

**A STUDY OF
INTERACTION EFFECTS BETWEEN
GENDER AND PERSONALITY ON
VERBAL AGGRESSIVENESS**

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An Abstract

Presented to the Graduate and
Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Psychology

by
Shawn L. Solley

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on how gender, the personality variables of dominance and submissiveness, and their interaction effect on verbal aggressiveness. It was hypothesized that males would report more verbal aggressiveness than females and that dominant individuals would indicate being more verbally aggressive than submissive individuals. It was also hypothesized that, overall, dominant males would report being the most verbally aggressive followed by dominant females, submissive males, and submissive females. Subjects from Austin Peay State University consisting of 76 females and 31 males, ages 18 to 30 years, participated in the study. No significant differences in verbal aggressiveness were found between males and females or between dominant and submissive individuals.

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To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Shawn Solley entitled "Interaction Effects Between Gender and Personality on Verbal Aggressiveness." I have examined the final copy of the paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

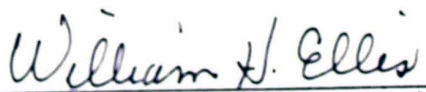

Major Professor

We have read this Thesis
and recommend its
acceptance:


Second Committee Member


Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate
and Research Council:


Dean of the Graduate School

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CHAPTER 1

Literature Review

Over the past 25 years, the scientific study of aggression has grown to become a major branch of the behavioral sciences (Klarna, 1988). The notion of aggression has been used to refer to a wide variety of phenomena, sometimes to indicate a broad theoretical construct, and sometimes to describe restricted and specific behaviors. Often the terms aggressiveness and aggression have been used in the literature interchangeably. Aggression is considered the act of hostility or assault toward another being. According to Maccoby and Jacklin (1974a), the central theme of aggression is the intent of one individual to hurt another. Aggressiveness, on the other hand, is one's tendency to act in this hostile or assaultive manner (Capara & Pastorelli, 1989).

The majority of the literature emphasizes a coherent and unmistakable gender difference in aggression. Many studies have found gender differences in aggression in infancy, childhood, and adulthood. In all of these periods, male subjects were found to be more aggressive than females (Hatsuzuka & Ogushi, 1990; Connor, Serbin, & Ender, 1978; Harman & Klopff, 1990; Piel, 1990; Susser & Keating, 1990). Others, such as Koyoma and Smith (1991),

to react aggressively. For instance, research investigating Type A behavior suggests that the frequency of one's feelings of anger is one way of distinguishing Type A from Type B behavior. It has been suggested that children who display Type A behaviors act more impatiently and aggressively (Matthews & Angulo, 1980). This correlates with research done involving university students which showed that Type A individuals also scored high on scales measuring aggression and hostility (Lundberg, 1980). In our society, Type A individuals are often viewed as more dominant while Type B individuals are seen as being more submissive (Price, 1982). Price (1982) also reported that women are less likely to exhibit Type A behavior, and that dominance may be indirectly related to aggressive behavior.

Omark et al. (1980) suggested that aggressive expressions appear to be influenced by factors such as dominance and submissiveness. As a personality style, dominance generally refers to a desire and a predisposition to attempt to control or influence others (Ellyson & Dovidio, 1985; Henley, 1977). These individuals tend to be more leading, influencing, controlling, and self-assertive (Kiesler, 1983). In most psychological literature, submissiveness has not been studied as a personality style in and of itself; rather, it has been viewed as a lack of dominance (Omark et al., 1980). Individuals who are considered submissive are more docile, yielding, passive,

and obedient (Kiesler, 1983; Leary, 1957).

Using Infante and Wigley's (1986) Verbal Aggressiveness Scale, Sallinen-Kuparinen and her associates (1991) noted that males were both more dominant and verbally aggressive than female subjects. According to Omark et al. (1980), dominant individuals are more likely to gravitate toward situations of conflict, or may even precipitate the conflict in order to increase their level of power. An individual's success when using dominance tactics, which are typically considered more aggressive, actually promotes self-confidence and therefore increases the likelihood of future aggressiveness (Omark et al., 1980; Hammond & Richardson, 1992). However, other research suggested that a dominant individual did not act as aggressively as the submissive individual in these conflict situations, perhaps due to their already having a high level of power (Omark et al., 1980).

One major research question has been whether gender difference is associated with the personality dimension of dominance and submissiveness. In studies involving children, Koyama and Smith (1991) found that there were no sex differences in dominance related behavior. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974b) reported that dominance was more of an issue in groups containing all boys than in groups of girls. Boys attempted to establish an hierarchy, while the girls did not. Omark et al. (1980) noted that in

cooperative tasks, girls who were judged to be high in dominance acted submissively toward boys, regardless of how the boys were ranked. This is similar to Megargee's (1969) findings with college-aged individuals. He found that a dominant female felt that a dominant male should lead and would submit to him any leadership role. Several researchers also reported significant gender differences with males being more dominant and females being submissive (Wiggins, 1979; Wiggins & Holzmueller, 1978; Sallien-Kuparinen et.al., 1991; Rahim, 1983). Wiggins (1979) also noted that there were no significant differences among university students. It was felt that this lack of gender difference was due to a larger proportion of "sex reversed" subjects in a college population.

This paper examined how gender and personality affect verbal aggressiveness. The personality dimensions considered in this study were dominance and submissiveness as defined by the Measure of Individual Differences in Dominance-Submissiveness Questionnaire (Merabian & Hines, 1978). Dominance included those personality attributes having to do with controlling situations, controlling conversation, and taking charge. Submissiveness had to do with a person taking a more passive role in situations. This person lets others make decisions and does not express his or her own thoughts and ideas. The Measure of Individual Differences in Dominance-Submissiveness

Questionnaire (Merabian & Hines, 1978) is an instrument which has not been widely used. It has a reported Kuder-Richardson formula coefficient of .95, indicating high internal consistency and has been balanced for response bias (Merabian & Hines, 1978).

Verbal aggressiveness was defined by the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (Infante & Wigley, 1986) as an individual's tendency to verbally attack another person instead of his position on topics of communication. An example of this is attacking an individual's intelligence, insulting him, or yelling at him. A verbally aggressive person, according to this scale, has difficulty being criticized and will intentionally attempt to make others feel bad about themselves. This scale has had limited use within the research. It is reported to have a relatively strong internal consistency with an alpha of .81 and a four week test-retest correlation of .82 (Infante & Wigley, 1986). This study may be valuable in determining the validity of these instruments for further research.

It was hypothesized that males would score higher than females on the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale. Dominant individuals would score higher on the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale than submissive individuals. Furthermore, on the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale, it was posited that dominant males would score highest, followed by dominant females, submissive males, and submissive females.

CHAPTER 2

Methods

Subjects

Undergraduate students consisting of 31 males and 76 females enrolled in General Psychology at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee, voluntarily participated in this study. Each student received extra credit for his or her participation. Individuals whose ages were between 18 and 30 years of age were used for this study.

Materials

A set of two questionnaires, consisting of The Measures of Individual Differences in Dominance-Submissiveness Questionnaire and the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale, were administered. The Measures of Individual Differences in Dominance-Submissiveness Questionnaire, as developed by Merabian & Hines, (1978) consisted of 48 items designed to measure reported aspects of dominance and submissiveness. There were 24 items worded positively and 24 items worded negatively. This instrument employed a nine-point scale which ranged from four (very strong agreement) to minus four (very strong disagreement), and was scored by subtracting the sum of the negatively worded items from the sum of the positively worded items.

Subjects attaining scores of -192 to 0 were considered submissive, while those with scores of 1 to 192 were considered dominant. It is balanced for response bias and has a high internal consistency, with a Kuder-Richardson formula coefficient of .95 (Merabian & Hines, 1978).

The Verbal Aggressiveness Scale, as constructed by Infante and Wigley (1986) is a 20 item scale designed to measure a person's reported use of verbal aggression against others. The VAS is unidimensional, with 10 items worded negatively. It was scored by reverse scoring items 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, and 20, and then summing all 20 scores. This produced a score range of 20 to 100. It has relatively strong internal consistency with an alpha of .81 and a four week test-retest correlation of .82 (Infante & Wigley, 1986).

Procedure

The study was conducted in one 30-minute session. After signing the informed consent statement (see appendix A), each participant was asked to complete a questionnaire booklet. The questionnaire booklet (see appendix B) consisted of three parts. The first part included demographic information, the second part contained the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale, and the third part was the Measures of Individual Differences in Dominance-Submissiveness Questionnaire.

find no such gender differences.

Frodi (1976, 1978) and Shope (1978) found that men and women may differ in the preferred mode of aggressing, with men showing a clearer tendency to aggress by means of physical violence. They also suggested that women may be equally as aggressive as men in nonphysical ways, such as verbal aggressiveness. According to Roloff and Greenberg (1979), females were actually more likely to employ verbal aggression when resolving conflicts. Males, on the other hand, were more likely to rely on physical aggression. Contradictory research indicated, however, that males were more verbally aggressive than females (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974a; Hyde, 1984; Burgoon, 1991; Henley, 1977; Averill, 1983). It was also suggested that although both sexes become less aggressive with age, males remain more aggressive throughout the college years (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974b). Others reported that with both college-aged individuals and young adults, 18 to 30 years of age, gender differences were insignificantly small or nonexistent (Frodi, 1978; Hyde, 1984).

The influence of personality styles, such as Type A and B behavior or dominance and submissiveness, on factors such as aggressiveness have rarely been addressed (Bluhm, Widiger & Miele, 1990; Griffith, 1991). Research which has been done suggested that an individual's personality style is a significant indicator of whether he or she is likely

CHAPTER 3

Results

Hypothesis 1 investigated the differences of verbal aggressiveness between males and females. Table 1 shows a mean score for males on the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale of 47.643, whereas the mean score for females was 46.584. The difference of mean scores between these two groups was not significant ($F = .206$, $p < .651$). This result did not support the first hypothesis.

Table 1

Gender Differences in Verbal Aggressiveness

Gender	Mean	F	p
Male	47.643	.206	.651
Female	46.584		

As seen in Table 2, the mean score for dominant individuals was 46.698 (male 49.056, female 44.3340), while the mean score for submissive individuals was 47.529 (male-46.231, females - 48.828). The result of the analysis of variance indicated that there was no significant difference ($F = .127$, $p < .722$) between the scores of dominant and submissive individuals as was posited in hypothesis 2.

Table 2

Personality Differences in Verbal Aggressiveness

Personality	Mean	F	p
Dominance	46.698	.127	.722
Submissiveness	47.529		

Hypothesis 3 investigated the interaction differences of verbal aggressiveness between gender and the personality variables of dominance and submissiveness. As seen in Table 3, the mean score of dominant males was 49.056, dominant females was 44.340, submissive males was 46.231 and submissive female 48.828. The difference of mean scores between these four groups shows no significance ($F=2.457$, $p < .120$). These results did not support hypothesis 3.

Table 3

Interaction Differences Between Gender and Personality on Verbal Aggressiveness

Gender x Personality	Mean	F	p
Dominant Males	49.056	2.457	.120
Dominant Females	44.340		
Submissive Males	46.231		
Submissive Females	48.828		

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

This study tested several hypotheses. The first hypothesis was that males would report being more verbally aggressive. Results of this study did not support this hypothesis however. Males and females responded almost equally as to there level of verbal aggressiveness. The second hypothesis posited that dominant individuals would indicate being more verbally aggressive than submissive individuals. The findings of this study however, did not support this hypothesis. Finally, hypothesis 3 suggested that dominant males would be the most verbally aggressive, followed by dominant females, submissive males and submissive females. This hypothesis was not supported by the results of this study.

The differences between these findings and previous research may be explained several ways. It may be that in a college population gender differences are not as great as the differences found in other populations, as was suggested by Wiggins (1979). In the norm population used by Infante and Wigley (1986), the mean verbal aggressiveness score for males was 51.97 and the mean score for females was 46.38. The results of this study report verbal aggressiveness means for males and females as 47.643

and 46.584 respectively, and mean scores for dominance and submissiveness which range from 44.34 to 49.05. Therefore, the individuals participating in this study were not reporting significant differences in their personality or verbally aggressive behavior.

Secondly, the subscales of the instruments used in this study may not have accurately assessed those variables being investigated in this study. For instance the Measure of Individual Differences in Dominance-Submissiveness Questionnaire (Merabian & Hines, 1978) may actually be measuring attributes such as assertiveness and lack of assertiveness rather than the personality variables of dominance and submissiveness. Given that both of these instruments are relatively new and not widely used in the research to date, their construct validity may need to be further established.

In the future, it may be valuable for researchers to investigate differences in verbal aggressiveness between different cultural groups or within populations outside a university setting. It would be beneficial also to continue developing instruments to be used in this area of research.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

The purpose of this investigation is to obtain information regarding human behavior. Your responses are confidential. At no time will you be identified nor will any other person other than the investigators associated with this research have access to your responses.

The demographic information collected will be used only for the purpose of research analysis. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to terminate at any time without penalty.

The scope of this project will be explained fully upon completion. Thank you for your participation.

I agree to participate in the present study being conducted under the supervision of a faculty member of the Department of Psychology at Austin Peay State University. I have been informed, either orally or in writing, about the procedures to be followed and about any discomforts or risks which may be involved. The investigator has offered to answer any further questions that I might have regarding the procedures. I understand that I am free to terminate my participation at any time without penalty, and to have all data obtained from me withdrawn from the study and destroyed.

NAME

(printed) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE

SIGNED _____

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

AGE: _____

GENDER: _____

The Verbal Aggressiveness Scale

please use the following scale to indicate your response to each of these questions. Use the space in front of the question to mark your response.

- 1 = almost never true
- 2 = rarely true
- 3 = occasionally true
- 4 = often true
- 5 = almost always true

- _____ 1. I am extremely careful to avoid attacking an individual's intelligence when I attack their ideas.
- _____ 2. When individuals are very stubborn, I use insults to soften the stubbornness.
- _____ 3. I try very hard to avoid having other people feel bad about themselves when I try to influence them.
- _____ 4. When people refuse to do a task I know is important, without good reason, I tell them they are unreasonable.
- _____ 5. When others do things I regard as stupid, I try to be extremely gentle with them.
- _____ 6. If individuals I am trying to influence really deserve it, I attack their character.
- _____ 7. When people behave in ways that are in very poor taste, I insult them in order to shock them into proper behavior.
- _____ 8. I try to make people feel good about themselves even when their ideas are stupid.
- _____ 9. When people simply will not budge on a matter of importance, I lose my temper and say rather strong things to them.
- _____ 10. When people criticize my shortcomings, I take it in good humor and do not try to get back at them.

- _____ 11. When individuals insult me, I get a lot of pleasure out of really telling them off.
- _____ 12. When I dislike individuals greatly, I try not to show it in what I say or how I say it.
- _____ 13. I like poking fun at people who do things which are very stupid in order to stimulate their intelligence.
- _____ 14. When I attack a person's ideas, I try not to damage their self-concepts.
- _____ 15. When I try to influence people, I make great effort not to offend them.
- _____ 16. When people do things which are mean and cruel, I attack their character in order to help correct their behavior.
- _____ 17. I refuse to participate in arguments when they involve personal attacks.
- _____ 18. When nothing seems to work in trying to influence others, I scream and yell in order to get some movement from them.
- _____ 19. When I am not able to refute others' positions I try to make them feel defensive in order to weaken their positions.
- _____ 20. When an argument shifts to personal attacks, I try very hard to change the subject.

APPENDIX D

Measure of Individual Differences
in Dominance-Submissiveness

Please use the following scale to indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each of the statements below. Use the space in front of each statement to indicate your response.

- +4 = Very strong agreement
- +3 = Strong agreement
- +2 = Moderate agreement
- +1 = Slight agreement
- 0 = Neither agreement or disagreement
- 1 = Slight disagreement
- 2 = Moderate disagreement
- 3 = Strong disagreement
- 4 = Very strong disagreement

- _____ 1. I usually make myself at home when visiting others.
- _____ 2. When I am with someone else, I usually make the decisions.
- _____ 3. If I know everyone disagrees with me, I don't bother to give my opinion.
- _____ 4. I don't feel comfortable supervising other people's work.
- _____ 5. I control situations rather than letting them control me.
- _____ 6. When discussions reach a stalemate, people look to me for a solution.
- _____ 7. I will probably be a famous person someday.
- _____ 8. If I don't like my food in a restaurant, I don't complain.
- _____ 9. I don't usually do things unless I know someone who has done them already.
- _____ 10. I usually say what I feel like saying.
- _____ 11. I don't like to make difficult decisions.

- _____ 12. I don't hesitate to challenge questionable ideas of others.
- _____ 13. I usually don't make suggestions at a group meeting.
- _____ 14. I can easily get rid of people who come to my door.
- _____ 15. I go my own way instead of following others.
- _____ 16. I am often the center of attention in a group.
- _____ 17. I avoid talking about touchy subjects.
- _____ 18. I don't express my ideas unless someone asks me to.
- _____ 19. When in a group, I don't dominate others.
- _____ 20. I work best when someone has outlined a job for me.
- _____ 21. I usually win arguments.
- _____ 22. It is hard for me to do anything in front of an audience.
- _____ 23. I like to discuss social, political, economical or international problems.
- _____ 24. I am subdued around my superiors.
- _____ 25. Others recognize me as an authority on some things.
- _____ 26. I control others more than they control me.
- _____ 27. I usually conform to custom.
- _____ 28. I enjoy making decisions.
- _____ 29. If I were introduced to a famous person, I wouldn't know what to say.
- _____ 30. I am a leader in my group.
- _____ 31. Although I contribute my ideas in group decisions, they are not usually the most influential.
- _____ 32. Domineering people don't intimidate me.

- _____ 33. I speak up for what I think is right although it sometimes gets me into trouble.
- _____ 34. In working with others, I let someone else take charge of things.
- _____ 35. I dislike walking into a room where everyone will be watching me.
- _____ 36. When people are being unreasonable, I tell them so.
- _____ 37. I don't usually discuss world affairs, because I know my opinion won't make any difference.
- _____ 38. Other people often do what I suggest.
- _____ 39. It is easy for me to make speeches.
- _____ 40. I am passive in my dealings with others.
- _____ 41. Sometimes I hesitate to express my ideas.
- _____ 42. I am reluctant to return defective products for refund.
- _____ 43. I influence others more than they influence me.
- _____ 44. I am reluctant to express my convictions if it will offend others.
- _____ 45. I rarely have to speak as the group representative.
- _____ 46. I am not overly assertive.
- _____ 47. When with a group, I let others decide what to do.
- _____ 48. I often talk back to those in authority.