exhibit this behavior in adulthood. Some of them have been reported to grow up to be against any form of aggression. A study by Routt and Anderson (2011) supported these findings by stating that when many children experience domestic violence at home, the result is that some do not become violent, while others do. The same applies to Assertiveness. Simmons (2013) reported that not all children who have experienced childhood abuse have poor psychological outcomes. Some of the children show optimal levels of resiliency and have some levels of good adaptation that resulted in positive outcomes in adulthood. This premise is another reason why it would be important to further study the etiology of verbal aggression and assertiveness, understand the variables under investigation and to what extent they influence the occurrence of the verbal aggression and assertiveness in communication

Purpose

The purpose of this study will be to address the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant relationship between assertiveness and verbal aggression?

2. To what degree do participants' demographics (i.e., age, racial/ethnic status—majority/minority, sex), family of origin variables (i.e., SES, parenting style), and self-reported experience with early childhood trauma (i.e., experienced, observed) predict the variance in college students' expression of verbal aggression in their day to day relationships?

3. To what degree do participants' demographics (i.e., age, racial/ethnic status—majority/minority, sex), family of origin variables (i.e., SES, parenting style), and self-reported experience with early childhood trauma (i.e., experienced, observed) predict the variance in college students' expression of Assertiveness in their day to day relationships?

A correlation matrix will be utilized to analyze the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. A comprehensive literature review of the various independent variables is conducted in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aggression is defined as observable, overt behavior (physical, verbal, or relational) that is intended to cause physical, emotional or psychological pain to another person, who does not desire to be harmed (Baumeister & Finkel, 2010). Verbal aggression refers to actions that cause harm using words considered hurtful by the recipient (e.g., cursing or yelling; Xie, Farmer, Beverley & Cairns, 2003). Assertiveness, on the other hand, is defined as the expression of one's ideas, wishes and preferences in a manner that is not intended to threaten or hurt the self or the other party (Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011). Martin and Anderson (1997) describe people who are assertive as forthright, independent, and competitive.

A literature review was completed by gathering information from PsycArticles, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, ERIC, PsycInfo, SAGE Journals and Wiley Intersciences. The search began by identifying the difference between assertiveness and verbal aggression then went further to identify factors that affect verbal aggression and assertiveness. Specifically, the search involved terms including the effect of parenting style on verbal aggression, effect of social economic status on verbal aggression, effect of age, ethnicity and gender on verbal aggression, verbal aggression and race/ethnicity, age, gender, effect of trauma on expression of verbal aggression, and trauma and verbal aggression. The same terms were used when conducting the study on assertiveness. The search obtained about 250 hits. Out of these, about 150 articles were

used for this study. Inclusion criteria included articles that were specific to the dependent variables and focused on day to day interactions.

When conducting the literature review for this study, it was noted that compared to other forms of aggression, there were fewer studies of the effect of verbal aggression in everyday interactions. According to Glascock (2014), this could be explained by the fact that verbal aggression is usually considered an antecedent to physical aggression and therefore few researchers (Hamilton, 2012; Infante & Wrigley 1986; Infante, 1995; Liu, Lewis & Evans, 2013; Martin & Anderson, 1997; Reitman & Villa, 2004) have carried out studies focusing specifically on verbal aggression.

Verbal Aggression vs. Microaggressions and Bullying

Of importance in this study is the need to note the difference between microaggressions, bullying, and verbal aggression. Microaggressions are defined as either intentional or unintentional, brief, daily, verbal, and behavioral interactions that can be humiliating, received as offensive or undesirable slurs by a target group (Campbell & Manning, 2014). According to Guy and Boysen (2012), microaggressions are usually vague, subtle and unintentional, but have been found to have a negative impact on the recipients. According to Lilienfield (2017), microaggressions are indirect insults targeted at minority groups. They can be direct, indirect, verbal, non-verbal, and/or environmental. Examples of micro-aggressions include racial slurs and ignoring minority groups and can range from actions considered to be of a smaller scale like ethnic jokes and slurs, which in some cases are inadvertent to more adverse acts like mass murders

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(Sue et al., 2007). Acts of microaggression may also include verbal attacks, avoidance, and exclusion (Guy & Boysen, 2012).

Like verbal aggression, there is increasing evidence that microaggressions have a negative impact on the emotional, cognitive and behavioral well-being of individuals (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Guy and Boysen (2012) state that in schools, victims of microaggressions have a negative perception of school, experience mental and psychological stress and have negative reports on their physical health. The victims have also been found to experience anxiety, depression, and anger as well as feelings of being disengaged and powerless in some situations (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Micro-aggressions have been found to have negative impacts on the recipient. Sue et al. (2007), however, state that they are generally not considered "aggressive" because the judgment of its occurrence depends on the perspective of the recipient. However, it is important to note such incidences because the recipients often respond with aggressive behavior. Based on the literature it is essential to make a distinction between verbal aggression and microaggression. While acts of micro-aggression most of the time are inadvertent and mostly vague and subtle, verbal aggression is more intentional, and the perpetrator aims to cause harm to the recipient. Though potentially having the same negative impact on the recipients of the words or behaviors, individuals engaging in verbal aggression have the intent to harm; whereas for individuals who are expressing a microaggression the intention is not to hurt though they may have done so.

Another form of verbal aggression most prevalent in the current literature is bullying. The most frequently used operational definition of bullying is that purported by

Olweus (1993, p. 9): "A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students." Bullying can be physical or verbal and is intended to cause harm to the victim (Modin, Låftman, & Östberg, 2015). Statistics from the National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES, 2016) show that among children aged between 12 to 18 years, 20.8% have been bullied. Of this percentage, 13.3% reported being made fun of, called names or insulted. Reitman and Villa (2004) state that verbal aggression may be ignored or unreported because in most cases the victims are afraid of making the situation worse. Adults, who observe such conditions in most cases do not view it as a problem, dismiss it as good-natured humor, and the verbal aggression act is therefore downplayed. While the NCES has systematically studied the secondary education system in the United States, no such comprehensive study of bullying exists for post-secondary education. A few researchers have investigated bullying among students at a specific institution (Perry & Blincoe, 2015).

Smith et al. (2002) discussed the difference between aggression and bullying based on the definition that aggressive behavior is intentional and perpetrated to cause harm to others. They argue that this difference is because bullying can be either physical or verbal, intentional, repeatedly done over an extended period and situations where there is an imbalance of power. Bullying can be identified as a subset of the broader concept of aggression. Based on this, the authors conclude that a physical fight or verbal argument between two individuals of the same strength is not considered bullying but can

be referred to as aggression as behavior that inadvertently causes harm is not considered aggression.

Previous attempts to distinguish between assertive and aggressive behavior have been difficult because of a limited understanding of the concept of assertiveness and the lack of specificity of the observable behavioral components of the two constructs (Rakos, 1979). Rathus, Fox, and Cristofaro (1979) sought to find out the public's definition of assertiveness and the implications for the use of the term assertiveness. For the study, 14 teachers rated students according to an adjective checklist with a rating with zero meaning that the adjective does not describe the student, one somewhat described the student, and two was very descriptive of the student. The teachers rated a total of 41 male students and 54 female students. The researchers concluded that assertiveness may not be apparent to the layperson as a prosaically, discrete personality type and is sometimes not easily differentiated from aggressiveness. Because of this reason, assertiveness is sometimes considered a negative trait characterized by hostility and being unreasonable. They concluded that the general public might not have an understanding of the professional usage of the concept of assertiveness. While the most significant difference in the two constructs depends on the intention of the perpetrator, the biggest challenge in trying to differentiate verbally aggressive behavior from assertive behavior is that the response to either of the constructs depends on the perception of the recipient. Verbal aggression is intended to cause harm to the recipient while assertiveness is meant to protect one's rights without violating the rights of others (Peneva & Mavrodiev, 2013). Although the complexity associated with differentiating between the two constructs

continues as a point of discussion for clarification, the etiology of the individual's intent in communication to increase the probability of affirmation by another remains a point of confusion, too.

In this chapter, the literature that examines the relationship between demographics (sex, age, racial/ethnic status), family of origin (social economic status and parenting style), and experience of childhood trauma will be reviewed to provide an overview of current perspectives of the impact on the interpersonal styles associated with assertiveness and verbal aggression. Thompson and Berebaum (2011) define verbal aggression as behavior that enables an individual to get his/her needs met forcefully while infringing on other people's rights. Hamilton (2012) describes aggressive language as offensive, rude, opinionated and vulgar. According to Infante and Wigley (1986), verbal aggression attacks a person's self-concept and has been found to be a very destructive form of communication. Adolescents who have been exposed to verbal aggression have also been found to exhibit negative behaviors in various settings (Strauss, Sweet, & Vissing, 1989). Severance et al. (2013) highlight the significant difference in the damages between verbal and physical aggression as physical aggression results in injuries to the recipient's body while verbal aggression leads to emotional and relational harm, often being the precedent of physical aggression. Studies also indicate that individuals who have been exposed to more negative life events are more likely to exhibit verbal aggression when compared to those who have experienced more positive life events (Hamilton, 2012). This study will review how demographics, the family of

origin and exposure to trauma influence an individual's propensity to exhibit verbal aggression.

<div align="center">**Verbal Aggression**</div>

Demographics

      Gender. Women in the USA have traditionally been socialized to relate negative results with direct aggression, which is associated with loss of or lack of control, and therefore, they are more likely to resort to indirect aggression (Tapper & Boulton, 2004). Indirect aggression would be considered a more convenient strategy as it does not have the consequence of social disapproval. In contrast, aggression in males is associated with being in control and attainment of higher status (Tapper & Boulton, 2004). In previous studies, aggression research focused on males based on the assumption that they were more aggressive and tended to be more apt to display physically aggressive behavior; women were considered non-aggressive (Nelson, Springer, Nelson, & Bean, 2008). This premise was supported by Glascock (2014), whose study concluded that adult males have generally been found to be more aggressive than females.

      According to Tapper and Boulton (2004), studies on sex differences and forms of aggression have shown that boys tend to be more directly aggressive than girls, while girls employed a more indirect form of aggression to minimize the chances of being identified, and consequently decreasing the probability of retaliation. Tapper and Boulton (2004) also stated that labels based on sex roles have an impact on the attention recollection of behaviors and, therefore, children will easily remember behaviors that are considered compliant with a specific gender stereotype as opposed to one that is not. In a

study conducted by (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996), children were required to describe what they considered aggressive. The responses obtained were varied and included the aspect of gender. Findings indicated perceptions that girls were more verbally aggressive in comparison to boys, who were perceived as physically aggressive. Tapper and Boulton (2004) concluded that women generally view aggression as "expressive," which can be associated with a loss of self-control. Conversely, men reportedly viewed aggression as "instrumental," which is linked to practicing control over other individuals. An explanation for a difference in the views of aggression between males and females is that often males are reinforced or have observed others being rewarded when they are aggressive or talk about aggression in an instrumental manner while females are reinforced when they talk about aggression in an expressive manner.

In a study to examine the differences in levels of aggression in males and females among primary school children and how they relate to their beliefs about aggression, Tapper & Boulton (2004) used self-reports, peer reports, and observational methods to determine sex differences in physical, verbal and indirect aggression. Participants for the study included 74 children in different age sets. The first set included children between the ages of 7-to 8-years, 19 of whom were female, and 15 were male. The participants in the second group were between the ages of 10-to-11 years. Nineteen of these children were males, and 21 were females. A video camera and wireless microphone were used to record the children in the morning and during lunchtime breaks. Self and peer rating scales were used to measure direct verbal, indirect and physical aggression. The children were asked to rate themselves and, then rate each of their classmates on a 5-point scale.

The children also completed questionnaires on their beliefs about aggression. Findings indicated that boys exhibited a higher rate of physical and direct verbal aggression than girls, while girls exhibited a higher rate of indirect aggression. The children in the 10 -to-11-year age group showed high levels of all forms of aggression when compared to the 7-8-year age group. Self-rating scales rated boys higher for physical and direct verbal aggression while girls on the self-rating scale were higher on indirect aggression. There was a positive correlation between peer rating scales and observed levels of aggression. This study did not find a significant sex difference for indirect aggression, which is inconsistent with previous studies. The levels of aggression in boys were highly correlated with their beliefs on physical aggression; concluding that children's beliefs about aggression influence the children's level of aggression. The results indicated that there was a significant correlation between the observed level of physical aggression in boys and their beliefs about aggression, which could be explained by possible reinforcement of aggressive behavior in boys but not in girls.

Relational aggression and verbal aggression have been reported to be the most common forms of aggressive behaviors for girls while boys are considered more physically aggressive. However, according to Nelson et al. (2008), the manifestation of aggressive behavior in children is expected to change as they develop. The researchers conducted study to identify the perceptions of aggression among emerging adults and whether there is a difference in opinion based on gender. The researchers used 134 participants enrolled in general education in a university in the Western United States. The participants between the ages of 18-25 years with 43% being male and 57% female.

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Approximately 89% of them were Caucasian. The participants completed a questionnaire

measuring the perceptions of aggressive behavior. Results of the study indicated that

men were reported to be more verbally and physically aggressive. When engaged in

direct aggression, females used direct forms of verbal aggression as opposed to physical

aggression. The results also indicated that for the participants, there were differences in

the range of aggressive responses depending on the situation (e.g., depending on whether

the verbal aggression presented was in response to insults or threats, etc.).

Males are believed to exhibit more aggressive behavior than females, and the types of

aggression displayed by the two sexes are generally different with males being more

physically aggressive than females (Glascock, 2014; Toldos, 2005). While these results

are consistent with previous studies, Toldos (2005) stated that culture is a more

significant influence on the level of aggression than sex.

Age: Studies have also indicated that aggression increases with age (Ferguson & Rule,

1980). According to the study by Ferguson and Rule (1980), children considered

aggressive behavior indefensible as opposed to adolescents who are able to rationalize

and explain the need for various forms of aggression. However, Loeber (1982) had a

different opinion, asserting that the use of aggression decreases with age. In a study to

provide an overview of the manifestation and causes of aggressive behavior across the

lifespan, Liu, Lewis, and Evans (2013) concluded that there is a difference in the

expression of aggressive behavior in individuals throughout the lifespan. The study

determined that younger children manifest more physical than verbal aggression due to

lack of appropriate verbal skills to express their emotions. As children grow older and

develop more verbal skills, behaviors that involve teasing and bullying begin to emerge and increase over time. At adolescence, more severe violent behavior is observed, and this can be attributed to peer pressure and the need to gain popularity. Toldos (2005), also highlighted that aggressive expressions occurred across the lifespan of development (i.e., childhood, adolescence, and adulthood). These differences in opinion are attributed to different contexts and definitions of aggression.

Kim, Kamphaus, Orpinas, and Kelder (2010) studied how the presence of overt aggression changes in adolescents of different ethnic groups by examining secondary data previously collected from a school-based intervention program for prevention of aggressive behavior in middle school students. The level of aggression, both physical and verbal aggression, was assessed using the Aggression scale (Orpina & Frankowski, 2001) which is a self-report measure normed for the adolescent population. The study established that as the students continued to mature, they steadily changed from the use of physical to verbal aggression; which can be explained by the improvement in language ability as one grows into the age of adolescence (Kim et al., 2010).

Culture and Ethnicity: Some cultures possess stereotypical characteristics that affect an individual's perception of aggression and influence the evaluation of aggressive acts (Toldos, 2005). For example, some cultures have been observed to have a more positive attitude towards violence when perpetrated by males as opposed to by females (Toldos, 2005). Kim et al. (2010) provide an example of Black and Hispanic adolescents who were found to be more physically and verbally aggressive than Caucasian students. The results of this study are consistent with previous studies that concluded that the African-

American culture values open confrontation and assertiveness, especially those living in inner cities, while the Hispanic culture emphasizes machismo for males, which encourages aggression for males (Kim et al., 2010). In a study to examine the differences in aggression based on gender, age and culture, Decartes and Maharaj (2016) conducted a study in Trinidad a total of 170 participants. The study consisted of 45% children and 55% adolescents. Forty-eight percent of the participants were males while 52% were females. Twenty-seven percent were Afro-Trinidadians and 22% Indo-Trinidadians while 51% Mixed- Trinidadians. The participants completed a demographic questionnaire and The Direct and Indirect Aggression Scale (DIAS; Björkqvist et al. 1992) which was designed to measure direct and indirect verbal and physical aggression. Afro-Trinidadians and Mixed-Trinidadians were found to exhibit higher aggressive traits in that order with Indo-Trinidadians scoring the least on the DIAS (1992). According to Kim et al. (2010), the differences noted in the study might be explained by the discrepancies in the socialization of children in collectivist and individualist cultures. Collectivist cultures encourage behaviors that follow conventional norms and, therefore, the children in these cultures are less likely to display high levels of aggression; individualistic cultures encourage individuals to be more assertive and expressive (Bergmuller, 2013).

Yager and Rotheram-Borus (2000) studied social expectations of different ethnic groups in day to day encounters using participants from an ethnically balanced high school. From total of 277, 30% were European America, 36% African American and 33% Hispanic. The researchers collected data by presenting the students with six scenes

that would evoke either assertive or aggressive responses. The researchers recorded the

sessions on video and later analyzed the data on self-esteem, ethnic identity and

adjustment. The results from the survey indicated that the participants perceived

European American adolescents as less expressive and aggressive when compared to

their Hispanic and African American counterparts. It is interesting to note that the males

in the study expected the females within their ethnic groups to be less aggressive in their

day to day operations.

Throughout the literature review, it was noted that the variable of geographical

location, gender, race and culture were studied together. This is because in most cases

these variables tend to co-occur in individuals and it has, therefore, been difficult to study

the sole effect of one variable on an individual.

Family of Origin

Under the family of origin variable, the variables of parenting style and the social-

economic status of the family of origin will be analyzed.

Parenting Style. Research on parenting styles has been based on studies originally done

by Baumrind (1967). These parenting styles are based on different proportions of

responsiveness, control as well as the level of independence allowed to the child (Cevher-

Kalburan & Ivrendi, 2016). Parenting styles are classified into three main categories;

authoritative, authoritarian and permissive (Sorkhabi, 2005). The permissive cluster was

further described by two sub-clusters; the indulgent permissive and uninvolved or

indifferent parenting styles (Pellerin, 2005).

Authoritative parenting is characterized by demands for high standards for behavior and regard for rules as well as expression of warmth, open communication, and respect for the needs and opinions of the child (Pellerin, 2005). Children of authoritative parents are encouraged to be independent thinkers (Pilarinos & Solomon, 2017), exhibit minimal externalizing behavior, are high on school attendance, and exhibit minimal symptoms of depression (Hoskins, 2014), present with strong social and coping skills (Kaufman et al., 2000) as well as secure attachment and positive self-concept in elementary school (Pilarinos & Solomon, 2017). Trenas, Osuna, Olivares and Cabrera (2013) stated that this style of parenting acts as a buffer against factors that would influence the children to exhibit aggressive behavior.

Authoritarian parenting style, as opposed to authoritative style, is characterized by a strong emphasis on parental demands and social expectations without much consideration and attention to the needs of the child (Sorkhabi, 2005). Authoritarian parents demand obedience and utilize punitive measures to limit a child's self-will (Pellerin, 2005). Verbal aggressiveness and psychological control are characteristic features of the authoritarian style of parenting (Hoskins, 2014). Children of authoritarian parents present with weak social skills, low self-esteem, and aggressive behavior (Kooraneh & Amirsardari, 2015) as well as exhibit characteristics associated with negative attributes such as frustration, insecurity, and confusion (Pilarinos & Solomon, 2017).

Permissive (Indulgent Permissive) parenting style is characterized by little parental control and high responsiveness (Kooraneh & Amirsardari, 2015), minimal

discipline by the parents and self-regulation by the child (Pilarinos & Solomon, 2017). Permissive parents do not set limits and expectations for their children's behaviors. (Cevher-Kalburan & Ivrendi, 2016). Children of permissive parents present with high self-esteem, and social skill (Pellerin, 2005). However, the lack of control from the parents may lead to underlying problems including aggression, lack of self-control and emotional issues (Kooraneh & Amirsardari, 2015). According to Hoskins (2014), as the children approach adolescence, the parents drastically reduce their supervision levels on the children leading to an increase in externalizing behavior, high rates of substance abuse, school misconduct, and low self-esteem. Some studies have linked the permissive parenting style to social withdrawal, anxiety, and depression in children between the ages of 14 months to 15 years (Pilarinos & Solomon, 2017).

Uninvolved parenting style, also known as indifferent parenting style (Pellerin, 2005), is characterized by low responsive and demand levels (Hoskins, 2014). These parents are most likely to avoid taking responsibility for their children (Pellerin, 2015), are considered unreliable in expressing affection to the children, are emotionally unavailable, and do not pay attention to the needs of the child (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, Dornbusch, 1991). The parents and children have weak relationships, and the children eventually exhibit externalizing behaviors (Hoskins, 2014). According to Lamborn et al. (1991), these children often lack social and cognitive competence, psychological well-being and exhibit problem behavior.

Trenas et al. (2013) conducted a study to determine whether there were differences in parenting style received by two groups of children considered high risk or

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low risk when assessed for aggressive behavior. The study also sought to determine

which parenting variables were associated with the presence or absence of the reported

aggression. The participants for the study were nursery, primary and secondary school

students from Spanish provinces. There were a total of 21 boys and 12 girls with ages

ranging from 3-to-14 -years. The Spanish adaptation of the Behavior Assessment Scale

for Children (BASC) and Age appropriate questionnaires were then utilized to measure

the predisposition to act in a physically or verbally aggressive manner. The Parenting

Questionnaire (Parent-Child Relationship Inventory) was used to assess the practices of

the parents and their attitudes towards parenting. Results obtained indicated that all the

variables being assessed except for the mother's autonomy were highly correlated with

high scores in the high-risk zone when they resulted in low scores. Conversely, when the

variables indicated high scores, then they suggested a high probability of being in the

low-risk area. These findings coincide with previous studies that have suggested that an

authoritative model is a predictor of low scores in aggression. The study also determined

that the relationship between both the parents' style is a better indicator of aggression

than the father's or mother's style separately. This study supports previous research

studies that have reported that the authoritarian parenting style or an excessively

permissive style are highly linked to aggressive behaviors observed in children

(Baumrind, Larzelere, & Owens, 2010). Conversely, an authoritative style of parenting

characterized by support, flexibility, and supervision are linked to the less aggressive

behavior observed in children (Baumrind et al., 2010).

According to Martin and Anderson (1997), children's development is significantly impacted by the relationships and interactions they have with their parents. Based on this conclusion on parent-child relationships, researchers have found similarities between children and their parents in loneliness, self-esteem, how well they can express themselves, gender roles, socialization, and physical aggressiveness. Similarly, individuals who have role models who are verbally aggressive are more likely to exhibit verbally aggressive behavior (Infante, 1987). According to Martin and Anderson (1997), aggressive communication can be considered constructive if it enables communication satisfaction and augments a two- way relationship between individuals. This is because it can increase understanding, empathy, and intimacy. On the other hand, it can be destructive, if at least one party feels worse about themselves after the conversation and the quality of the relationship is negatively impacted. Martin and Anderson (1997) carried out a study to find out the parallels between aggressive communication traits in young adults and their parents. The study involved 160 college students (78 females and 82 males). The primary inclusion criterion was that they had to have both parents. The parents had various levels of education varying from some high school education to college degrees. The participants completed self-reported questionnaires to measure levels of argumentativeness (Infante's Argumentativeness Scale), assertiveness (Richmond and McCroskey's Assertiveness- Responsiveness measure) and verbal aggressiveness (Verbal Aggressiveness Scale). There were also questionnaires for the parents of the participants. The study found no substantial relationship between a father's and children's aggressiveness and that the children mostly

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displayed their mother's verbal behavior. The study, however, did not establish how much time the children spent with their parents and if they would be more susceptible to model their behavior to that of the parents with whom they spend more time.

Social-economic status

According to Hoskins (2014), the Social-Economic Status (SES) of families has an impact on the optimal psychological functioning of parents, which in turn, affects the behavior of the parents around their children which in turn affects the children's emotional functioning. Families in the higher socioeconomic status tend to be overindulgent, which results in undesirable behaviors in adolescents because it sometimes overwhelms the adolescents with excess resources such as material wealth and experiences at inappropriate times (Hoskins, 2014). Fatima and Sheikh, (2014) present a different argument stating that there is a correlation between the occurrence of violent crimes by juvenile delinquents and SES and that children from lower SES families present with more behavior problems and aggression than those from higher SES backgrounds. A study by Conger et al. (1992) concluded that financial pressure on the family has a negative correlation with positive behavior and vice versa and that an individual may learn maladaptive and aggressive behavior through socialization and cognitive learning within the environment. These studies have been supported by a survey conducted by Glascock (2014) that concluded that children from lower socio-economic status had been observed to be more aggressive than those from a higher social-economic status. In the study conducted to survey demographic, sociological and media usage as factors that affect aggressive tendencies and verbal aggression, the

researcher used 400 college students with ages ranging from 18-26 years. The participants included 84% Caucasian, 5% African American, 2% Asian American and 2% reported themselves as other. The majority of the participants were from households with two parents, most of whom had attended college. To assess for verbal aggression, the participants completed the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (1986). Results of the study indicated that parenting styles considered negative (e.g. yelling, screaming and frequent loud arguments), and peer influence have a high positively related with verbal aggression. Low SES neighborhoods that are identified by old buildings, high rates of criminal activities and absence of parental control were also linked to aggression in young adults.

Exposure to Trauma

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Fifth Edition; DSM-5) defines trauma as exposure to actual or threatened deaths, severe injury or sexual violence. The DSM-5 is a classification manual of mental disorders that guides for reliable diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders. It can also be used by as an educational resource as a resource for research (DSM-V, 2013). Exposure to trauma as indicated in the DSM- V can either be direct, as a witness or indirect, as learning about a traumatic event to a close relative or friend. Childhood trauma includes physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect. Exposure to trauma can either be at home (domestic) or outside the home (community) (De Bellis & Zisk, 2014). Traumatic experiences from maltreatment have been highly correlated with dysfunctional self-capacities that increase the possibility if exhibiting various forms of aggressive behavior (Allen, 2011).

According to Moretti, Obsuth, Odgers, and Reebye (2006), evidence shows that witnessing interparental violence has a negative impact on the mental health as well as social consequences in children and adolescents. Moretti et al. (2006) conducted a study to further research on the impact of violence between parents, perpetrated by either the mother or father, on interpersonal aggression in adolescent children. The study evaluated whether interparental violence perpetrated by the mothers had a stronger effect on girls being more aggressive than boys and whether that conducted by fathers had a strong relationship to boys being more aggressive. The researchers also sought to assess the impact interparental violence had on interpersonal violence towards mothers, fathers, friends and romantic partners. The participants for the study consisted of 112 (63 girls and 49 boys) adolescents recruited from a provincial center for assessment of severe behavior problems and youth correctional facilities in Vancouver. Data was collected using including The Family Background Questionnaire (McGee et al., 1997). The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979) which measures violence and aggression within relationships and the Diagnostic Interview for Children and Adolescents-IV [DICA-IV; Reich et al., 1997). Results of this study indicated that boys who witnessed violence perpetrated by their fathers tended to be more aggressive with their peers. Girls who had witnessed aggression from their mothers were aggressive to their peers. These results indicate that boys learn to be more aggressive from their fathers while girls learn from their mothers. Moretti et al., (2006) noted that witnessing violence between parents involve processes that may be more detrimental to a child's development and adjustment.

Ozkol, Zucker, and Spinazzola (2011) stated that the relationship between witnessing events considered violent and taking part in violence could be explained by theories of social learning indicating that children may learn to be aggressive by observing other violent events especially when there is, at the time of the event, a rewarding outcome. Therefore, the more the children are exposed to aggressive acts, the more aggressive behavior is observed in the children. Based on this information, Ozkol et al. (2011) designed a study to identify the possible pathways from exposure to violence to manifestation of the behavior. The participants for the study were 259 fourth-grade students, across 15 classrooms from inner-city schools in a major metropolitan area in the Northeastern United States. The participants were mostly individuals of an ethnic minority groups including African American, Hispanic/Latino, Biracial/multi-racial, Caucasian, Native American, and Asian. The participants completed questionnaires including Children's Report of Exposure to Violence (CREV) designed to measure the participants exposure to violence in the community (Cooley, Turner, & Beidel, 1995), Children's Report of Post-Traumatic Symptoms (CROPS; Greenwald & Rubin,1999) to measure for post traumatic symptoms, Normative Beliefs About Aggression (Huesmann, Guerra, Miller, & Zelli, 1992. pp 139-151) to assess for beliefs and attitudes towards violence and Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) to measure for anger and aggression (Buss & Warren, 2000). The results obtained indicated that boys were more exposed to violence than girls. The study also reported that aggression could be hypothesized as a symptom of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The results of this study also indicate that PTSD, and attitudes individuals have towards violence are correlated with

both exposure to violence and aggression suggesting that the link between violence

exposure and aggressive behavior is multidetermined.

Emotional abuse involves several forms of childhood mistreatment and may

include witnessing domestic violence and verbal aggression (Glaser, 2011). According to

Teicher, Sampson, Polcari, Cynthia, & McGreenery (2006), while most researchers do

not focus on verbal abuse, when combined with physical abuse and neglect, it may have a

more severe effect on the child. Most victims of verbal aggression at an early age report

higher rates of physical aggression, crime, and personal problems later on in life. Teicher

et al. (2006), sought to establish the impact of exposure to verbal aggression earlier in life

in the absence of physical, sexual and domestic violence, and to highlight the impact

exposure to physical, verbal, sexual and domestic violence has on the mental health of

children either alone or when combined. The study concluded that emotional abuse is

highly correlated with dissociation. Participants of the study were 554 young adults from

various ethnic groups, recruited from an advertisement that requested adults who had

either a happy or unhappy childhood. Three hundred seventy-eight of the participants

were female while the rest were male. The participants completed several rating scales

including the Verbal Abuse Questionnaire that measured the exposure to verbal

aggression. To find out whether the participants had been exposed to other forms of

abuse or trauma, the participants gave a self-report response to the question "Have you

ever been physically hurt or attacked by someone such as husband, parent, another family

member, or friend (for example, have you ever been struck, kicked, bitten, pushed, or

otherwise physically hurt)?" Those who answered yes to the question were then asked to

give more details on their relationship to this individual, the frequency of the episodes, ages at the time the episodes began and when they ended, whether as a result of the abuse, they received or should have received medical attention, and whether the abuse resulted in lasting injuries or scars. The participants also completed the Limbic System Checklist to measure for limbic irritability as well as the Dissociative Experience scale to measure for psychiatric symptoms. The results of the study indicated that childhood exposure to verbal aggression, by itself had a moderate to strong positive correlation to dissociation, limbic irritability, depression and anger/ hostility. Combined with other forms of abuse, being a witness to domestic violence had a more significant impact and more negative effects on the participants especially in dissociation. These findings support previous research that has indicated that emotional maltreatment may be a more significant factor in dissociation (Teicher et al., 2006).

Assertiveness

As previously noted, for this study, the concept of assertiveness will be defined by Thompson and Berebaum's (2011) definition of adaptive assertiveness that refers to behaviors that allow one to get his/her needs met without infringing on someone else's rights. Assertiveness is therefore considered socially acceptable behavior. Assertive behavior involves taking into consideration and maintaining the limits between one's rights and those of another individual (Jakubowski-Spector, 1973). Sigler, Burnett, and Child (2008) describe assertiveness as the ability to request, disagree with another person's opinion, express an opinion, and start conversations, maintain them and end the conversations without attacking another person's sense of self. According to Peneva and

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Mavrodiev (2013), assertive characteristics should be observable in different situations. Development of assertive skills among high school and college students has been linked to effective learning, less stress and improved performance in school (Paeezy, Shahrary & Abdi, 2010). Assertiveness is believed to be linked to social economic status and one's level of education, and therefore individuals with the same level of education or same social status are expected to exhibit the same levels of assertiveness without regard to gender, the family of origin or ethnicity (Parham et al., 2015). Assertiveness is not only valuable to those who experience difficulty standing up for themselves but also for those who tend to engage in aggressive communication or interact with aggressive individuals (Sigler et al., 2008).

Lindsay (2001) described the need for assertiveness as it increases one's self-esteem and levels of confidence, as well as reducing levels of stress. Ames, Lee, and Wazlawek (2017) conducted a literature review to study the effect of "too much" or "too little" assertiveness exhibited by individuals. The study was based on the premise that too much or too little assertiveness may have several consequences. The study concluded that too little assertiveness might lead to lower ambitions and a tendency to accept everyone's requests at one's own expense. It may also lead to avoidance of conflict or failure to make specific requests. These effects may lead to increased stress levels both in the workplace and in personal lives. In contrast, "too much" assertiveness can lead to resistance by the recipients of the communication, who may also end up being overly assertive. People who are perceived to be highly assertive have been reported to have a reputation that may end up affecting their future interactions with their counterparts,

which may grow into resentment and in extreme cases, revenge. The trick with assertiveness according to Ames et al. (2017) is to find the right balance between too much and too little assertiveness to obtain the desired results which may still be a challenge for specific populations (e.g. women) who have historically been expected by society to behave in a more timid and less assertive manner.

Family of Origin

Aspects of the family of origin that will be reviewed in this section include the family's socioeconomic status and parenting style.

     Socio-Economic Status. According to Farrell (2001), some individual barriers to assertiveness include ignorance of personal and professional rights, concern about what other people think of the individual, and lack of confidence and poor self-esteem. Parham et al. (2015) state that education can mitigate these factors; that the level of education and status would be the determinants of assertiveness and that people on the same level of education and status should be equally assertive. Ibrahim (2011) conducted a study to identify different aspects that affect assertiveness among nursing students. Participants for this study were 207 student nurses with ages ranging from 17-to-22-years and a majority) from rural areas. The family income of 80% of the participants did not match their needs. To collect data, the researcher utilized a demographic sheet, the Rathus Assertiveness Scale (1973) to determine the level of assertiveness and a 12-item scale by Spreitzer (1996) to measure empowerment with regards to meaning, self-determination, competence, and impact. The results of the study established that student assertiveness increased with psychological empowerment. The study also revealed that

students who reported sufficient family income were more assertive than those whose family income was not sufficient to meet their needs.

Parenting Style. Children who are considered assertive have been reported to have parents who were assertive (Hutchison & Neulip, 1993). Assertiveness is often found to be lacking in homes where aggressiveness is prevalent (Sigler et al., 2008). Nalls (2013), further highlighted the influences parenting style has on the level of assertiveness in children, by stating that children who exhibit symptoms of anxiety and depression report feeling rejected or overly controlled by their caregivers. Similarly, children brought up in strict homes that demand perfection tended to feel like they have less or no control of their circumstances and may, therefore, develop symptoms of anxiety. The level of discipline and control in African American families generally differs from that of other ethnic groups (Nalls, 2013). Nalls (2013) hypothesized that children raised in permissive or authoritarian environments display higher levels of assertiveness than those in authoritarian environments. The second hypothesis for the study was that African Americans raised in authoritative and authoritarian environments have lower levels of assertiveness than Caucasians brought up in authoritative environments. Participants for the study were 129 adults, aged between 18-to-30-years from various ethnic backgrounds. Sixty-nine of the participants reported being brought up in the suburbs, 37 were brought up in rural areas, 18 of the participants reported growing up in urban areas while four were from other environments. Ninety-seven of the participants were brought up by both their biological parents, 15 were raised by their biological mothers alone, and other combinations of parental figures raised 13 of the

participants. The researchers used the Adult Self-Expression scale (ASES; Gay, Hollandsworth, & Galassi, 1975) to assess self-reported assertiveness and self-expression. The Parental Authority Questionnaire was used to evaluate the parenting style. The study concluded that an agreement between the parents on how to raise the child, or the lack of it, influenced the child's behavior. Participants who reported that both parents were permissive were noted to be more assertive. Those raised by permissive single mothers were also found to be more assertive than those with authoritative or authoritarian mothers. These results imply that regardless of race or type of neighborhood, people brought up by permissive parents, report being relatively assertive. These children report that they have more autonomy to express themselves and have relatively less fear of the effects of their expression. The study also established that African American children brought up by authoritative and authoritarian parents do not have a significantly higher level of assertiveness when compared to Caucasian brought up in a similar environment. The results of this study were in contrast to previous findings that concluded that permissive parenting style is associated with negative effects while authoritative style is associated with positive results (Nalls, 2013).

Children have been observed to exhibit similar characteristics of loneliness, self-esteem, ability to express themselves, gender roles, socialization and physical aggressiveness, and assertiveness as their parents (Martin & Anderson, 1997). Martin and Anderson (1997) attributed this observation to the social cognitive theory that states that people learn to acquire skills through observing behavior portrayed by a person considered a model as well as the repercussions of the observed behavior. The purpose

of the study was to establish the similarities between young adults' aggressive communicative traits and that of their parents. One hundred sixty college students and both sets of parents participated in the study. Sixty-seven percent of the participants lived with their parents when not in school. Both sets of parents had varying levels of education ranging from some high school education to postgraduate education. The researchers designed questionnaires to assess for self- reported levels of argumentativeness, assertiveness, and verbal aggressiveness as well as questionnaires for the fathers and mothers. Argumentativeness was assessed using the Infante and Rancer's (1982) Argumentativeness Scale. Assertiveness was measured using the Richmond and McCroskey's Scale (1990) while Verbal Aggressiveness was assessed using the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (Infante & Wrigley, 1986). The study established when mothers scored high on the assertive scale, their children tended to score high on the assertive scale as well. The study found no significant relationship between the fathers' assertiveness and that of the children. These findings indicated that the children model their behavior depending on their mothers' behavior.

Demographics

  Gender. A challenge experienced as a result of assertiveness is that, the perception of the recipient may interpret the communication based on established stereotypes (Ames et al., 2017). Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Rudman (2010) for example, report that women are expected, by gender stereotypes, to be less assertive than men. In most cases, when women speak up to offer their opinions, Eagly and Karau (2002) state that they may be perceived negatively, which may result in counter criticism by society.

Women have historically been less assertive than males (Geller & Hobfall, 1993). For

example, Rodriquez, Johnson and Combs (2001) conducted a review that concluded that

Puerto Rican women are less assertive in some situations and this can be attributed to the

differences between Puerto Rican and Western norms. The study found that the level of

education and ethnicity influences the level of assertiveness. Women with a higher level

of education tend to be more assertive than women with a lower level of education. The

study also established that regardless of the level of education, Hispanic women were

found to be less assertive than their Western counterparts with the same level of

education.

A meta-analysis by Twenge (2001) was conducted to study the metamorphosis

that has occurred over the years in assertiveness and dominance. The study sought to

identify the effect the social environment has on the development of assertiveness. This

study was based on the premise that the roles and status of women have changed over the

years. It was hypothesized that specific environmental factors of women's social status

and functions impacted levels of assertiveness over the years. During the meta-analysis,

Twenge (2001) carried out two studies. In the first study, meta-analytic techniques were

used to study 158 samples of college students in America. This study aimed to establish

the reasons for the change in assertiveness between 1931 and 1993. In the second study,

10 high school students were sampled to examine the curvilinear pattern of assertiveness

in women between 1955 and 1985. The results of the survey indicated that the level of

assertiveness in women had changed over a period of seven decades following a

curvilinear pattern based on the changing roles and status of women in those years. Some

of the reasons Twenge (2001) noted to influence the change in assertiveness scores include women's educational achievement, women joining the workforce and average age of women at first marriage

Consistent with different gender roles, assertiveness has also been found to differ across gender with researchers reporting that men are more assertive than women (Cheng, Bond, & Chan, 1995; Eskin, 2003). In some cultures, men are encouraged to be assertive, ambitious and are supposed to have a strong persona. In contrast, women are required to be timid, passive and submissive (Eucharia, 2003). Sigler et al. (2008) sought to find out whether there are differences in students' self-reported assertiveness based on sex differences. The researchers used 307 participants from four universities. One hundred and forty-eight participants were from the Upper Midwest region while 159 of them were from the New York metropolitan area. Of the participants, 102 were male while 205 were female. This sample population from the Upper Midwest region consisted mostly of Caucasian with 4% reported to be from various ethnic minority groups were black. Eighty percent of these participants had lived in the region all their lives while the rest of them moved into the area and had lived there for approximately nine years. The New York Metropolitan participants consisted of 61% Caucasians, and 39% from other ethnic groups. Fifty-eight percent of the participants reported that they had lived in the New York area all their lives while the rest were reported to have moved into the area and had lived there for an average of six years. Data was collected using The Rathus Assertiveness Scale (1973) to assess for assertiveness. The results of the study revealed that participants from the New York Metropolitan area scored higher on

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the assertiveness scale when compared to their counterparts from the Upper Midwest region. Males, as per previous studies, were found to be generally more assertive than females. The difference in the assertiveness scores between males and females can be explained as results of both nature and nurture and that in some cases where females are socialized to be less assertive, there is an inclination to respond in a passive-aggressive manner (Sigler et al., 2008).

Culture and Ethnicity

Assertiveness as a character trait is viewed differently in different cultures. For example, western cultures, especially North America and parts of Europe, consider assertiveness as a desired attribute and are generally reinforced. In many other cultures however, assertiveness is not necessarily encouraged, and is not viewed as a sign of weakness or symptomatic of a disorder like anxiety (Florian & Zernitsky-Shukra, 1987). Parham et al. (2015) carried out a study to find out how assertiveness is different with regards to national culture and ethnicity. The study hypothesized that Caucasians will exhibit higher levels of assertiveness than African Americans and Vietnamese Nationals. For this study, all the participants' level of education and social status were alike and had access to similar subject matter, teaching styles, reading and writing styles, similar styles of dressing and fluency in English. All the participants were in college in the United States or United States affiliated colleges in Vietnam. The researchers used a total of 231 undergraduate students from three universities in the States and one in Vietnam. Two of the universities in the United States were historically black colleges. The participants completed the Rathus Assertiveness Scale (1973). Results of the study showed that white

men perceived themselves as the most assertive, followed by African American females. Asian males were found to be least assertive from the study. However, Parham et al. (2015) concluded that other factors such as race, gender also influence an individual's level of assertiveness.

The differences in the level of assertiveness among different cultures were also studied by Zane, Sue, Hu, and Kwon (1991). The study was conducted to examine the variances in levels of assertiveness between Asians and White Americans, and the influence the social learning theory has in the difference. Participants for the study were Chinese, Japanese and Caucasian undergraduate students. Data were collected using surveys, interviews and direct behavior observations and results indicated that the Asians in the study were less assertive than Caucasians, but only in the circumstances involving strangers; suggesting that assertiveness in different ethnic groups was situational. According to Zane et al. (1991), studies on culture and assertiveness have often noted that Chines and Japanese tend to be less assertive when compared to their Caucasian counterparts and that Asians are socialized to be modest and indirect in communication making them less confrontational in communication.

As previously stated, cultural expectations can sometimes influence assertive behavior (Eskin, 2003). Yager and Rotheram-Borus (2000) studied the social expectations of different ethnic groups in the day to day encounters using participants from an ethnically balanced high school. A total of 277 participants took part in the study with an almost equal distribution between European Americans, African Americans and Hispanics. Data was collected by presenting the students with six scenarios that evoked

either assertive or aggressive responses. The sessions were recorded on video and later analyzed. Information on self-esteem, ethnic identity and adjustment were also obtained during the study. The results from the survey indicated that European American adolescents were less expressive and aggressive but more assertive when compared to their Hispanic and African American counterparts. It is interesting to note that the males in the study expected the females within their ethnic groups to be less aggressive in their day to day operations.

Trauma

An assertive person, according to Unal, Hisar, and Gorgulu (2012), is usually able to express him/herself adequately, is seen as confident and can make decisions. However, when exposed to verbal violence, which may be considered a traumatic event, students report experiencing adverse psychological effects (Shipton, 2002). In their study, Unal et al. (2012) established that students who had been exposed to traumatic events, like violence, when exposed to other violent situations "said nothing" as a coping strategy.

Brecklin (2004) conducted a study based on previous reviews that theorized that more women who enroll in assertiveness training have experienced child physical and sexual abuse or adult sexual victimization when compared to women who do not register for the training. For the study, a national survey was conducted in 32 institutions of higher learning in the United States but only 3,187 females participated. Eighty-six percent of the participants were Caucasians while 14% were from other ethnic minorities. The age range of the participants was 16-to-77-years. Approximately 10% of the women

were married. Their family of origin's level of income varied which was indicative of

differences in socioeconomic status. Fifty-seven percent of the women had experienced

child sexual abuse, 36% suffered childhood physical abuse, and 25 % of the participants

were victims of both physical and sexual abuse. The participants completed a survey that

included sections on child victimization history (Child sexual abuse and Child physical

abuse), Adult victimization and social-psychological characteristics. The Extended

Personal Attributes Questionnaire (EPAQ; Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan, 1979) was

used to measure instrumental and expressive traits. Psychological symptoms were

assessed using the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, &

Erbaugh, 1961). The results of the study indicate that participants who enrolled for the

assertiveness training were possibly victims of sexual and physical abuse. Victims of

child sexual abuse were more likely to enroll for the training than child physical abuse

victims. More women who had gone through both child sexual and physical abuse were

found to join the self-defense and assertiveness training sessions. These findings

indicated that women who previously experienced various cases of victimization were

less assertive and suffered more psychological distress.

Summary

As previously stated, to most people, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate

between verbal aggression and assertiveness. The difference between the two constructs

is based on the intent of the communication. Verbal aggression is intended to cause harm

to the recipient of the communication while Assertiveness is not intended to cause

damage but firmly state a position without hurting the other party. However, because it is

difficult to differentiate between the two, the interpretation of the two is dependent on the recipient of the information. During the literature review, it was noted that most of the earlier literature on assertiveness was conducted in North America in the 70's and 80's when the Equal Rights Amendment (1972) that was intended to eliminate gender-based discrimination (ushistory.org, 2018). Most of the more recent studies on assertiveness were conducted in countries outside of North America. It is not immediately known why this is occurring. This study would, therefore, be important because it would add to the literature and provide more information on aggressiveness and assertiveness. Also, with the current social and political climates, people report getting offended by other people's utterances without regard to whether they are intentionally meant to cause harm. It would, therefore, be essential to establish the difference between the two to hopefully change the perception of the recipients of the information. For this study, the two constructs are operationally defined by the study conducted by Thompson and Berebaum (2011).

The objectives of the study are to examine the three research questions:

i.   Is there a relationship between assertiveness and verbal aggression?

ii.   To what degree do participants' demographics (i.e., age, racial/ethnic status—majority/minority, sex), family of origin variables (i.e., SES, parenting style), and self-reported experience with early childhood trauma (i.e., experienced, observed) predict the variance in college students' expression of verbal aggression in their day to day relationships?

iii.   To what degree do participants' demographics (i.e., age, racial/ethnic status—

majority/minority, sex), family of origin variables (i.e., SES, parenting style), and

self-reported experience with early childhood trauma (i.e., experienced, observed)

predict the variance in college students' expression of assertiveness in their day to

day relationships?

Based on the literature, younger individuals, those from ethnicities that are considered

a minority group, low socio-economic status, from families where there was not much

structure or adequate parental support, and experienced trauma growing will be expected

to report engagement in behaviors associated with verbal aggression. On the other hand,

older participants, those from majority ethnic groups, higher socioeconomic status and

structured families with adequate support and did not experience trauma will exhibit

more assertive traits.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Participants

The target participants for the survey were primarily individuals from the United

States of America. The participants were both male and female adults from various

ethnic backgrounds. They were recruited through Mechanical Turk (MTurk) which is an

online platform created by Amazon that can be utilized by researchers to access

participants for online data collection (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014).

To use MTurk, researchers (requesters) create tasks virtually using simple

templates which are linked to online survey tools (e.g. SurveyMonkey). The participants

can then browse available studies and are paid upon successful completion of each task

(Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). The effectiveness of MTurk is in the fact that it

allows researchers to access larger research samples and populations (Buhrmester,

Talaifar, & Gosling, 2018). This allows researchers to obtain information from

participants who would otherwise be difficult to reach within a short period of time. For

this reason, Paolacci, Chandler, and Ipeirotis (2010) note that it is important for

researchers to report their exclusion and inclusion criteria when using MTurk as a data

collection tool. Concerns that have been reported with the use of MTurk involve the

quality of data with fears that some participants may provide separate responses to the

same study (Paolacci et al., 2010). However, a follow up study by Burhemester et al.

(2018) conclude that this is increasingly becoming less of an issue because the system is

now enabled to deny multiple requests for funds from a single study. Like other online

platforms, another limitation of MTurk is that in some cases, unsupervised participants

may not pay close attention, which may result in them giving inappropriate responses.

Paolacci et al. (2010) recommend utilization of manipulation checks to remind

participants to pay more attention to the tasks. According to Kees, Berry, Burton, and

Sheehan (2017) studies on three thousand unique respondents over a period of three

years, the consistency of demographic responses, when compared to other online

platforms, was high. MTurk has a wider reach of participants which can facilitate the

generalizability findings (Rouse, 2015). It is also widely used for data collection because

it allows for faster data collection across different geographical areas without incurring

travel cost (Ford, 2017; Kees et al., 2017; Rouse, 2015).

Variables

The primary objective of the study was to examine the degree to which the

independent variables, participants' demographics (i.e. age, racial/ethnic status-

majority/minority, sex), family of origin variables (socio-economic status, parenting

style) and self- reported experiences with early childhood trauma (i.e. experienced or

observed), are significantly associated with the dependent variables: Verbal aggression

and Assertiveness.   Bonferroni adjustment was used to determine the alpha for

significance (.05/2), .025. The same independent variables were used in each regression.

Bonferroni adjustment is a statistical process that is done to a p-value when several

independent or dependent tests are done on a single data set. It is usually done to reduce

the chances of obtaining false positive results or type 1 errors (Napierala, 2012).

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables were Assertiveness and verbal aggression, which were

measured using The Adaptive and Aggressive Assertiveness Scale (AAA-S, Thompson

& Berenbaum, 2011). This measure, (see Appendix B), was created to differentiate

between assertiveness and verbal aggression. According to Thompson and Berenbaum

(2011), assertiveness is defined as those activities and behaviors exhibited by an

individual that help him/her get his/her needs met without hurting others or violating their

rights in a manner generally approved by society. Verbal aggression, on the other hand,

refers to activities and behaviors that help one to get his/her needs met in a forceful

manner hence infringing on other people's rights. Verbal aggression is generally not

approved by society (Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011). The scale is a self-report set of 19

hypothetical questions requesting participants to respond to certain hypothetical

situations as they interact with people who were either familiar or unfamiliar to them

(Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011). The situations presented and the responses total to 19

questions each for assertiveness and verbal aggression. The response is on a five-point

Likert scale with a score of one indicating 'Never' and five indicating 'Always'. The

scores for each subscale range from 19- 95 with a score of 19 indicating that the

participant is lower on the assertiveness or verbal aggression scale while a score of 95

indicates that the participant is higher on the scales respectively. High scores on the

verbal aggression scale were linked to higher tendencies of aggressive behaviors (e.g.

physical and verbal) while high assertiveness scores were indicative of abilities to

effectively navigate different situations without causing harm to other people involved (Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011).

To determine the psychometric properties of the scale, the developers used three different participant groups. The first group, Sample 1, consisted of 261 students, 55% of them female; with ages between 17-to-32 years and they were from various ethnic backgrounds, 76% and 24% from various ethnic minority groups. The second group, Sample 2, had a total of 281 female students who were mostly freshmen and sophomores. Their age range was between 17 -to-29 years. The sample also consisted of participants from various ethnic backgrounds, with a majority being (76%) Caucasian, and the remaining 24% being African American, Asian American, Latina, Biracial American and 3% reported as other. The third group, Sample 3, was a Clinical Sample that consisted of 30 outpatient clients from a Stress and Anxiety Community Clinic and Psychological Services Centre. The participants had to have at least one anxiety disorder based on the DSM-IV. The participants' age range was 18-to-57- years with a majority being women. The third sample also consisted of participants from various ethnic backgrounds, 77% Caucasian, while the remaining 13% consisting of African Americans, Latino and Biracial Americans. The results indicate that the AAA-S has a 2-week test-retest reliability of .81. The AAA-S also indicated an internal reliability of .82 for sample 1, .82 for sample 2 and .69 for sample 3 on the Adaptive Assertiveness Scale (Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011). On the Aggressive Assertiveness Scale, the AAA-S indicated an internal reliability of .88 for sample 1, .87 for sample 2, and .82 for sample 3 (Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011). The AAA-S was compared with the Rathus Assertiveness Scale

(RAS) scores and there was a significant correlation of 0.61 for Adaptive Assertiveness and 0.37 for Aggressiveness Assertiveness. It also shows a strong correlation between Aggressive Assertiveness and other forms of aggression: Physical aggression; .53 81 Hostility; .35, Anger; .51 Verbal Aggression; .50, and Dominance; .54. (Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011).   These results, therefore, show that the scale has good convergent and discriminant validity. When scored, the AAA-S produces scores on a spectrum that indicate an individual's level of the Assertiveness and verbal aggression. These will be analyzed to determine how they correlate to the independent variables discussed. The scale requires approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Independent Variables

Information on independent variables was collected using the demographic survey, attached in Appendix A.   Survey completion time is 10 minutes. The survey included items that address the following: demographic information (i.e., age, racial/ethnic status, gender), the family of origin (social economic status and parenting style) and self-reported early life experience with physical or emotional trauma.

The demographic information included the age of the participants, race/ethnicity (whether majority or minority race), and gender (male, female or unidentified). According to the United States Census Bureau (2018), the majority race comprising of 60.7% of the entire population is Caucasian while the rest of the races (Hispanic, African American/Black, Asian, Native Americans and others), are considered minority races. These were coded as

Race: African American/Black = 1; Latino/Latina = 2; Caucasian = 3; Native American = 4; Asian = 5; Other = 6; Decline to Answer = 7. This coding assisted in providing the representation of each of the groups within the sample. However, this categorical data was not used in the regression. For the regression, the number 1was be assigned participants who report Caucasian/White; the number 2 was assigned participants who report any of the remaining groups. Gender was coded as: Male =1; Female = 2; Other = 3. For the regression analysis, participants that noted 'other' were excluded.

The family of origin variable was addressed using the family of origin's social economic status and parenting style. The social economic status was measured using the respondent's parent's level of education when growing up. The coding was based on the definitions by Thompson, & Hickey (2005); Upper class = 6; Upper middle class = 5 Middle Class=4; Lower middle class = 3; Working class = 2; Lower class = 1. Both parents' level of education were coded as: Elementary school-1; Junior School = 2; High School = 3; Some College education = 4; Associate Degree= 5; Degree = 6; Graduate School = 7; Doctorate level = 8; Unknown = 8; Other (e.g. Certification) =9. For this study, these measures of SES were based on the assumption that higher level of parents' education will be positively related with values, attitudes, and lifestyle associated with those of a higher socio-economic status, while a lower level of education was associated with values, attitudes, and lifestyle lower socio-economic status. It is important to note that responses indicating 'Unknown' and 'Other' were not be included in the descriptive results but eliminated from the regression analyses.

Parenting style was measured using the four types of parenting styles reported during early childhood development as defined by Baumrind (1967). The parenting styles were coded as Authoritarian = 1 (established rules and expected me to follow them); Authoritative = 2 (established rules but kept in mind my opinion when setting limits); Permissive = 3 (tended to be lenient in terms of rules and only acted when I was in serious trouble); Uninvolved = 4 (had few to no rules and not monitor my behaviors). Respondents were requested to indicate whether they experienced or observed abuse when growing up. The objective of the item was to verify if the participant did or did not directly or indirectly experience traumatic events (abuse) during early development. These were coded as: Yes = 2; No = 1. The respondents were also requested to report whether or not spanking was a form of discipline at home during early development. The responses will be code as Yes = 2; No = 1.

Social Desirability

Marlowe- Crowne Social Desirability Scale- Short form (1982). People tend to want to appear more honest and socially desirable than they are (Chung & Monroe, 2003). Chung and Monroe (2003) define Social Desirability as the propensity to understate or overstate their responses in undesirable situations in order to seem socially acceptable or desirable. Presser and Stinton (1998) stated that the need for social desirability can influence responses of research participants who may be unwilling to admit to taking part in activities that are considered socially undesirable and they, therefore end up misreporting. To identify such instances, mitigate the effects of social desirability, and ensure research questionnaires are valid, researchers use Social Desirability Scales

(Chung & Monroe, 2003). For this study, the researcher will use The Marlowe - Crown

Social Desirability Scale (see Appendix C) which is used to measure the extent to which

the need to be socially responsible influences the responses participants in self-reported

surveys give (Reynolds, 1982). The original version consisted of 33 true or false

questions (Reynolds, 1982). The short form of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability

Scale developed by Strahan and Gerbasi (1972), is a 13 question, true or false

questionnaire. The reliability for the scale is at .76 as compared to the longer version

whose reliability is at .82 on the Kuder Richardson Scale which is considered acceptable.

The validity of the scale, when correlated with the longer version, is at .93 (p < .001,

Reynolds, 1982). This being a short scale takes about 5 minutes to complete. To score

both the long and short versions of the Social Desirability Scale, every true or false

response is scored either one or zero depending on whether the response is correspondent

with the desired response to the specific question. Therefore, a true-true/false-false

response is scored one and true-false/false-true is scored as zero. (Crowne & Marlow,

1960; Thorne-Figueroa, 2010). The scores range from 0 to 13. The scores assess the

extent to which an individual is willing to give a response that may not be necessarily

true but is socially acceptable or desirable (Crowne & Marlow, 1960). Higher scores on

the Marlowe Crowne Desirability scale (1960) could be an indication that the respondent

may have reported responses that they believe are more appealing to the public as

opposed to lower scores which indicate that the respondent is less concerned about

people's opinion and most likely gave more truthful answers (Crowne &Marlow, 1960)

Procedure

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was first obtained for the study. The participants signed an informed consent and then completed a questionnaire in MTurk, an online platform for research created by Amazon. To ensure the privacy of the participants, the online survey was anonymous and any identifying information was deleted during data analysis.

No personally identifiable information (i.e., name, address of the respondent) was collected using the survey. Once the survey data was input into an electronic database, the original survey forms were destroyed along with any information linking the electronic data with the original survey. To further ensure confidentiality, the data collected was encrypted and stored in a password protected computer with limited access to people other than those directly involved in the research study.

Statistical Analysis

Pearson product correlation matrix was initially utilized to check for multicollinearity to guide the variables selected for inclusion in the regression (Kraha, Turner, Nimon, Zientek & Henson, 2012; Nimon & Oswald, 2013). Multicollinearity occurs when there is a strong correlation between two or more variables. (Field, 2018). Multicollinearity in data increases the standard error of coefficients, which causes an increase in confidence intervals and increases the chances of occurrence of Type 1 error (Yoo et. al., 2014). A type one error occurs when the data reflects that the independent variable has a significant effect on the population while in reality it does not (Field, 2018). To determine the criteria for multicollinearity, some researchers utilize correlation

coefficient cut-off of r =0.5, while others typically use a cut-off of r =0.8. For this study, the cut-off of r =0.8 was used. When the correlation matrix was analyzed none of the variables met the criteria for multicollinearity.

The enter regression analysis, also referred to as the forced entry method was used in the analysis. Enter regression analysis involves entering all the independent variables in a single step to determine their effect on the dependent variable. The enter method is used to explain the variance in the dependent variable by the dependent variable, establish the statistical significance of each of the independent variables and indicate the relative importance of the independent variables in predicting the dependent variable. This information is summarized in a single significance test of the model. (Roger & Nunn, 2009). Because of the use of multiple regression analysis procedures (Assertiveness and Verbal Aggression), the alpha resulting from the use of Bonferroni Correction analysis, $\alpha/2 = .025$ was used to determine significance. To have significant statistical power, a minimum of 25 participants for each independent variable were required to be included in the regression model (Cohen, 2013). The study therefore required a minimum of 125 participants.

When conducting the analysis for this study, the Bonferroni adjustment was used to minimize the occurrence of a type 1 error (Field, 2018). The Bonferroni analysis $\alpha/2=.025$ was used to determine significance. Bonferroni adjustment in establishing alpha was used because multiple regressions with the same set of independent variables with different independent variables were used to address the research questions.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Sample Demographics

For this study, data was collected from 354 participants. Incomplete responses

were deleted and not used for the analysis. A total of 321 respondents (200 female, 115

male, 3 Queer and 3 other) between the ages of 20-74 were analyzed. The sample

consisted of 28 (8.7%) African American, 15 (4.7%) Latina/Latino, 260 (80.4%)

Caucasian, 15 (4.7 %) Asian American, 1 (0.3%) Native Hawaiian and 3 (0.9%)

identified themselves as other. A summary of the demographic information is

represented in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic variables

Variable	N	Percentage
Sex		
Female	200	63%
Male	115	36%
Other	6	1%
Race/ Ethnicity		
Caucasian	259	80.4%
African American	28	8.7%
Latino/Latina	15	4.7%
Asian American	15	4.7%
Other	3	0.9%
Native Hawaiian	1	0.3%

For the family of origin variables, social economic status and parenting styles were analyzed. Participants were asked to identify mother's parenting style, and 154 (47.9%) of the participants reported growing up in homes where mothers utilized the authoritarian style of parenting, 80 (24.9%) reported an authoritative style, 69 (21.3%) indicated the permissive style and 18 (5.3%) indicated that mothers were uninvolved in their upbringing. When asked about father's parenting style, 138 (42.9%) reported that fathers utilized the authoritarian style, 70 (21.8) the authoritative style, 71 (22.1%) the permissive style, and 41 (12.7%) reported fathers as uninvolved. A summary of parenting style is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Parenting Styles

Style	Mother		Father	
	N	Percentage	N	Percentage
Authoritarian	154	47.9%	138	42.9%
Authoritative	80	24.9%	71	21.8%
Permissive style	69	21.3%	71	21.8%
Uninvolved	18	5.3%	41	12.7%

Social economic status was assessed using the parent's level of education and the participants' family of origin's social economic status. For mothers' completed level of education, 41 participants (12.8%) endorsed freshman, 25 (7.8%) indicated sophomore,

15 (3.1%) indicated junior level, 137 (42.6%) indicated senior level in college, 61 (18.7%) reported that mothers attained a master's level, and 7 (2.1%) endorsed doctorate level. Thirty-nine (11.8%) of the participants selected "other" and identified mothers' highest level of education as high school diploma or associate diploma. Thirty-three participants (10.3%) endorsed freshman for father's level of education, 25 (7.8%) reported sophomore, 11 (3.4%), junior level, 131 (41.7%) were senior level, 53 (16.2%) masters and 19 (5.6%) reported that their fathers attained a doctorate level education. Forty-six (14%) endorsed "other" indicating some college education, associate diploma, high school diploma and professional certifications. A summary of parents' level of education is presented in table 3.

Table 3

Parent's Level of Education

	Mother		Father	
Level	N	Percentage	N	Percentage
Senior	137	42.6%	131	41.7%
Freshman	41	12.8%	33	10.3%
Sophomore	15	3.1%	25	7.8%
Junior	15	3.1%	11	3.1%
Masters	61	18.7%	53	16.2%
Doctorate	7	2.1%	19	5.6%
Other	39	11.8%	46	14%

Table 4 presents a summary of participants' responses for family income while growing up. A majority of participants, 113 (35.2%) indicated that they grew up in families considered middle class. Thirty- eight (11.8%) indicated lower class, 68 (21.1%) reported working class, 55 (17.1%) stated that they grew up in lower middle-class families, 43 (13.4%) were upper middle class while 4 (1.2) were upper class.

Table 4

Family of Origin Income

Variable	N	Percentage
Middle class	113	35.2%
Working class	68	21.1%
Lower middle class	55	17.1%
Upper middle class	43	13.4%
Lower class	38	11.8%
Upper class	4	1.2

A summary of the results for exposure to direct or indirect trauma is presented in Table 5 below. A total of 143 (45%) participants reported that they had experienced verbal abuse while growing up; 104 (32%) endorsed experiencing direct physical abuse. For indirect exposure to abuse, 104 (32%) reported witnessing another family member being verbally abused and 156 (48.5%) witnessed physical abuse.

Table 5

Exposure to Trauma and Verbal Aggression

| | Experienced | | | | Observed | | | |
| | Verbal Abuse | | Physical abuse | | Verbal abuse | | Physical abuse | |
	N	Percentage	N	Percentage	N	Percentage	N	Percentage
Yes	143	44.5%	104	32.4%	104	32.4%	156	48.5%
No	178	55.4%	217	67.7%	217	67.7%	165	51.4%

A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted to establish relationships between each pair of variables and check for multicollinearity. Multicollinearity occurs when there is a strong correlation between two or more variables (Field, 2018). Multicollinearity in data increases the standard error of coefficients, which causes an increase in confidence intervals and increases the chances of occurrence of type 1 error (Yoo et. al., 2014). A type one error occurs when the data reflects that the independent variable has a significant effect on the population while in reality it does not (Field, 2018). To determine the criteria for multicollinearity, some researchers utilize correlation coefficient cut-off of $r = 0.5$, while others typically use a cut-off of $r = 0.8$ (Vatcheva, Lee, McCormick & Rahbar, 2016). For this study, the cut-off of $r = 0.8$ was used. When the correlation matrix was analyzed none of the variables met the criteria for multicollinearity and were therefore all used in the regression model.

The dependent variables for the study were verbal aggression and assertiveness. The independent variables were demographic information (i.e., age, race/ethnicity, and

gender), family of origin variables (i.e., SES, and parenting style) and reported

experience with early childhood trauma. Results show a statistically significant positive

correlation between assertiveness and verbal aggression ($r = .182$; $p = .001$) suggesting

that the participants who rated themselves as verbally aggressive also considered

themselves assertive, and vice versa. The participants were also asked to complete the

Marlow-Crowne social desirability scale in order to account for participant who may

have provided responses considered socially desirable. Lower scores on the Marlow

Crowne indicate that the participant most likely responded in a truthful manner and is not

concerned with the opinion of the public. There was a negative correlation between the

scores on the social desirability scale and assertiveness ($r = -.009$; $p = .873$) as well as

verbal aggression ($r = -.265$; $p = .000$). While the correlation was significant for verbal

aggression, it was not statistically significant for assertiveness as indicated in Table 6

below. These scores indicate that the relationship between the responses on the lie scale

and assertiveness can were not significant.

Table 6

Verbal aggression, Assertiveness and Lie scale

	Verbal Aggression	Assertiveness	Lie scale
Verbal Aggression	1		
Assertiveness	.182**	1	
Lie Scale	-.265**	-.009	1

** Correlation significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed)

The mean from this study was compared to means obtained from studies by Andrew and Meyers (2003). In the study by Andrew and Meyers (2003), results indicated a mean of $M = 5.73$; SD (3.13). There was a slight increase in the mean value for this study when compared to Andrew & Meyers (2003) as shown in Table 7 below. This indicates that the participants in the study, when compared to those in previous studies did not focus on what other people considered socially desirable. The implications of this are discussed in detail in the discussion section.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD	N
Verbal Aggression	39.30	17.41	321
Assertiveness	69.09	15.75	321
Lie Scale	6.04	3.15	321

The enter regression analysis was conducted to answer the primary research questions:

1) To what degree do participants' demographics (age, race/ethnicity and sex), family of origin variables (SES, and parenting style), and self-reported experience with early childhood trauma predict the variance in individual's expression of verbal aggression in their day to day relationships?

2) To what degree do participants' demographics (age, race/ethnicity and sex), family of origin variables (SES, and parenting style), and self-reported experience with early childhood trauma predict the variance in individual's expression of assertiveness in their day to day relationships?"

Results obtained from the analysis are summarized in table 8 and further described below.

Table 8

Correlation Matrix

	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	Verbal Aggression	1													
2	Assertiveness	.182**	1												
3	Age	-.205**	126*	1											
4	Gender	-.152**	-0071	.048	1										
5	Ethnicity	-.028	-.008	.039	.140*	1									
6	Father's Education	-.025	-.012	.065	.062	.044	1								
7	Mother's Education	.006	-.001	.079	.051	032	.514**	1							
8	Family SES	.085	.018	.008	.080	225**	.173	.186**	1						
9	Mother's discipline	.028	-.053	.102	.046	110*	.116	.048	.034	1					
10	Father's discipline	-.031	-.031	.040	.144	.131*	.026	.078	.032	.285**	1				
11	Direct V Abuse	-.144**	.006	043	.120	.004	.070	.115	112*	021	.002	1			
12	Direct P Abuse	-.076	-.028	152**	.129*	.050	.049	.030	.284**	.015	.013	.491**	1		
13	Witnessed P Abuse	-.045	-.041	.100	.106	.112*	.069	.010	310**	.020	.098	.411**	.02**	1	
14	Witnessed V Abuse	-.070	.018	.039	.051	.053	.009	.072	.178**	.054	.013	.684**	.459**	.565**	1

**Correlation significant at 0.01 level, * Correlation significant at .025 level

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Research Question One: Verbal Aggression

A Pearson Correlation Matrix for the whole sample indicated significant relationships between verbal aggression and the following variables: Age ($r = -.205$; $p = .000$), Gender ($r = -.152$; $p < .001$), Experiencing verbal abuse ($r = -.144$; $p < .001$). Significant correlations were established between verbal aggression and age as well as verbal aggression and gender. These results indicate that as age increases, verbal aggression decreases. With regards to gender, males were found to be more verbally aggressive than females. A report of experiencing direct verbal abuse during childhood was found to have a significant negative correlation with verbal aggression meaning that reporting an early life experience with verbal aggression is associated with a self-identification of being less verbally aggressive in adulthood. A summary of the results from the correlation are presented in the correlation matrix.

Demographics. To determine the demographic factors that predict verbal aggression in individuals, a regression analysis was performed for age, gender and ethnicity. Age, gender and ethnicity had a significant negative relationship on the expression of verbal aggression, $F (3, 318) = 2296.34$, $p < 0.01$; $R^2 = .072$. These three independent variables accounted for 7.2% of the variance in the regression model. These results suggest that an increase in age results in a reduction in the expression of verbal aggression. For gender, males reported a tendency to be more verbally aggressive than females. Ethnicity was found to have a negative correlation with verbal aggression. However, the results were not statistically significant, suggesting that a relationship could not be established between the participants' ethnic majority or minority status.

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Family of origin variables. When the regression analysis was conducted on the family of origin variables (Father's level of education, mother's level of education, family of origin SES, mother's style of discipline and father's style of discipline), the variables were not found to have a statistically significant effect on the occurrence of verbal aggression in adults, $F (5, 320) = 212.67; p = .625 R^2 = .011$. Together, the family of origin variables accounted for about 1% of the variability in the expression of verbal aggression in adults. While there was a relationship noted between the variables and verbal aggression, a lack of significance indicates that family of origin variables do not have a consequential effect on the expression of verbal aggression in adults.

Exposure to trauma. The variables that were utilized to assess for the impact reported early life trauma has on expression of verbal aggression were self-report of direct verbal and physical abuse and indirect exposure to verbal or physical abuse. Based on the literature, it was hypothesized that direct and early exposure to verbal abuse was most likely to influence becoming verbal aggressive into adulthood (Duman & Margolin, 2007) but on running the regression, it was found to not be statistically significant. While a trend was established for the variables under exposure to trauma, the results show that is it not possible to establish a significant relationship between exposure to trauma and the expression of verbal aggression. The results indicate that exposure to verbal aggression has a positive correlation with expression of verbal aggressive behavior $r = .029$. Due to Bonferroni correction, these results only approached significance and therefore further studies should be conducted in this area. Based on the regression model, $F (4, 320) = 544.72, p = .126, R^2 = .022$, exposure to trauma explains about 2.2%

of verbally aggressive behavior in individuals. A summary of the regression analysis is presented in Table 9.

Research Question Two: Assertiveness

A Pearson Correlation Matrix for the whole sample indicated a significant relationship between assertiveness and age. Age ($r = .129$, $p = 024$). Significant positive correlations were established between assertiveness and age indicating that as age increases, self-reported assertiveness also increases. For the rest of the variables, the relationship with assertiveness was not statistically significant indicating that a meaningful relationship could not be established.

Demographics. The enter regression analysis was conducted to determine the demographic factors that predict assertiveness in adults. Age was found to have a positive correlation with assertiveness while ethnic background and gender had negative correlations. These relationships were, however, not statistically significant, $F (3, 318) = 559.37$, $p =.08$, $R^2 = .012$ as displayed in Table 8 below. These three independent variables accounted for 2.1% of the variance in the regression model. With regards to age, it was noted that while the relationship with assertiveness did not meet significance due to Bonferroni correction, it approached significance $r = .026$ and therefore continued research should be conducted in this area. For gender, the trend in the data suggested that male respondents tended more assertive than the female participants. The results for ethnicity suggest that the ethnic majority reported being more assertive than the minority. However, the relationship was found to not be statistically significant and therefore it was

concluded that a meaningful relationship could not be established. A summary of the

regression model is presented in Table 9.

Family of origin variables. When the regression analysis was conducted on the

family of origin variables, none of the variables were found to have a statistically

significantly effect on the occurrence of assertive behavior individuals' $F (5, 320) =$

56.53 $p = .951$ $R^2 = .004$. The family of origin variables account for about 0.4% of the

variability in the expression of verbal aggression in adults. There was a negative

correlation between assertiveness and both the father's and mother's level of education,

as well as the father's and mother's style of discipline. Family SES when growing up

indicated a positive correlation with assertiveness. These relationships were however not

statistically significant and, therefore it can be concluded that the relationship between

the indirect variables have no effect on the occurrence of assertive behavior.

Exposure to trauma. To assess for the impact trauma has on expression of

verbal assertiveness, self-reported values of direct verbal and physical abuse and indirect

exposure to verbal or physical abuse were used in the regression model. These variables

were, however, not found to be statistically significant, $F (4, 320) = 86.08$, $p = .84$ $R^2 =$

.004. Exposure to trauma explains about 0.4% of assertive behavior in individuals.

Direct exposure to verbal aggression and witnessing a close member experiencing verbal

abuse had a positive correlation with assertiveness while direct and indirect forms of

physical abuse were negatively correlated with verbal abuse. These results indicate a

trend indicating that exposure to either direct or indirect verbal abuse may result in one

presenting with assertive behavior while direct or indirect physical aggression may lead

to expression of less assertive behavior. However, these were not statistically

insignificant, and therefore a relationship could not be established. A summary of the

regression analysis is presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9

Regression Model for Verbal aggression and Assertiveness

Variables	Verbal Aggression						Assertiveness					
	B	SE B	β	R	R²	p	B	SE B	β	R	R²	p
Model				.33	.111	000**				.18	.032	.600
Age	-.27	.07	-.21			.000**	.15	.07	.12			.026*
Gender	-6.06	-.17	-.17			.002*	-2.181	1.81	-.07			.228
Ethnicity	-1.58	1.11	-.08			.156	-.33	1.03	-.02			.750
Father's education	-.48	.67	-.05			.474	-.09	.61	-.01			.883
Mother's education	.15	.68	.02			.823	.04	.62	.00			.949
Family SES	1.2	.78	.09			.124	.24	.71	.02			.73
Mother's style of discipline	.75	1.08	.04			.490	-.81	.98	-.05			.413
Father's style of discipline	-.64	.95	-.04			.501	-.25	.87	-.02			.776
Experienced V. Aggression	-6.09	2.79	-.17			.029*	-.10	2.5	-.00			.97
Experienced P. Aggression	-.73	2.75	-.02			.791	-.55	2.5	-.02			.826
Witnessed P Aggression	.33	2.85	.01			.116	-2.23	2.60	-.07			.40
Witnessed V Aggression	1.85	2.93	.05			.530	2.06	2.68	.07			.78

Note ** $p < 0.001$ * $p < 0.02$

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study purposed to answer three research questions. 1) Is there a relationship between assertiveness and verbal aggression? 2). to what degree do participant's demographics (i.e. age, racial and ethnic status-minority-majority, sex), family of origin variables (i.e. SES, parenting styles), and self-reported experience with early childhood trauma (i.e. experienced, observed) predict the variance in occurrence of expression of verbal aggression in individuals' day to day relationships? 3) To what degree do participant's demographics (i.e. age, racial and ethnic status-minority-majority, sex), family of origin variables (i.e. SES, parenting styles), and self-reported experience with early childhood trauma (i.e. experienced, observed) predict the variance in occurrence of expression of assertiveness in individuals 'day-to-day relationships?

A significant positive correlation was found to exist between self-reported verbal assertive behavior and verbal aggression. These results are consistent with studies by Galassi and Galassi (1975) that found a significant linear relationship between assertiveness and verbal aggression for both males and females who participated in the study. This may suggest that given the right conditions, a person who considers himself /herself assertive may exhibit verbally aggressive tendencies and vice versa.

The Marlow-Crowne desirability scale was used as a measure to control for participants' desirability bias response to the survey questions presented. According to Larson (2018), the use of a social desirability scale can be useful especially when

conducting studies that involve individuals from different cultures, because some cultures encourage higher levels of desirability bias. As previously indicated higher scores on the Marlowe-Crowne desirability scale may indicate that the participants provided answers that they believed would be appealing to the society (Crowne &Marlowe, 1960). The negative correlation between the desirability scale and the direct variables (Assertiveness and verbal aggression) suggests that the participants generally provided responses that were honest and not necessarily influenced by the opinions of other people. It is important to note that the relationship between the lie scale and verbal aggression was significant while that of the lie scale and assertiveness was not. This could suggest that the participants responded to the questions assessing for verbal aggression with the awareness that the trait may not always be desirable and were intentional with the responses they provided. For assertiveness, it being considered a positive trait meant that the participants responded in a truthful manner without taking into consideration social desirability.

Andrew and Meyers (2003) in their study compared means of scores of the responses on the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale between forensic groups and non-forensic groups. Participants who were considered to be in the forensic groups included physical offenders, child neglect offenders, domestic violence offenders, child sexual abuse offenders, pretrial competency defendants, domestic violence victims, non-offending family members in child abuse cases, disability examinees, and other groups of individuals who were referred for psychological evaluation due to civil court proceedings. The mean for the forensic groups were higher (M = 7.61 SD = 3.32) than

those for non-forensic groups (M = 5.37 SD = 3.13). Comparison with means from

previous studies enables one to understand to what extent participant attempted to alter

their self-presentation. To interpret the scores, for example, higher scores for the non-

forensic group and average for forensic group may mean that the respondents may have

been more deceptive than the average population. A lower score indicates a possibility of

a negative self-critical response set. In comparing the means of this study (M = 6.04 SD

= 3.15) with that of the study by Andrew & Meyers (2003) non-forensic groups, an

increase in the mean was noted. The mean was however noted to be lower than that of

the forensic group. While there was a significant negative correlation between the social

desirability scale and verbal aggression, meaning that the respondents were not

influenced by societal opinions, the increase in the mean score may suggest that overall,

the participants presented themselves in a somewhat desirable manner when compared to

the respondents from previous studies. Assertiveness was not found to have a statistically

significant relationship with social desirability suggesting that being a positive trait, its

occurrence is not affected by social desirability.

      Demographics and Verbal Aggression. The findings from this study indicate

that age and gender have a significant negative relationship with verbal aggression. Age

was found to have the strongest effect on verbal aggression. These results are similar to

previous studies that concluded that as individuals get older, they report being less

verbally aggressive (Harris & Knight-Bohnhoff, 1996). Harris Knight-Bohnhoff (1996)

concluded in their study that age had a significant negative correlation with various forms

of aggression. Some of the reasons highlighted for this trend include the fact that as

people get older, they learn other ways to various situations that may have previously provoked feelings of anger and hostility. This opinion is similar to that of Liu et al. (2013) who reported that a younger age, children use more physical ways to express themselves because of poor language abilities. As they grow older and learn to communicate, they tend to be more verbally aggressive but this trend changes as they grow older and into adulthood and learn to use the verbal skills to reduce aggressive behavior and better communicate their needs.

With regards to gender, males appeared to be more verbally aggressive than women. These results were found to be consistent with previous research that indicate that men are more aggressive than women and tend to employ more direct forms of aggression (Campbel &Muncer, 2008). Harris and Knight-Bohnhoff (1996) study noted that generally men are considered more aggressive than women in all forms of aggression. However, in their study, they reported that there was not a statistically significant correlation between males and females in verbal aggression.

When the data was analyzed, ethnicity was found to have no effect on the occurrence of verbal aggression in adults. This is in contrast to previous literature that indicated a significant effect of ethnicity on verbal aggression. For example, aggressive behavior is mostly observed among individuals from ethnicities that encourage open confrontation and assertiveness in certain situations (Kim, et al., 2010). A study conducted by Harris (1995) found that Hispanic participants endorsed more aggressive behavior when compared to Caucasians and scored high in their opinion about aggression in general and aggression for self-defense. McLaughlin, Hilt and Nolen-Hoeksema

(2007) concluded in their study that black, male participants in the study were found to be more aggressive than white and Hispanic participants. The findings from this study do not support previous studies that concluded differences in verbal aggression based on race and/or ethnicity.

Family of origin variables and verbal aggression. When evaluated as whole, family of origin variables were not found to have a significant effect on verbal aggression. On further evaluation of the regression model, none of the individual variables were found to have a statistically significant effect on verbal aggression. This could be explained by several reasons. For example, with regards to SES, while most of the previous studies assessed for verbal aggressive behavior based on the respondents' current socioeconomic status, this study considered SES based on the respondent's early childhood status. The passage of time, change in the environment, and possibly their current SES status may have had an impact on the results obtained. Another reason for the results could be the fact that the questionnaire used for this study was based on self-reports and relied only on the respondents' perspectives. Other studies evaluating parenting style and its effect on verbal aggression either used standardized scales to evaluate parenting style. For example, the study by Trenas et al. (2013) used the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory to establish the parenting styles and the parents' attitude towards parenting and then compared this to the results obtained from the responses by the participants. Others like the study by Martin and Anderson (1997) involved the participants and their parents which enabled the researcher to obtain more information

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from various perspectives. The difference in methods used for data collection could explain the difference is results obtained in this study.

   Exposure to trauma and verbal aggression. Previous studies have indicated that exposure to trauma may affect individuals causing them to be more verbally aggressive and aggressive (Overlien, 2010). However, results of this study show that exposure to verbal aggression had a negative correlation with expression of verbal aggression in adults. Verbal aggression was also found to have the largest effect on the results obtained from the study. Experiencing physical abuse, as well as witnessing verbal and physical abuse was found to not be statistically significant. Holt, Buckely and Whelan (2008), in their review noted that that not all children who were exposed to traumatic environments end up being aggressive, as some have grown up to exhibit behaviors that would be considered contrary to their environment when growing up. According to Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, Kenny (2003), while these individuals may not exhibit traits indicating that they may have been affected by their environment while growing up, it is important to not assume that they were not affected at all. Researchers should, therefore, consider other factors that would be considered protective to promote resilience among such individuals.

Assertiveness

   Demographics and assertiveness. Overall, demographic information was found to have no significant impact on the expression of assertiveness in adults. Further evaluation of the results indicates a positive correlation between age and assertiveness. These results were however not statistically significant and contrary to studies by Eskin

(2003) that indicated that older individuals have been found to be more assertive when compared to younger people.

Gender and race/ ethnicity were also not found to have a statistically significant effect on assertive behavior. These results do not support studies by previous researchers. For example, with regards to ethnicity, studies by Yager and Rotheram-Borus (2000); Parham et al. 2015, suggested that assertiveness is influenced by ethnicity and that in the United States, Caucasians were found to be more assertive that individuals from other races. An interesting conclusion by Zane, et al. (1991) stated that that the difference in assertiveness between Asian and Caucasian individuals may be situational. The researchers noted that while Asians reported being less assertive, they exhibited this behavior only in situations that involved strangers. More recent studies by Cheng and Chun (2008) also noted that assertiveness across cultures is influenced by the context of the presenting situation and not the race or ethnicity. In their study, the aim was to establish the difference in behavior exhibited by Caucasian and Chinese participants in response to requests were considered "reasonable" and "unreasonable." The results showed that the participants responded in similar ways to the two contexts. They noted that the responses may have been influenced by the response model adopted by each participant. Those who adopted the "self-model" regardless of the race were more likely to assertively reject a request that was considered unreasonable while those who adopted the relational model were less likely to reject the request.

With regards to gender, the results also indicated no statistical significance. These results were contrary to studies by Jones & Page (1986) that concluded that males

are generally more assertive than females but were consistent with studies by Tucker et al. (1983) that also found no statistical significance between gender and assertiveness. More recent studies indicate that the expression of assertiveness, regardless of gender is dependent on the situation (Swanson, 1999; Eskin, 2003; Ikiz, 2011). The results in this study could be a further indication of the trend observed by these previous studies.

Family of origin variables and assertiveness. Overall, family of origin variable was not found to have a statistically significant effect on expression of assertive behavior. For this study, parent's level of education and family level of income were used to determine SES. Previous studies by (Twenge, 2001; Ibrahim, 2011), concluded that SES is a factor that largely affects the expression of assertiveness in adults. These results could not be supported by the results of this present study. The difference in results obtained could also be explained by the fact that the level of assertiveness in the previous studies was measured by the individual's own level of SES and not that of their parents as they were growing up.

With regards to parenting style, neither the mother's or father's parenting styles had a significant effect on current expression of assertiveness. These results were in contrast with previous studies that indicate that parenting style affects the behavior exhibited by individuals. For example, Nancy (1999) noted that parenting style was a good indicator of the child's social, academic, psychosocial and behavior competence. Based on Baumrind's (1991) study, children raised by authoritative parents are expected to be well socially adjusted when compared to those from authoritarian parents and those raised in permissive homes tend to exhibit weaknesses in social and instrumental

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domains.   Well-adjusted individuals tend to exhibit more assertive traits as compared to those who exhibit poor social skills, low self-esteem as well as signs of depression and anxiety (Sarkova et al., 2013). These results were not supported by those obtained by this study.

Exposure to trauma and assertiveness. The variables under exposure to trauma include direct and indirect exposure to verbal and physical abuse. While these variables were found to have a positive correlation with assertiveness, there was no statistically significant effect on expression of assertiveness in adults. These results are in contrast to previous studies by Rutten et al. (2016) who noted that individuals who experienced direct and indirect forms of physical abuse reported being less assertive as adults, and that children who reported witnessing violence while growing up were found to exhibit a host of behaviors including being fearful, inhibited and showed lower social competence when compared to other children. They also exhibited symptoms associated with trauma, anxiety depression as well as low self-esteem when compared to children who were not exposed to violence at home. Through longitudinal studies, these symptoms were found to still be observed in adults. These symptoms according to Rutten et al. (2016) are associated with low levels of assertiveness and a tendency to not stand up for oneself

Summary

To summarize the findings of the study, the aim of the study was to find out the extent that the indirect variables of demographic (i.e., age, racial and ethnic status and gender), family of origin variables (i.e., SES and parenting style) and self-reported experience with early childhood trauma (i.e., experienced or observed) affect verbal

aggression and assertiveness in day to day relationships. The results indicate a positive

correlation between assertiveness and verbal aggression suggesting that it is possible for

one person to exhibit both characteristics. What the study was not able to establish is

what may lead one to tend to exhibit one more than the other on a day to day basis.

While there is a positive correlation between assertiveness and verbal aggression, there

appears to be sufficient distinction by the respondents in expression of both constructs

that warrants additional study. Looking at the variables, age was found to be a predictor

of verbal aggression but not assertiveness. As one grows older, he/she tends to become

less verbally aggressive. Men were found to exhibit more verbal aggression than women.

However, Lease (2017) notes that assertiveness in women is like "a double-edged

sword", because while there are people who appreciate it and encourage it, it is still seen

by others as a negative trait, compelling women to still try and find a balance without

being "too assertive."

Under the family of origin variables, family's overall income as well as parents'

level of education and parenting style was not found to have a statistically significant

effect on the expression of verbal aggression or assertiveness. For exposure to trauma,

exposure to verbal aggression was found to have a significant negative relationship with

verbal aggression. These results are in contrast with reports that have indicated that

witnessing or experiencing direct forms of aggression as a child puts one at risk of

expressing the same aggressive traits with one's family in the future (Duman & Margolin,

2007).

These results indicate a difference in the etiology of verbal aggression and assertiveness. There was a significant correlation between verbal aggression and age, gender and exposure to verbal aggression. The male respondents rated themselves as more verbally aggressive than females and younger participants responded as being more aggressive. A negative correlation between early exposure to verbal aggression and the expression of verbal aggression presents an interesting perspective, suggesting that those who did not experience verbal aggression growing up reported themselves as being more verbally aggressive. There was no significant correlation between assertiveness and any of the variables included in this study. The results of this study are in contrast with many previous studies that indicate these two constructs are influenced by the independent variables in this study. This raises the question as to whether verbal aggression and assertiveness are innate traits that are observable in certain situations and not others. Further research should be conducted this area to provide an explanation for the occurrence of these traits.

Limitations

This study presents with some limitations. First, as with studies based on self-report, one of the limitations of this study was that the respondents may have responded with some levels of social desirability bias. According to Rosenman, Tennekon and Hill (2011), participants tend to want to "look good" even when taking part in anonymous studies. Secondly, the study was based on retrospective information that required the participants to think back to their lives growing up. Because of the passage of time, it is possible that the information obtained may be distorted based on what the participants

could remember. Henning, Leitenberg, Coffey, Turner, and Bennet (1996) noted that in some cases, when conducting retrospective studies, participants may only recall negative experiences in their family history or sometimes are not able to remember with accuracy the situation or conditions while growing up. The third limitation of this study was that it was based on a limited population sample that was chosen due to convenience and therefore the results obtained may not be generalizable to populations represented by the data (Bornstein, Jager, & Putnick, 2013). Another limitation of the study is that most of the studies used in the literature are old and may not necessarily represent the trends that are observed in the current populations. More research needs to be conducted in this area to increase the literature available. As with correlation studies, this research could only demonstrate relationships between various variables but cannot show causality (Thompson, Diamond, McWilliam, Snyder, & Snyder, 2005) and the findings were only restricted to the variables included in the model. During data analysis, the responses for race were collapsed into two groups; majority and minority groups. This may have contributed to the difference in the results obtained for the effect of race or ethnicity on verbal aggression and assertiveness. Finally, there were even fewer studies on assertiveness based on the American population. This could be because compared to other populations, Americans are considered generally assertive and therefore it is not considered a problem area. However, there still are members of the society who may experience difficulty expressing assertiveness and may need continued support to develop this trait.

Implications for Practice

The results obtained from this study indicate that the occurrence of verbal aggression or assertive may not necessarily be a result of factors previously stated by prior studies. What this implies is that due to the passage of time since the occurrence of the variables to the time of the study there could be other confounding factors that could lead to verbal aggression and assertive behavior. This study therefore provides a basis for researchers to further study what other possible factors could be influencing the occurrence of verbal aggression and assertiveness. For example, while this study asked the participants to whether or not they experienced physical or verbal abuse, the researcher did not seek to find out how long and how frequently they were exposed to such environments. Researchers may also look at other variables including genetic factors, neurological factors and socio-emotional factors and how these may influence verbal aggression and assertiveness. This information can also be useful to practitioners for example teachers, school psychologists, and school counselors as they strive to come up with interventions to cope with aggressive behaviors and build assertive behaviors in individuals. Having the knowledge that assertiveness is not influenced by these variables can help when coming up with training programs for assertiveness. Professionals can therefore focus on teaching more positive communication strategies that do not have a negative impact on the persona of other individuals.

This study sought to add literature on verbal aggression and assertiveness and further give more insight into the etiology of the two constructs with the hope that a

better understanding of these factors will also help parents, teachers and professionals

working with children and adolescents understand behavior and possibly come up with

more effective interventions to meet the needs of individual clients.

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APPENDIX A

Demographic Questions

State your age_____

Gender: _____Female ____Male _____Other (Specify)_____

Your ethnic and racial background (Select One)

___African American/ Black ___Latino/ Latina ___Caucasian (Non-Latino/Latina)

___Native American/ Alaska Native ___Asian American

Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander ___Other (Specify)_____

State where were you born (city/ state, region, country) _____

Which level of education best describes you? Select one

____Freshman ____Sophomore ____Junior ____Senior ____ Master's

program ____Doctoral Program ____Other (e.g. Certification)

What is your father's highest level of education? Select one

___Elementary school ___Junior School ___High School ___Some

College education ___Associate Degree ___Degree ___Graduate School

___Doctorate level ___Unknown ___Other (e.g. Certification)

What is your mother's highest level of education?

___Elementary school ___Junior School ___High School ___Some

College education ___Associate Degree ___Degree ___Graduate School

___Doctorate level ___Unknown ___Other (e.g. Certification)

What was your family of origin's household social economic status when you were growing up? Check one of the following.

___Lower class   ___Working class ___Lower middle class ___Middle class ___Upper middle class ___Upper class

How would you describe your mother's style of discipline? Select one that best describes your mother's style of discipline.

_____My mother established rules and expected me to follow them

_____My mother established rules but kept in mind my opinion when setting limits

_____My mother tended to be lenient and only acted when I was in serious trouble

_____My mother was extremely lenient and did not take much note of what I was up to

How would you describe your father's style of discipline? Select one that best describes your father's style of discipline.

_____My father established rules and expected me to follow them

_____My father established rules but kept in mind my opinion when setting limits

_____My father tended to be lenient and only acted when I was in serious trouble

_____My father was extremely lenient and did not take much note of what I was up to

Did you experience verbal abuse as a child? ___Yes ___ No

Did you experience physical abuse as a child? ___ Yes ___No

Did you, when growing up witness a close member of the family experience physical abuse? __Yes ___No

Did you, when growing up, witness a close member of the family experience verbal abuse? ___Yes ___No

Was spanking used as a form of discipline in your home when you were growing

up? ___Yes   ___No

Have you received any counseling services before?   ___Yes   ___No

Have you had a clinical diagnosis for a psychological condition or disorder?

___Yes   ___No

Have you read self-help books before?   ___Yes   ___No

Does religion ply an important role in your life?   ___Yes   ___No

Are you currently part of any support groups?   ___Yes   ___No

Are you or have you been on medication for any psychological disorder?

___Yes   __No

APPENDIX B

Below is a list of different common situations you may experience in daily life.

Following each situation is a variety of responses. Rate to what extent each response best

describes how you would react to the given situation. Here is an example:

In my free time, I…

a. Play sports   Never 1 2 3 4 5

Always

b. Spend time with family   1 2 3 4 5

c. Hang out with friends   1 2 3 4 5

d. Watch movies   1 2 3 4 5

1. I have been working at the same company for a while. It has been over a year

since I received a promotion. I…

a. Ask my boss about getting a promotion.   1 2 3 4 5

2. When someone close to me unjustly criticizes my behavior, I…

a. Openly discuss the criticism with the person.   1 2 3 4 5

b. React angrily and tell the person that she/he shouldn't be

throwing stones.   1 2 3 4 5

3. When someone I don't know well borrows something from me and forgets to

return it,   I…

a. Demand it back.   1 2 3 4 5

b. Ask if she/he is done and ask for it back.   1 2 3 4 5

4. I am at the grocery store and several of my items ring up incorrectly, I…

a. Get angry and demand that the cashier change the price. 1 2 3 4 5

b. Ask the cashier to do a price check on the particular items. 1 2 3 4 5

5. At a meeting at work, I keep trying to say something but keep getting interrupted. I…

a. Without apologizing, cut the next person off from talking…

after all I have been waiting to talk too. 1 2 3 4 5

6. My friends and I are trying to decide on a place to eat. They come to a decision about going to a place to eat that I do not like. I…

a. Tell them that I have had some bad experiences there

and that I would prefer a different place. 1 2 3 4 5

7. If I start to think that someone I don't know well is taking advantage of me, I…

a. Talk rationally to the person and express concern about

the one-sidedness of the relationship. 1 2 3 4 5

b. Tell the person off the next time she/he takes advantage

of me again. 1 2 3 4 5

8. When I have to return an item to a store without the original receipt, I…

a. Take it to the store and demand a refund. 1 2 3 4 5

b. Stand my ground if the sales person gives me a hard time. 1 2 3 4 5

9. If someone I know well says something that hurts my feelings, I…

a. Would tell him/her off. 1 2 3 4 5

b. Provide evidence why the comment was incorrect. 1 2 3 4 5

10. If the postal carrier continually forgets to take my outgoing mail, I…

    a. Raise my voice at him/her the next time I see him/her.   1 2 3 4 5

11. If I find a mistake on a bill I receive in the mail, I…

    a. Call up the company and talk to someone about the mistake.   1 2 3 4 5

12. If someone I don't know well disagrees with me during a conversation, I…

    a. React angrily.   1 2 3 4 5

    b. Continue elaborating on my opinion until the person

    understands it.   1 2 3 4 5

13. If I am at a performance and someone keeps talking loudly, I…

    a. Would tell the person to shut up.   1 2 3 4 5

    b. Say something to the usher.   1 2 3 4 5

14. If someone I hire is not completing his/her work satisfactorily, I…

    a. Somehow let the person know what to do differently.   1 2 3 4 5

15. If a neighbor I know well returns something of mine in poor shape, I…

    a. Get angry and demand that it be replaced.   1 2 3 4 5

    b. Request that my neighbor replace or fix it.   1 2 3 4 5

16. If someone cuts in line ahead of me at the movies, I…

    a. Start making loud comments about how rude the person is.   1 2 3 4 5

    b. (if I am in a hurry) ask the person to move to the

    back of the line.   1 2 3 4 5

17. If the new newspaper deliverer does not deliver the newspaper a couple of days,

I…

a. Yell at the newspaper deliverer the next time I see him/her.   1 2 3 4 5

b. Mention the oversight next time I see him/her.   1 2 3 4 5

18. If a close family member keeps interrupting me when I am talking, I…

a. Snap at him/her.   1 2 3 4 5

19. If someone close to me kept telling other people things I had told him/her in confidence, I would…

a. Yell at the person the next time I see him/her.   1 2 3 4 5

Adapted from the Adaptive and Aggressive Assertiveness Scales (AAA-S) Thompson & Berenbaum (2011)

APPENDIX C

Marlowe-Crowne Scale (Reynolds's Form C)

Listed below are a number of statements concerning personal attitudes and traits. Read each item and decide whether the statement is True or False as it pertains to you personally.

	True	False

1. It is sometimes hard for me to go on with my work if I am not encouraged.

2. I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way.

3. On a few occasions, I have given up doing something because I thought too little of my ability.

4. There have been times when I felt like rebelling against people in authority even though I knew they were right.

5. No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener.

6. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone.

7. I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.

8. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget.

9. I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable.

10. I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very

different from my own.

11. There have been times when I was quite jealous of the

    good fortune of others.

12. I am sometimes irritated by people who ask favors of me.

13. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feeling

Consent Form
       Dear Participant,
       You are being asked to participate in this research study that is designed to find out if there is a significant relationship between assertive and verbally aggressive behavior. It also seeks to establish to what extent participant's demographics (i.e., age, racial/ethnic status—majority/minority, sex), family of origin variables (i.e., SES, parenting style), and self-reported experience with early childhood trauma (i.e., experienced, observed) predict the variance in college students' expression of verbal aggression and assertiveness in their day to day relationships. **Participation in this study should take a minimum of 15 minutes and maximum of 40 minutes to complete.**

       The risks to your participation in this online study are those associated with basic computer tasks, including boredom, fatigue, mild stress. Some of the questions may require you to remember some things from your childhood which may elicit some feelings of anxiety. If this happens, you may access counseling services from counseling centers available in the community. You are also allowed to leave the study at any point if you so wish. However, if you decide to leave the study before completing, you may not receive credit for participating in the study. Participation is completely voluntary. You must be at least 18 years of age and be a resident of The United States. All information obtained from this study will remain anonymous and confidential.

       To the participant, the benefit of this study is the learning experience from participating in a research study. To the society, the information obtained will provide further insight into the two concepts of verbal aggression and assertiveness which may be used for further research as well as development of suitable interventions as needed.

       All IP addresses will be deleted, and all data will be downloaded on to only one password protected computer. Any reports and presentations about the findings from this study will not include your name or any other information that could identify you. Your Mechanical Turk Worker ID will be used to distribute payment to you but will not be stored with the research data we collect from you. Please be aware that your MTurk Worker ID can potentially be linked to information about you on your Amazon public profile page, depending on the settings you have for your Amazon profile. We will not be accessing any personally identifying information about you that you may have put on your Amazon public profile page.

       Your participation is voluntary. You may stop participating at any time by closing the browser window or the program to withdraw from the study. Partial data will not be analyzed. After you complete the questionnaire, you will receive 50 cents ($.50)

for completing the tasks correctly. The researchers have the rights to withhold compensations as outlined in the Mechanical TURK's term and conditions.

If you desire further information about this study, you may contact Juliet Aura at aurajw@jacks.sfasu.edu, Dr. Robbie Steward at stewardrj@sfasu.edu

Sincerely,
Juliet Aura
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, please contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (OSRP) at (936) 468-6606.
By clicking the "YES" button, you will be agreeing to the terms and conditions and agree to participate in this study.

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

VITA

Juliet received her bachelor's degree in Hospitality and Tourism Management from Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya. She then worked as head of operations in a corporate training firm for several years after which she decided to change career paths. She then moved to Nacogdoches, Texas in 2015, to pursue a masters and doctorate degree in school psychology. She is currently completing her doctoral internship hoping to graduate in the summer of 2020.

During her free time, Juliet enjoys travelling, reading and listening to Music.

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American Psychological Association (APA) Style

This thesis was typed by Juliet Aura.