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Where did you come from? The effects of culture, hometown region, and gender on the perception, endorsement, and justification of aggression

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WHERE DID YOU COME FROM? THE EFFECTS OF CULTURE, HOMETOWN

REGION, AND GENDER ON THE PERCEPTION, ENDORSEMENT, AND

JUSTIFICATION OF AGGRESSION

by
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A Thesis

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Thesis Chair: Terri Allen, Ph.D.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, James and Janice Hendricks. Your continuous love and support have allowed me to reach my dreams and conquer new challenges.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Ronald Green and Dr. Julia Heberle, of Albright College, for encouraging me to finish my senior thesis. The completion of my senior thesis was the foundation and inspiration for the current thesis. Secondly, I would like to acknowledge my amazing boyfriend, Christian Benulis, for forcing me to take weekend breaks and focus on life outside of graduate school and my thesis. For the rest of my life, I pledge to never utter "thesis" as much as I have this year!

Abstract

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WHERE DID YOU COME FROM? THE EFFECTS OF CULTURE, HOMETOWN
REGION, AND GENDER ON THE PERCEPTION, ENDORSEMENT, AND
JUSTIFICATION OF AGGRESSION
2013/14
Terri Allen, Ph.D.
Master of Arts in School Psychology

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine whether individual factors, including culture, hometown region, and gender, would affect the likelihood of a person perceiving and justifying an aggressive act. Previous literature explored the differences between distinctive cultural subtypes, hometown regions, and gender on the acceptance of expressing aggression. Hypotheses were established to examine the perception, justification, and endorsement of aggression in a northern setting with college-aged participants. Participants were asked to watch clips from six modern American movies. After each clip, participants answered seven questions based on their perceptions. Six univariate Analysis of Variances (ANOVAs) were conducted to address the hypotheses. With three exceptions, significance was not supported in the results. Participants from urban hometowns were less likely to perceive aggression in the acts and to rate them as aggressive. This suggested a potential normalized perception of aggression for individuals raised urban hometowns. Males were more likely than females to feel the act was justified and to commit the same act if in the situation, similar to previous literature. The results were interpreted taking into account potential limitations. Future directions and implications of factors influencing aggression in American society are discussed.

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<center>**Chapter 1**</center>

<center>**Introduction**</center>

Need for Study

Although there is less school violence than in previous decades, perceptions of
school violence are increasing (Neuman, 2012; Baum, 2005). There are various
reasons for this revolution, with the surge of media coverage surrounding school
shootings, bullying, and school rivalries leading the bombardment upon the American
culture. In conjunction with media coverage, violence and aggression are more
apparent in video games, television, and movies, most of which are marketed towards
teenagers and adolescents. With this media assault upon the American culture, but the
number of incidents of violence in schools decreasing, are students becoming
desensitized towards violence and aggression? Also, do certain qualities of a student,
such as their cultural heritage, hometown region, and gender, affect their perceptions
of aggression?

Previous literature has focused on whether gender, cultural heritage, or the
environment in which one was raised is an indicator for the person to commit
aggressive or violent acts. However, little research has investigated whether these
factors are indicative of people endorsing and justifying aggressive or violent acts, or
just experiencing or committing aggressive acts. Within a school system, although
violence is decreasing, could the endorsement and acceptance of aggression and
violence in the world today be increasing?

<center>1</center>

Purpose

The current study aims to examine the possible qualities in a person, cultural heritage, home region, and gender, which may lead to acceptance of media violence. Previous literature focuses on whether these factors will lead to them to participate in a violent act. However, the purpose of this study is to investigate whether a person's background will lead them to endorse or justify a violent act, rather than investigating personal aggressive or violent experiences.

Hypothesis 1

Compared to individuals self-identified as coming from an individualistic culture, individuals self-identified as collectivist will be more likely to perceive and justify aggression in the movie clips.

Hypothesis 2

Individuals from urban hometown regions will be the most likely to endorse and perceive aggressive acts from movie clips. Individuals from rural regions will be more likely to endorse and perceive aggression compared to individuals from suburban regions.

Hypothesis 3

No difference will be found between genders in perceiving aggression in the clips. Men, however, will be more likely to justify and endorse the aggression viewed.

Operational Definitions

Aggression will be defined as "any act, verbal or physical, intended to hurt a person or another animal, whether physically or emotionally" (Stewart-Williams, 2002).

Collectivist societies will be defined as cultures which value group cohesion and success, over personal achievement (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990; Triandis, 2001).

Individualistic societies will be defined as cultures which value autonomy, emotional detachment from an in-group, and success of the individual (Triandis et al., 1990; Triandis, 2001).

Although hometown regions will be self-reported, and will not be defined for the participant, for the purpose of analyzing results, urbanized areas will be defined as having a population of 50,000 or more (Department of Commerce, 2011).

Suburban areas, also known as urban clusters, will be defined as a population between 2, 500 to 50,000 (Department of Commerce, 2011).

Rural areas will be defined as a population less than 2,500 (Department of Commerce, 2011).

Assumptions

Participants completing the survey are aware or familiar with the movie clips presented. They will also be able to read at an appropriate level.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is an unrepresentative sample of the general population. Due to the university's location, it may be difficult to collect data truly

representative of all collectivist cultures and hometown regions. Also, participants may respond differently to the endorsement of violence in the movie clips compared to how they would react in an actual situation. Finally, a limitation may be using self-reports to gather the data.

Summary

Media and violence are solidified within American culture. Understanding individual factors influencing this endorsement may shed light on how this entrenchment was derived. Chapter Two reviews previous literature, which focuses on how different cultures, hometown regions, and genders accept violence and aggression in certain situations. There is a lack of previous literature in how aggressive and violent acts are perceived and endorsed when these factors are considered, which the current study examines.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Since the advent of media, including television, movies, and video games, violent programs have become potential risk factors for aggression (Coyne, Linder, Nelson, & Gentile, 2012; Coyne, Stockdale, & Nelson, 2012; Josephson, 1987; Lin, 2013; Yoon & Somers, 2003). This risk factor affects males, in particular, who already score high in aggressiveness (Josephson, 1987). Women, though, are not exempt from experiencing aggressive thoughts or feelings (Coyne et al., 2012), or watching aggressive television programs (Yoon & Somers, 2003). However, aggression and violence were a part of American culture before the invention of electricity and the explosion of media upon society (Taylor, 2001; Webb, 2004). Thus, it is important to look at media as a gateway into finding aggression acceptable, but not as the sole reason a person will justify and endorse an aggressive act. Rather, the aim of this study was to investigate an individual's perception, justification, endorsement of aggression based on their cultural heritage, hometown region, and gender after viewing aggressive movie clips.

Culture

The United States became labeled the "melting pot" after people immigrated from across the world, including Western Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Spain, and Eastern Asia, and settled in the same region for the first time (Taylor, 2001). However, most countries tended to cluster in the same region and were able to retain a similar lifestyle to their life in their homeland (Taylor, 2001). For example, Spanish colonies arose throughout Mexico, the southwestern United States, and southern

Florida, while Western European colonies arose in the Northeast (Taylor, 2001; Vandello & Cohen, 1999). Thus, these countries were able to retain their culture. A culture is defined as "a socially transmitted or socially constructed constellation consisting of such things as practices, competencies, ideas, schemas, symbols, values, norms, institutions, goals, constitutive rules, artifacts, and modifications of the physical environment" (Fiske, 2002, p.85). Language, time, and place are also significant features in discriminating between cultures (Triandis, 2001). The degree to which persons within a culture share the traditional beliefs and behaviors as generations before them is known as cultural consonance (Dressler, 2012). Many individuals who relocated to the United States were proud and comforted to retain their native culture (Taylor, 2001).

Within these three broad definitions (Dressler, 2012; Fiske, 2002; Triandis, 2001), two distinctive cultural subtypes have emerged: collectivistic and individualistic (Cohen, 2009; Fiske, 2002; Leung & Cohen, 2011; Triandis, 2000; Triandis, 2001; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990; Vandello & Cohen, 1999). As different cultures immigrated to North America, these subtypes followed. Through the maintenance of each separate culture, the United States has become entrenched with both individualistic and collectivist cultures (Vandello & Cohen, 1999). Although people in the modern United States are less entwined with their native cultures, individuals still adhere to the defining attributes associated with each culture (Triandis et al., 1990; Triandis, 2001).

Collectivist Cultures. Attributes of a collectivist culture include a strong sense of family integrity; a homogenous in-group (people within the same culture,

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family, or neighborhood); and a distinct difference between the in-group and the out-group. Social hierarchy, maintaining positive relationships, and social norms are essential to ensure balance and harmony (Triandis, 2000; Triandis et al., 1990). Also, external and internal evaluations are viewed as crucial to self-worth (Severance et al., 2013). For these reasons, aggression and violence are not viewed as appropriate as they disrupt social harmony, ruin personal reputation, and possibly destroy relationships (Triandis, 2001). In the contemporary United States, the ten states which ranked highest on the collectivist index, collected by Vandello and Cohen (1999, p. 283) were Hawaii, Louisiana, South Carolina, Mississippi, Maryland, Utah, Virginia, Georgia, California, and New Jersey. This contrasts with traditional research which has focused collectivist cultures mainly populating the Deep South (Cohen, 2009). Within the collectivist culture, there are also two subtypes: cultures of honor and cultures of face (Leung & Cohen, 2011).

Prior research has focusd on the culture of honor within the south, specifically the remote regions of the Appalachian Mountains, and individuals from a Scots-Irish heritage who settled in this area (Hayes & Lee, 2005; Reed, 1971; Vandello, Cohen, & Ransom, 2008; Vandello, Cohen, Grandon, & Franiuk, 2009; Webb, 2004). This isolated location led to a scarce, central law enforcement, which permitted families to protect themselves from outsiders (Leung & Cohen, 2011; Nisbett, 1993; Shackelford, 2005; Webb, 2004). Contemporarily, the southern United States has had higher levels of violence in comparison to the northern United States (Vandello et al., 2008). In the rural mountain regions, homicide rates are higher compared to the flatter lands of the coast and are more likely to result due to an interpersonal dispute

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between a family member or loved one (Nisbett, 1993; Reed, 1971). Hayes and Lee (2005) found similar results to Reed (1971), where southern rural males support violence when it is directed at a child, a spouse, or personal views.

The previous study focused on men within the culture of honor, and the level of aggression they exhibit (Hayes & Lee, 2005). Aggression is also supported by women within the Scots-Irish culture of honor, although it is not overtly expressed. It is, however, endorsed and fostered into the family environment, allowing for the continuation of the culture of honor. Women within this culture, and other cultures of honor, are more likely to approve of traditional gender norms and loyalty to a husband or father (Vandello et al., 2009). By taking this into consideration, this may explain the high levels of violence in the region, as spousal or child abuse is tolerated if the father or patriarch of the family is disobeyed. Women also hold more conservative views on gun control, a strong national defense, and spanking as a form of discipline for children (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996).

The Hispanic culture is also considered a culture of honor (Ahrens, Rios-Mandel, Isas, & del Carmen Lopez, 2010; Vandello et al., 2008). Beliefs of traditional gender morns are consistent with the Scots-Irish, southern United States culture of honor. In contrast, within the Hispanic culture these beliefs are strained as young people acculturate to the individualistic culture seen in the majority of the United States (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2006). Latin cultures endorse the concept of *familismo*, which refers to "attitudes, behaviors, and family structures operating within an extended family system and is believed to be the most important factor influencing the lives of Latinos" (Coohey, 2001, p. 130). Familismo and adhering to

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traditional cultural beliefs, such as speaking the national language, serve as protective factors against maltreatment and aggression for youths (Coohey, 2001; Reingle, Maldonado-Molina, Jennings, Komro, 2012). Conversely, Smokowski and Bacallao (2006) and Williford and DePaolis (2012) found adolescent aggression to be positively affected by parent-child conflict and perceived discrimination from peers, for being "different". Therefore, Latin adolescents, especially those whose families have recently immigrated to the United States, may feel stressed about adhering to traditional cultural values, while attempting to create an independent sense of self, similar to their Western peers.

Similarly to Latin cultures, the Italian culture endorses the importance of family and an extended family structure. As Western cultures began shifting to nuclear families, Italy experienced a slower transition and continued extended family structures (Artioli, Cicogna, Occhionero, & Reese, 2012). This continued as Italian families immigrated to North America, both to the United States and Canada (Lalonde, Cila, Lou, & Giguère, 2013). Contemporary Italian family structures still consist of either living with or in close proximity of extended family members and having children remain in the home for prolonged periods (Artioli et al., 2012; Vosburgh & Juliani, 1990). The focus on family allocentrism extends to mate selection, as strong cultural and familial ties are important factors, comparable to other collectivist cultures (Lalonde et al., 2013). Other characteristics modern Italian families identify with, besides family closeness, include warmth, loyalty, courage, and personal honor (Beck, 2000). Geographically, modern Italian – Americans generally live in the Northeast and North Central areas of the United States, in larger

cities or suburban areas within a metropolitan area. They are also more likely to remain in the same area throughout their lifetime (Vosburgh & Juliani, 1990).

Italian families are considered patriarchal, although women are still independent and are authority figures in the home (McCloskey, Treviso, Scionti, & dal Pozzo, 2002). Familial abuse does occur in Italian families, though the type of violence does not differ between American, Mexican, and Italian women. The only difference was found in the marriage length. Italian wives were married to their abusers for longer periods of time, possibly due to stricter divorce laws in the country (McCloskey et al., 2002). Therefore, media portrayal of Italian aggression may not be completely accurate (Beck, 2000). Collectivist ideals, such as family cohesion and happiness are major contributors against familial abuse in the Italian culture.

Asian cultures, including Chinese and Japanese cultures, are highly collectivistic (Triandis, 2000). However, rather than being cultures of honor, Asian cultures are face cultures (Leung & Cohen, 2011). Face cultures are highly dependent on the perception of others, similar to cultures of honor (Leung & Cohen, 2011). In contrast to cultures of honor, though, individuals within a face culture reside in cooperative social hierarchies. Aggression and violence is not accepted because it disrupts social harmony and norms; undermines the family system; and hurts the other family members, including the parents, older siblings, extended family, and the neighborhood. Thus, "saving face" is more important than retaliation (Ekblad, 1984; Forbes, Zhang, Doroszewicz, & Haas, 2009; Leung & Cohen, 2011; Triandis, 2000). Even compared to Chinese-American parents, Chinese parents do not allow for aggression against siblings and discourage aggression in Western-considered

appropriate situations, such as protecting oneself in a fight or if the child is being

bullied (Stollenberger, 1968). Chinese parents are more likely to use inductive

reasoning as a parenting technique, along with their collectivistic values. This in turn,

relates to lowered overt aggression as their child ages (Shuster, Li, & Shi, 2012).

Although aggression is not endorsed within face cultures, aggression still

happens within families and with adolescent peers. Chinese parents are most likely to

use verbal abuse if they have one child or if the child is male (Tang, 1996). Peers

exhibited physical aggression towards one another, at a rate of one in five children,

taken from a sample of 1, 798 junior high school students in a rural town in central

China. These students also scored higher in having aggressive beliefs, compared to

their non- or less aggressive peers (Wang, Chen, Xiao, Ma, & Zhang, 2012).

Regardless of peer influence, when adolescents endorse both collectivistic and

individualistic cultural values, they exhibit increased levels of aggression. The

individualistic cultural value may extend to the adolescent's academics, where the

children plan to succeed solely for themselves and not for their family (Li, Wang,

Wang, & Shi, 2010). Therefore, within certain context, adolescents still display

aggression and individualistic values within traditional collectivist cultures.

Nonetheless for some individuals, aggression is exhibited when collectivistic

values are disrupted. For example, Japanese individuals are most insulted when a

family member is publicly insulted, are stolen from, or are personally insulted in

public (Severance et al., 2013). Attacks or damages to a person's self-worth or

personal belongings, within this culture, are also seen as great offenses (Severance et

al., 2013). Reasons for this aggression coincide with the cultures of face's view of

punishment. Shame, instead of physical punishment, is proper because shame demonstrates humility, another crucial aspect in the culture of honor (Leung & Cohen, 2011). It also disrupts family harmony because the shame of one person can bring shame to the entire household (Leung & Cohen, 2011).

African American cultures are also considered collectivist, but are not considered honor nor face cultures. African American cultures and values are dominated by the existence of family (Ward, 1995). Cooperation and respect of others within a community and family are foundations within the African American culture. The establishment of this collectivist culture began in African tribes but continued during and after slavery in the United States (Ward, 1995). The culture led to the establishment of a racial identity for African Americans. This racial identity is a combination of a similar history with many others and the shared experiences of discrimination and oppression (Ward, 1995).

In comparison to other cultures, such as Latin, Asian American, and Caucasian, African-American children have the highest levels of aggression (Kim, Kamphaus, Orpinas, & Kelder, 2010; Nichols, Graber, Brooks-Gunn, & Botvin, 2006; Reingle et al., 2012; Swaim, Henry, & Baez, 2004; Ward, 1995). A component of increased violence for African Americans could be acculturation stress, similar to Hispanic cultures (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2006; Ward, 1995; Williford & DePaolis; 2012). African Americans who detach from collectivist views are more likely to engage in violent behavior to advance themselves materialistically (Ward, 1995). This detachment could lead to further acceptance of violence (Swaim et al., 2004). Also, African Americans are more likely to live in urbanized areas, so aggression may be

an adaptive response for self-defense and protection of their in-group (Kim et al., 2010). Aggression exhibited in urban areas will be further discussed in a later section.

Individualistic Cultures. In contrast to collectivist cultures, an individualistic culture has attributes including a sense of autonomy and emotional detachment from the in-group; holding personal goals and values above the goals and values of the in-group; and viewing confrontation as appropriate if in the proper situation (Triandis et al., 1990; Triandis, 2001). This culture is also considered a culture of dignity as persons within this culture believe they have an inalienable right to self-worth, which makes them equal to other individuals (Leung & Cohen, 2011). Vandello and Cohen (1999, p. 283) found the ten states ranked highest on the individualist index were Montana, Oregon, Nebraska, Wyoming, South Dakota, Colorado, North Dakota, Washington, Kansas, and Iowa. Thus, states in the Mountain West and Great Plains are the most individualistic within the United States (Vandello & Cohen, 1999). The individualist culture appears to have originated from Western European cultures and still exists in North and Western Europe, parts of North America, Australia, and New Zealand (Forbes et al., 2009; Triandis, 2000).

In terms of aggression, individualistic cultures are comfortable with endorsing and performing acts of aggression, especially if the conflict is protect oneself (Triandis et al., 1990). Compared to Pakistini, Israeli, and Japanese participants, Americans take great offense when their reputation or emotional well-being is damaged (Severance et al., 2013). Americans also consider damage to personal belongings and accomplishments as considerable value violations, as it disrupts autonomy, a key component to individualism (Severance et al., 2013). Forbes et al.

(2009) measured levels of aggression through questionnaires between the United States, Poland, and China. As a whole, individuals from the United States scored higher than the other two countries on measures of aggression, with Poland measuring the second highest (Forbes et al., 2009). These higher measures can possibly be traced back to American history, where personal belongings were valued during immigration and aggression and violence were the means for claiming land, rights, and freedom (Taylor, 2001).

Hometown Region

Collectivistic and individualistic societies can occur in various regions across the United States (Cohen, 2009; Vandello & Cohen, 1999). As immigrants settled in America, different geographical areas led to the colonization of distinct regions. Cities were established near bodies of water for trade accessibility (Taylor, 2001). These cities prospered as economies developed and larger amounts of people moved to these areas. The opposite effect happened in the desert and mountainous regions, causing more rural communities to develop (Taylor, 2001). In today's industrialized civilization, more densely populated cities are still located near large bodies of water (Philadelphia, New Orleans) and more rural areas are still located in desert or mountainous regions (Montana, New Mexico) (Taylor, 2001). The different areas are currently divided into three sections based on population: rural, suburban (urban clusters), and urban (urbanized areas) (Urban Area Criteria for the 2010 Census, 2011).

Rural Areas. A rural area is defined as having a population of less than 2,500 people (Urban Area Criteria for the 2010 Census, 2011). In rural areas, the

neighborhood has a significant impact on a person's development (Karriker-Jaffe, Foshee, Ennett, & Suchindran, 2013). Due to limited public transportation, rural youth have trouble exploring areas outside their neighborhood. As a result, neighborhood landmarks, including alcohol and tobacco retailers, often become after-school hang-out locations for youths, which may provide the opportunity for risk-taking behaviors (Chilenski, 2011). If tobacco and alcohol use is considered a norm in a neighborhood, through the quantity of retailers and family use, youths may be more accepting of trying these substances earlier in life. Adolescent-focused organizations and clubs did not mediate the negative effects of retailers on rural youths, as originally anticipated (Chilenski, 2011).

Family relationships and parental support are also predictors for aggression in rural adolescents (Larsen & Dehle, 2007; Mazfsky & Farrell, 2005). Children who witnessed violence, found their environment threatening, and had lowered parental emotional support were more prone to aggression (Larsen & Dehle, 2007; Mazfsky & Farrell, 2005). This effect was exacerbated if the adolescent viewed themselves as an outsider and were suspicious of peers (Larson & Dehle, 2007). Although aggression levels for both genders were influenced by family dynamics, Mazfky and Farrell (2005) found boys reported higher levels of poor parenting practices in conjunction with aggression. Similar to culture of honor research (Hayes & Lee, 2005; Reed, 1971; Vandello et al., 2009), males in Mazfky and Farrell's (2005) study may have learned aggression as acceptable from witnessing violence from their parents.

The combined impact of neighborhood and family conflict has a direct effect on aggression for children in rural areas (Karriker-Jaffe et al., 2013). Children raised

in high-conflict families within a disadvantaged neighborhood showed the increased levels of aggression towards peers. For boys, family conflict was a stronger predictor for aggression compared to neighborhood disadvantage. For girls, the interaction between family conflict and neighborhood disadvantage resulted in long-lasting aggression problems; most of which persisted through adolescence (Karriker-Jaffe et al., 2013). Higher levels of aggression were also apparent in dating violence for rural adolescents (Spencer & Bryant, 2000). Reported rates of dating violence were nearly double for rural adolescents (16%) compared to suburban (9%) and urban (8%), and the results were similar between males and females (Spencer & Bryant, 2000). Spencer and Bryant (2000) noted, however, these results were taken from smaller cities and rural areas in upstate New York. Therefore, the results were cautioned against generalization to larger metropolitan areas.

However, youth aggression in rural areas can be mediated by certain factors. Overall, rural areas include a larger population of elderly and children, compared to suburban and urban regions (Hart, Larson, & Lishner, 2005). Children, both girls and boys, raised by methamphetamine-involved parents reported being both the aggressor and victim against parents and siblings (Haight, Marshall, Hans, Black, & Sheridan, 2010). However, when grandparents played an active role with the children, they became emotional and social supports for the same children (Sheridan, Haight, & Cleeland, 2011). These children, who viewed their grandparents as supportive, had lower externalizing and aggressive scores on the Child Behavior Checklist for Children (Sheridan et al., 2011). In rural environments, extended familial support can

positively affect children, more than teachers or counselors, which are similar to collectivist cultures (Triandis, 2001; Triandis et al., 1990).

     Suburban Areas. Suburban areas, or urbanized clusters, have a population between 2,500 and 50,000 (Urban Area Criteria for the 2010 Census, 2011). Little prior research has been conducted to find correlations between environmental risk factors and aggression in suburban individuals. However, recent research has begun to find associations between this previously less studied area (Bradshaw, Rodgers, Ghandour, & Garbarino, 2009; Bradshaw, Goldweber, & Garbarino, 2013). Compared to urban adolescents studied in White, Bruce, Farrell, & Kliewer (1998), although suburban adolescents were less likely to experience serious forms of violence (hearing gunshots or witnessing a stabbing), they were exposed to similar rates of mild violence (observing a drug deal). However, even mild forms of aggression or violence can have a negative impact on suburban adolescents (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Bradshaw et al., 2013). Exposure to mild forms of aggression may be enough to form scripts of the endorsement and justification of violence, which are then expressed in a school setting and with peers (Bradshaw et al., 2009). Nevertheless, it is still unclear the level of exposure necessary for the formation of a script. Shorter exposure of violence may have a different impact compared to an adolescent who has been exposed for a longer amount of time (Bradshaw et al., 2009).

     Across gender, boys were exposed to higher levels of mild violence compared to girls (Bradshaw et al., 2009). With this increased exposure, it was expected for boys to be a greater risk for expressing aggression. However, girls were more likely

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to perceive violence and no gender difference was found in the display of aggression (Bradshaw et al., 2009). There are positive implications associated with aggressive behavior for suburban male and female adolescents. Adolescents who show some physical aggression, but not aggressive behavior, were more esteemed by their classmates. This was correlated with attractiveness in girls and athletic ability in boys (Becker & Luther, 2007). Interestingly, boys who were high substance users had higher levels of peer admiration (Becker & Luther, 2007). Thus, a milder form of aggression, using substances, is more socially accepted and admired in suburban contexts, compared to more severe forms of aggression, such as physical fights or bullying.

Urban Areas. Urban areas have a population of more than 50,000 people (Urban Area Criteria for the 2010 Census, 2011). Violence in urban areas is more common compared to suburban areas. Youths living in urban areas are 50 – 75% more likely to experience serious violence in the form of hearing gunshots or witnessing someone being stabbed or shot (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Ward, 1995; White et al., 1998). Compared to the general population, individuals in urban areas may need fewer motives to become aggressive towards another. This is possibly due to desensitization and the development of a violent value system (Baron, Forde, & Kennedy, 2001).

As a result, similar to rural regions, family support is a protective factor against aggression (Sheridan et al., 2011). Especially for girls, family support is essential for the decrease in anxiety felt within a violent community (White et al., 1998). Disruption of the family structure, away from a two-parent, non-blended

household, can have serious impact on a child. It increases the likelihood of adolescent delinquency. In comparison, less delinquency was demonstrated if other changes of family structure occurred, such as a becoming a two-parent, non-blended household (Nichols et al., 2006).

Compared to the general male population, boys raised in urban regions were more likely to endorse and participate in violence which impacts the amount of aggression displayed in a conflict (Baron et al., 2001). The development of aggression became an aid in popularity and social status beginning in elementary school. As early as third grade, individuals who were aggressive were viewed as leaders among their peers (Waasdrop, Baker, Paskewich, & Leff, 2013). Sixth grade boys reported committing five or more aggressive acts within the past month, which was significantly higher compared to sixth grade girls. In the seventh grade, girls participated in more aggressive acts, eliminating the difference between girls and boys (Nichols et al., 2006). Thus, aggression may continue in urban school settings to maintain or increase popularity.

Gender

A well-researched area involves the evident sex differences in the expression of aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Karriker-Jaffe, Foshee, Ennett, & Suchindran, 2008; Kim et al., 2010; Nichols et al., 2006; Waasdrop et al., 2013). Overall, boys are more likely to commit overt aggressive acts compared to girls, such as physically fighting (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Karriker-Jaffe et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2010; Nichols et al., 2006; Swaim et al., 2004; Waasdrop et al., 2013). Girls, on the other hand, are more likely to commit relational aggression, such as peer pressure

or verbal bullying peers (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukianinen, 1992; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Farmer, Estell, Bishop, O'Neal, & Cairns, 2003; Waasdrop et al., 2013). This effect displays the adherence to traditional gender norms within the United States. The established traditional gender roles emphasize masculinity in males and femininity in females (Stewart-Williams, 2002). This cultural value also supports aggression and discrimination towards minority groups, including homosexuals. By expressing prejudice against homosexuals, heterosexual males are able to strengthen their status within society (Vincent, Parrott, & Peterson, 2011).

Traditional gender norms were also involved in popularity and peer acceptance. Overtly aggressive boys were considered popular and school leaders (Björkqvist et al., 1992; Farmer et al., 2003; Waasdrop et al., 2013). Men who fought in bars may have been attempting to impress women and prove they are "tough". Through fighting, they were viewed as opposing and protective. In this case, aggression was used for impression management (Graham & Wells, 2003). For some men, adherence to traditional gender roles and exhibiting aggression was intrinsically fulfilling. Feelings of righteousness, group cohesion, power, and positive attention from friends and people watching were encouraging features of aggression. Negative consequences, including injury or being arrested, were considered unimportant; rather, these became "war" stories (Graham & Wells, 2003). Males, though, begin to display social aggression, similar to women, later in life (Björkqvist, Österman, & Lagerspetz, 1994; Kim et al., 2010). This may be due to social constraints, not allowing overt aggression to continue as men age. However, overall, the traditional

male roles may explain why men are more accepting of aggression in comparison to females (Swaim et al., 2004).

For relationally aggressive girls, although they were considered leaders and popular (Björkqvist et al., 1992; Farmer et al., 2003; Waasdrop et al., 2013; Zimmer-Gembeck, Pronk, Goodwin, Mastro, & Crick, 2013), self-reports have found these girls may be maladjusted (suffering from depression or social isolation) (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Girls may have been unhappy in their peer relationships and becoming relationally aggressive was an appropriate outlet to manifest their maladjustment (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Continuation of relational aggression may have been used by girls to disguise maladjustment and have others perceive them as confident and popular. Relational aggression is also a more socially acceptable expression of aggression for females (Stewart-Williams, 2002). Although social and relational aggression arises one year prior to physical aggression for both children (Karriker-Jaffe et al., 2008), only females are allowed to continue expressing this aggression (Stewart-Williams, 2002). This could explain results found by Stewart-Williams (2002), where participants were more likely to perceive aggression if the actor was a woman (Stewart-Williams, 2002). Women displaying aggression are more socially accepted compared to men, because relational aggression is considered less threatening compared to overt aggression (Stewart-Williams, 2002).

Summary

Increased aggression in media outlets, such as movies, television, and video games, has influenced society to believe there is only one main avenue for the development of aggression. Conversely, history has shown otherwise. For example,

the display of aggression is apparent in different cultures, hometown regions, and gender. Research has focused on the incidents of aggression within the previously mentioned variables (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Triandis et al., 1990; Vandello et al., 2008). All three individual components can lead to acts of aggression, with different purposes, such as protecting oneself, a close family member, friend, or one's belongings; to increase popularity and peer acceptance; and to adhere to traditional cultural or gender norms (Baron et al., 2001; Björkqvist et al., 1992; Hayes & Lee, 2005; Karriker-Jaffe et al., 2013; Severance et al., 2013; Waasdrop et al., 2013; Webb, 2004). By investigating individual differences amid the media's depiction of aggression, the current research assists the further understanding of aggression in the modern world.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Participants

One-hundred and eighty-five (98 males and 87 females) undergraduate students from Rowan University exchanged participation in this study for extra credit. Participants were recruited through the Rowan University Participant Pool. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 33 (M =19.62$, SD$ = 1.95). 131 (70.80%) participants identified a cultural identity of collectivist and 54 (29.20%) participants identified a cultural identity of individualistic. 31 participants (16.80%) indicated their hometown as urban, 127 (68.60%) participants indicated their hometown as suburban, and 27 (14.60%) participants indicated a rural hometown.

Variables

Six American movie clips depicting aggression were used. The movie clips were: "Greg's Outta Here" from *8 Mile* (Grazer, Iovine, & Hanson, 2002), "Cady Goes Primal" from *Mean Girls* (Michaels, Shimkin, Rosner, Messick, & Waters, 2004), "Somebody or Nobody" from *American Gangster* (Grazer & Scott, 2007), "Picking on Lupus" from *Bad News Bears* (Jaffe & Ritchie, 1976), "You Can't Stop What's Coming" from *No Country for Old Men* (Rudin, Coen, & Coen, 2007), and the final courtroom scene from *The Boondock Saints* (Fried, Brinker, McGarry, & Duffy, 1999). After each movie clip, the following seven questions were asked: "Did you perceive an aggressive act?"; "If yes, please identify the aggressive act..."; "How aggressive did you find the act you identified?"; "Did you feel the act you identified was justified?"; "Would you have done the same act, you identified, if in the

situation?";"What percentage of the United States population do you believe hold similar views as you on the act you identified?"; and "Do you believe that males or females are more likely to commit the act you identified?" Four of these questions were previously used by the researcher in completion of her senior thesis for her undergraduate degree. The questions were created based on previous culture of honor research (Hayes & Lee, 2005; Reed, 1971; Vandello, Cohen, & Ransom, 2008; and Vandello, Cohen, Grandon, &Franiuk, 2009).

For the remainder of this paper, the questions will now be referred to as the "Perception" question for "Did you perceive an aggressive act?"; "Aggressive" question for "How aggressive did you find the act you identified?"; the "Justified" question for "Did you feel the act was justified?"; the "Same Act" question for "Would you have done the same act if in the situation?"; the "United States Population" for "What percentage of the United States population do you believe hold similar views as you on this act?"; and the "Gender Difference" question for "Do you believe that males or females are more likely to commit this act?".

A demographic questionnaire was given to gain background information, which included: age, gender, class standing, ethnicity, home state, religious affiliation, closeness of family, description of hometown (urban, suburban, or rural), and how the participant classified themselves (African American, Caucasian, or Hispanic).

Statistical Analysis. The experiment was a between subject design where the independent variables were gender, ethnicity (culture), and hometown of the participant. The dependent variables were the responses from the movie clip

questions. The data was interrupted through six, 3 x 1 univariate Analysis of Variances (ANOVAs).

   Coding. Prior to analysis, data was cleared of duplicate participants. The seven questions answered after each movie clip varied in question type. Questions without Likert Scale answers were coded into a numerical scale. Therefore, the first question, "Did you perceived an aggressive act?" was coded from "Yes" or "No", into 1 and 2. The second question, "If yes, please identify the aggressive act" was a follow up question to the first. This question was a qualitative answer and will not be used in the quantitative analysis. Similarly, the seventh question "Do you believe that males or females are more likely to commit the act?" was coded from "Males" or "Females", into "Males" or "Females". For three of the questions, a Likert scale was used. The numerical scale corresponds to the Likert scale in the following way: Strongly Agree (1), Neutral (3), and Strongly Disagree (1). The participants' overall answers were investigated; therefore, each question was combined to create an overall score. For example, "Did you perceive an aggressive act?" was the first question after each movie clip. The six answers were averaged and new dependent variables were created.

   In the demographic section, gender, hometown region, and ethnicity were coded, to create the independent variables. Gender was coded males (1) and females (2); hometown region was coded urban (1), suburban (2), and rural (3); and ethnicity was coded into collectivist (1) and individualistic (2) cultures, based on previous literature.

Design and Procedure

      Participants used the Rowan Subject Pool and followed the link to the Google Form survey. Before beginning the survey, the participants read and signed the informed consent form. Participants were told they would be watching six videos and answering questions pertaining to each video. After watching one movie clip, the participant answered seven questions pertaining to their opinions. The same questions were asked after each movie clip. Some movie clips may have become offensive to participants, due to foul language and violence depicted. Participants were informed of this risk during the informed consent and were debriefed about the purpose of using this material. At the end, the participants filled out the demographic questionnaire and read the debriefing statement. The debriefing statement also included information about the Rowan University Counseling Center, if the participant needed to debrief about the study to a professional.

Hypotheses

      The three hypotheses for this study were as follows: (1) Individuals self-identified as coming from a collectivist culture will be more likely to perceive and justify the aggression in the movie clips, compared to those self-identified from an individualistic culture; (2) Individuals from urban hometown regions will be the most likely to endorse and perceive aggressive acts from the movie clips. Individuals from rural regions will be more likely to endorse and perceive aggression compared to individuals from suburban regions; (3) No difference will be found between genders in identifying the aggressive clips. Men, however, will be more likely to justify and endorse the aggression in the movie clips.

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Chapter 4

Results

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis stated that individuals, who self-identified with a collectivist culture, would be more likely to perceive and justify aggression in the movie clips, as compared to individuals self-identifying with an individualistic culture. To address this hypothesis, six, 3 x 1 univariate ANOVAs with gender, ethnicity, and hometown region acting as the independent variables and the six averaged questions acting as the dependent variables were conducted. There were no significant results to support this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis two stated that individuals from urban hometown regions would be the most likely to endorse and perceive aggressive acts from movie clips. Individuals from rural regions would be more likely to endorse and perceive aggression compared to individuals from suburban regions. The same six, 3 x 1 univariate ANOVAs which were conducted to test hypothesis one were used to address this hypothesis. A main effect for hometown region was found for the "Perception" question, $F(2, 174) = 3.97$, $p < .05$. The results from this ANOVA are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Variance of "Perception" question according to gender, ethnicity, and hometown region.

Source	df	F	p
Hometown Region	2	3.973	.021*

Note. * = $p \leq .05$

For the "Perception" question, a Post Hoc test, Tukey HSD, was conducted and, overall, participants from urban hometowns ($M = 1.42$, $SD = 0.29$) were less likely to perceive an aggressive act compared to participants from suburban hometowns ($M = 1.29$, $SD = 0.24$). The difference in hometown region is displayed in Figure 1.
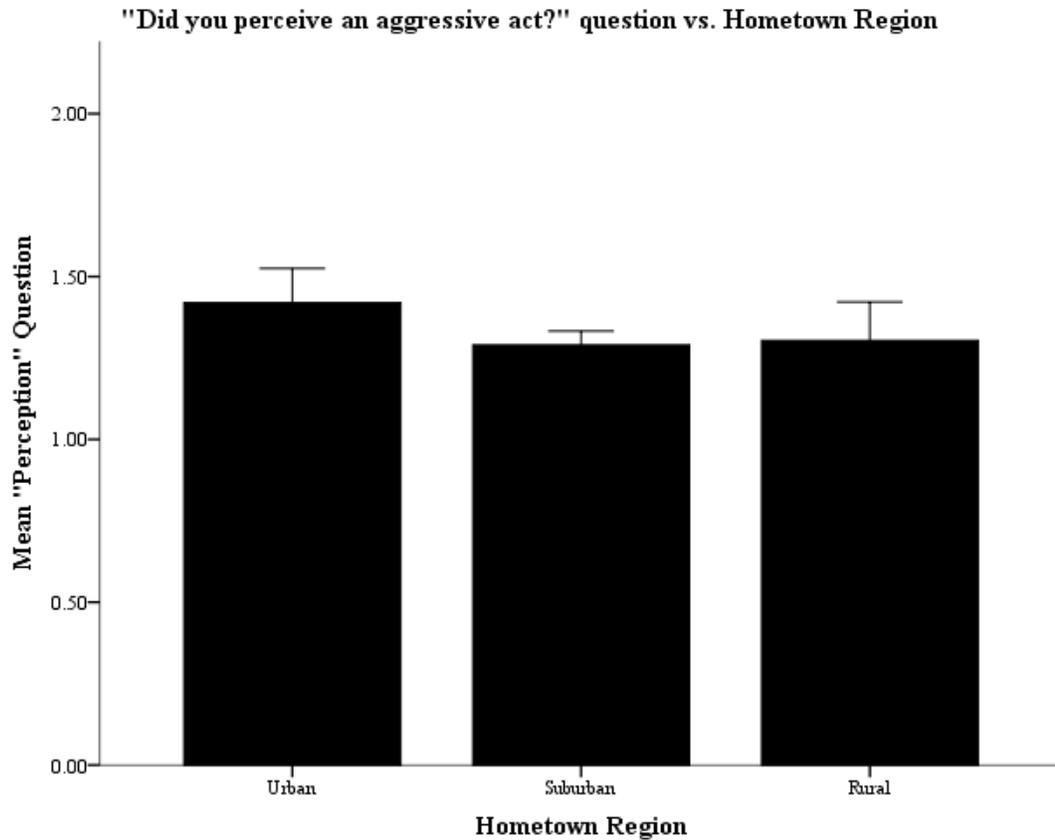
Figure 1. Post Hoc Tukey HSD comparison of hometown region against the "Perception" question.

There was no main effect for rural participants ($M = 1.30$, $SD = 0.30$). A marginally significant main effect for hometown region was found for the "Aggressive" question, $F(2, 174) = 2.955$, *ns*. Urban participants were less likely to rate the acts as aggressive, ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.58$), while rural participants were the most likely to rate the acts as aggressive ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 0.64$). Table 2 displays the results from this ANOVA.

Table 2

Variance of "Aggressive" question as a function of gender, ethnicity, and hometown region.

Source	df	F	Sig.
Hometown Region	2	2.955	.055

Hypothesis 3

Lastly, the third hypothesis stated there will be no different found between genders in perceiving aggression in the clips. Men, however, will be more likely to justify and endorse the aggression viewed. The same six, 3 x 1 univariate ANOVAs were conducted to address this hypothesis. A main effect for gender was found for the "Justified" question, $F(2, 174) = 4.49$, $p < .05$. Males ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.53$) were more likely than females ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.66$) to feel the aggressive acts as justified. Table 3 shows the results from this ANOVA.

Table 3

Variance of "Justified" question as a function of gender, ethnicity, and hometown region.

Source	df	F	Sig.
Gender	1	4.488	.036*

Note. * = $p \leq .05$

A second main effect for gender was found for the "Same Act" question, $F(1, 174) = 6.77$, $p < .05$. Males ($M = 3.38$ $SD = 0.66$) were also more likely to commit the same act if in a similar situation compared to females ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.69$). The results of this ANOVA are displayed in Table 4. The "Gender Difference" and

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"United States population" questions did not yield significant main effects or interaction results.

Table 4

Variance of "Same Act" question according to gender, ethnicity, and hometown region.

Source	df	F	Sig.
Gender	1	6.770	.010*

Note. * = p ≤ .05

Summary

Six univariate ANOVAS were conducted to examine the three hypotheses. The results addressed hypotheses two and three, as hypothesis one was not supported by the results. Hypothesis two was contradicted by the results, as participants from urban hometown regions were less likely to perceive aggression in the clips and were less likely to rate them as aggressive. In contrast, hypothesis three was supported by the results. Compared to females, males were more likely to feel the act was justified and to commit the same act if they were in the situation.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate whether individual factors, including culture, hometown region, and gender, would affect the likelihood of a person perceiving, justifying, and endorsing aggression from movie clips. Based on previous literature, three hypotheses were formulated. The first hypothesis was that individuals self-identified as coming from a collectivist culture, compared to those self-identified from an individualistic culture, would be more likely to perceive and justify aggression in the movie clips. In regards to hometown region, it was hypothesized that urban participants would endorse and perceive aggression more than suburban and rural participants. Rural participants were hypothesized to endorse aggression more than suburban students. Lastly, although there would no difference found between men and women perceiving aggression in the clips, men would be more likely to justify and endorse the aggression viewed.

Culture

One-hundred and thirty-one participants reported coming from a collectivist culture; however, the results of this study did not support the first hypothesis. Triandis (2000), Triandis et al. (1990), and Triandis (2001) explained how collectivist cultures stress social harmony and view aggression as unacceptable. Nevertheless, history and prior research have shown collectivist cultures do endorse aggression in certain situations. For example, aggression is accepted in situations to either protect or harm a close friend or family member (Hayes & Lee, 2005; Kim et al., 2010; Nichols et al., 2006; Reingle et al., 2012; Severance et al., 2013; Swaim et al., 2004;

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Tang, 1996; Webb, 2004). Vandello and Cohen (2011) also found New Jersey as one of the top collectivist states. Therefore, it was interesting to find no significance although the study was conducted in New Jersey and the majority of the participants were from New Jersey. A possible explanation of the findings includes the participants not becoming emotionally connected to the characters in the clips. As a result, the collectivist participants may have answered similarly to the individualistic participants, who are more likely to endorse general acts of aggression (Triandis et al., 1990).

In the demographic survey, participants were asked to write in their ethnicity, which was then coded as either collectivist or individualistic culture. Many of the participants indicated they had more than one ethnicity. As a result, many participants had both collectivist and individualistic ethnicities. This became a limitation during coding; as it was unknown which ethnic heritage had the largest impact on the participant. For example, a participant may have answered African American (collectivist) and German (individualistic). However, it was unknown the exact percentage of the participant's ethnicity, and which had the largest impact on the participant's cultural development.

Hometown Region

Significance was found for the independent variable, hometown region. However, the significant result was in contrast to the second hypothesis. For the "Perception" questions, urban participants were less likely to perceive and rate aggressive acts as acceptable compared to suburban or rural participants. A possible explanation for these findings is participants from urban hometowns are desensitized

towards violence, either from personal exposure or media exposure. This would be consistent with previous research finding urban youth are 50 – 75% more likely to experience serious violence compared to suburban and rural youth (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Ward, 1995; White et al., 1998). As a result, these participants viewed the movie clips as normal acts and were less likely to rate the clips as aggressive.

Gender

The results of this study were consistent with the third hypothesis for gender. There was no statistical difference between males and females in perceiving aggression. However, males were more likely to justify the aggressive acts and commit the same act if in the situation. This is consistent with previous research which showed that males are more likely to commit aggressive acts compared to females (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Karriker-Jaffe et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2010; Nichols et al., 2006; Swaim et al., 2004; Waasdrop et al., 2013). With the results, the participants in this study displayed the continued existence of a traditional gender norm within the United States which emphasizes aggression in males (Stewart-Williams, 2002). The majority of the videos depicted overtly aggressive acts, such as physical violence, which may explain the gender difference. The female participants may have answered differently if the movie clips illustrated more relational aggression, such as peer pressure or bullying (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukianinen, 1992; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Farmer, Estell, Bishop, O'Neal, & Cairns, 2003; Waasdrop et al., 2013).

Limitations

A more representative sample of the area could have resulted in more significant results. Though the study was conducted in New Jersey, the southern, suburban location of the study may not have yielded enough participants with strong views of aggression. There were also not many participants who self-identified as coming from rural and hometown regions, compared to suburban hometown regions. More variety in hometown region may have led to a more diverse participant pool in gender and ethnicity. The survey did explain the potential risks in the informed consent so the participants understood they would be watching aggressive clips. Nevertheless, the survey did not provide a formal definition of aggression. This was done to decrease researcher influence upon the participants, as providing a definition may have primed the participants to answer in a more aggressive way. Since there was no formal definition, every participant may have had a different definition of aggression. This may have led to participants considering the videos less aggressive or potentially more violent than aggressive.

Data was collected by self-report measures by the participants, again to reduce potential researcher bias. The participants may have been answered in a biased way to either enhance or throw off the study. Also, since the survey was confidential, the participants may have been more cautious in their answers, compared to if the survey was anonymous.

Future Directions

As previously mentioned, an alternative to the previous study could have been to code ethnicity differently, which may have resulted in more significant results. In

future studies, using fewer self – report measures may decrease participant error, either in not knowing the correct answer in the demographic section (the correct hometown region or the correct ethnicity) or attempting to skew the answers either aggressively or non-aggressively. Also, future studies should use different movie clips depicting aggression. Using alternate aggressive scenes, with more relational aggression, different genders and cultures, may lead to females and collectivist cultures perceiving and justifying the aggressive acts.

Lastly, another way to reduce participant self – reporting would be to include physiological tests in conjunction with the current study. Having a physiological response to watching an aggressive movie scene may lead to different results, instead of solely relying on self – reports, which may be skewed. A physiological measure would allow for the record of a change of heartbeat or stress when watching the movie or reading the scenario. This change can signal a bodily reaction to the stimulus, even if they respond indifferently or in an opposite way.

Summary

Aggression is a multifaceted behavior, which is influenced by an interaction between an individual's biological and environmental context. It has penetrated all aspects of American life, from young children's play to media, like news and entertainment. A person's gender is still a predictor for how they view aggression. The traditional gender norm of male acceptance of violence is still apparent in American society, and was found within this study. The environment of a hometown region may desensitize people and normalize violence and aggression. The acceptance of violence within American society has perpetuated the biological and

environmental interaction and allowed for continued perception, justification, and endorsement of aggression in modern American movie clips.

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