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Sticks and Stones: The Effects of Verbal Aggression on Self-Esteem and Intimate Relationships in Adulthood

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STICKS AND STONES: THE EFFECTS OF CHILDHOOD VERBAL AGGRESSION ON SELF-ESTEEM AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN ADULTHOOD

Committee Chair: Youseung Kim, Ph.D.

Thesis dated May 2018

This study examines the effects of childhood verbal aggression on self-esteem and intimate relationships in adulthood. This study was based on the premises that an individual’s morals and behaviors are affected by one’s life experiences. A case study analysis approach was used to analyze data gathered from 151 participants in the South East region of the United States. The researcher found that the participants that showed lower levels of intimacy in relationships also have experienced threats, ridicule, or insults during childhood. The conclusions drawn from the findings suggest that an individual that experiences verbal aggression in childhood will affect their levels of intimacy in adulthood.
STICKS AND STONES: THE EFFECTS OF CHILDHOOD VERBAL AGGRESSION ON SELF-ESTEEM AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN ADULTHOOD

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
JANA JONES

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

MAY 2018
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

PVA: Parental Verbal Aggression
PTSD: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
FAP: Functional Analytic Psychotherapy
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Verbal abuse can be defined as a negative defining statement told to the victim or about the victim, or by withholding any response, thereby defining the target as non-existent. In the African-American community, verbal abuse is often over looked in childhood and adulthood. In a study, researchers mentioned the effects and correlation of parental/guardian perpetrated abuse among low-income African Americans (Raj, 1999). Often studies focus on verbal abuse as a co-occurrence; however, this study stems to examine a sole portion of verbal abuse which is verbal aggression. Verbal aggression can be defined as a message behavior which attacks a person's self-concept in order to deliver psychological pain. Studies of verbal aggression have focused primarily on children and adolescents in educational and social settings. Both verbal aggression and verbal abuse can be categorized as an early stress. Very few studies were found to examine verbal aggression in adulthood. Therefore the issue that will be studied in this thesis will be the effects of childhood verbal aggression on self-esteem and intimate relationships in adulthood.

This topic was selected based on browsing through research and living within the African-American community. There is a lack thereof for acknowledgement towards
emotional abuse specifically parental verbal aggression (PVA) amongst African Americans. In the study previously mentioned (Raj, 1999), there was a correlation between verbal aggression and low income however some form of verbal aggression was reported in all cases that reported abuse in the entire study even though they were not considered low income. This factor supports the concept that verbal abuse or verbal aggression can be directed towards any person within the African-American community regardless of the income.

Verbal aggression can lead to fear and anxiety, depression, stress and PTSD, intrusive memories, memory gap disorders, sleep or eating problems, hyper-vigilance and exaggerated startle responses, irritability, anger issues, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, self-mutilation, and assaultive behaviors (Black, Smith-Slep, & Heyman, 2001). Verbal aggression is often overlooked within the African-American community. Since verbal aggression tends to be overshadowed by a co-occurring form of abuse; it can unknowingly become another social issue such as mental illness and/or substance abuse as stated previously. Anyone with the ability to communicate can commit verbal aggression towards another individual young or old.

Recent studies completed on verbal aggression often generalize the issue to all races and base it on reported cases. However, there are many African Americans in the community who do not see verbal aggression as a chronic issue or wouldn’t word it as such, which leads to verbal aggression being underreported (Keyes, 2017). Often PVA is experienced as a child and then the effects are carried into adulthood because both parties (the perpetrator and the victim) are unaware of the real dangers of enduring the verbal aggression.
In a study led by Martin Teicher the neurobiological consequences on early stress and childhood maltreatment was examined in individuals. The work of Martin Teicher and his colleagues displayed that the human brain is highly amenable. The evolutionary goal is for children to adapt to whatever environment they are placed in, so that they are not in a constant state of stress. If a child is born into a safe, attentive, affectionate, and accommodating environment, the individual’s brain develops normally; if born into an environment which is either unsupportive, aggressive, or hostile, the brain does not. This study show that various parts of the brain are affected by a hostile or aggressive situations, among them the corpus callosum (the duct for transferring motor, sensory, and cognitive information between the brain’s two hemisphere); the hippocampus (portion of the limbic system that manages emotion); and the frontal cortex (regulates decision making and thought). With Teicher and his colleagues’ research in consideration, it can be noted that verbal aggression experienced during childhood does in fact affect the brain.

This research aims to determine to what decree witnessing or experiencing verbal aggression within the home or community, contributes to the development of intimate relationships and self-esteem in later adulthood within the African-American community. This research aims to fill a portion of the void in awareness of the long term effects of verbal aggression amongst African Americans. Once filled, awareness can be used as a prevention tactic to better the African-American community by lowering the numbers of another excessive social issue. Once the gaps are filled and the awareness is spread on the effects and dangers of verbal aggression, it can then be applied to possibly prevent physical abuse and/or other forms of abuse or aggression. Overall, verbal aggression is a
key component that has a record of being overshadowed in the African-American community. This component can lead to problems like fear and anxiety, depression, stress and PTSD, intrusive memories, memory gap disorders, sleep or eating problems, hyper-vigilance and exaggerated startle responses, irritability, anger issues, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, self-mutilation, and assaultive behaviors; which can all be prevented with research, awareness, and prevention.

**Purpose of the Study**

The objective of this research is to determine to what degree witnessing or experiencing verbal aggression in childhood contributes to the development of intimate relationships and self-esteem in adulthood amongst the African-American community.

**Research Questions**

The current study is based on the following research questions:

- To what degree does verbal aggression experienced during childhood affect self-esteem developed in African American adults aged 18-55?
- To what degree does verbal aggression experienced during childhood affect intimate relationships developed in African American adults aged 18-55?

**Hypotheses**

Keeping in view the objectives of the research and the available research literature, two specific hypotheses are being offered. The first hypothesis states that a presence of verbal aggression in childhood will have a negative effect on self-esteem in
later adulthood. The next hypothesis states that a presence of verbal aggression in childhood will have a negative effect on intimate relationships.

**Significance of the Study**

Parental Verbal Aggression (PVA) involves communicative verbal acts, including but not limited to, yelling/screaming, threatening to hit, swearing, insulting, and threatening to send away, that are directed toward the child and range in harshness from mild to severe (Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, & Runyan, 1998) which was reported to be used by a large amount of parents during parenting. This widespread use suggests that PVA or parental verbal aggression is an acceptable behavior; however, acceptable parental behaviors can still cause long lasting harm to children. Verbal Aggression can be defined as a communication intended to hurt another person, or a communication perceived as having that intent. Verbal aggression can be spoken, written, or drawn. Verbal aggression is often overlooked by researchers unless it co-occurs with other forms of aggression, particularly ones that have reached abusive levels.

Past studies have not advanced the understanding of PVA or community verbal aggression due to the dependency on clinical samples of families reported for child maltreatment, or self-reports from children, which limits the understanding of verbal aggression, unless it co-occurs with physical abuse. In the small amount of studies that have used community samples, “indications are that verbal aggression is very likely to be found outside of reported cases” (e.g., Claussen & Crittenden, 1991; Kaplan et al., 1999). Multiple studies have shown that a parent is very likely to use at least one form of verbal aggression. Even though levels of severity may vary the use alone can still harm children
(Straus & Field, 2003). Also, it is reported in the CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance report that on average across 39 states survey, 7.2% of students admit to safety concerns in the community. Many reported fearing the physical and verbal aggression of their peers, and many more attend school in a chronic state of anxiety and depression. It is reported that 70.6% of young people say they have seen verbal aggression in their community. These children who experience harm from verbal aggression later turn into adults who may battle issues of self-esteem and social interaction skills. Studies suggest that a childhood history of frequent verbal aggression could have long-term consequences (Briere & Runtz, 1990).

A large amount of the studies previously conducted on verbal aggression and/or parental verbal aggression are not culture specific. With verbal aggression being more prevalent inside the African-American community, there is a need for a better understanding of the long term effects of verbal aggression alone (Keyes, 2017). Overall, due to the limited understanding of verbal aggression there is a lack of awareness inside the African-American community resulting in a display of unwarranted long term effects; therefore, this study will determine to what degree witnessing or experiencing verbal aggression during childhood contributes negatively to the development of intimate relationships and self-esteem in later adulthood within the African-American community.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will begin to discuss the history of verbal aggression as well as some of the barriers and issues defining it. This chapter will also begin to look at how verbal aggression has been studied in relation to its causes and effects thereof. Additionally, Afrocentric Perspective and theory as it relates to the social issue of verbal aggression will be discussed.

**Historical Perspective**

Verbal aggression can be defined as a message behavior which attacks a person's self-concept in order to deliver psychological pain (Infante, 1987). Verbal aggression was originally observed as a co-occurrence with physical abuse. Originally the topic was considered a form of emotional abuse. Also, it was originally studied in its appearance in discipline tactics for children. Overtime verbal aggression became its own construct.

Research conducted on verbal aggression has also consistently drawn several conclusions. Verbally aggressive messages take many forms, which include character attacks, background attacks, competence attacks, physical appearance attacks, malediction, teasing, ridicule, threats, swearing, and nonverbal emblems (Infante, 1987; Infante et al., 1990). According to research as early as the 1970s verbal aggression came...
to light in the research world as a form of emotional abuse. Over time research has begun to link verbal aggression and emotional maltreatment to later socialization issues. Emotional maltreatment may negatively affect an individual’s empathic understanding by hindering the individual from being able to connect with the emotions of others (Sorsoli, 2004).

Between the year 1990 and 2000 the study of verbal aggression moved its focus from that of the home and family to outside of the home (i.e. work and school). In the year 2001 a study was completed on perceived instructor argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in the college classroom, which focused on verbal aggression in the classroom in the college classroom (Myers & Rocca, 2001). In the study previously mentioned, a connection began to be form between verbal aggression and personality development. Overall, a functional definition has changed and grown over time for verbal aggression between the year of 1970 and 2017. Verbal aggression has gone from a subtopic to its own construct.

**Factors That Cause Verbal Aggression**

Verbal aggression in both children and adults can have many factors. Some factors can be social, emotional, environmental, and biological. Verbal aggression can be defined as a message behavior which attacks a person's self-concept in order to deliver psychological pain. A study completed in 1990 by Jan E. Stets listed a few reasons outside of the factors listed as possible reasons for verbal aggression. According to the study previously mentioned, verbal aggression is an alternative to physical aggression;
verbal and physical aggressions are manifestations of the same underlying phenomenon, generalized aggression (Stets, 1990).

Of the studies completed majority focus on the concept of verbal aggression as a construct to define the personality outcome of a child during childhood. However in a study completed in 1998 there was a long term effect mentioned (Downs & Miller, 1998). In this study there was a highlighted perspective on the effects of verbal aggression in childhood as a long term factor in self-esteem development in adulthood. This study focused on personality development in woman after experiencing parental verbal aggression on childhood. The purpose of the study was to examine the association between experiences of parent-to-child violence (i.e., verbal aggression) and the self-esteem of women, including whether these associations differ for father-perpetrated violence as compared with mother-perpetrated violence (Downs & Miller, 1998). There was also a highlight on the factor of there being a difference indicated on the effects of parental verbal aggression across the gender (Downs & Miller, 1998). There has been a link determined between verbal aggression and its internal effects, including a discovered link between parental verbal aggression and alcohol dependency in later adulthood. Verbal aggression can be caused by a dynamic chain of previous experience of verbal aggression or other external factors; some of those factors possibly being life stressors. Verbal aggression can at times be considered a reaction to external/internal stimuli or even considered to be an alternative to physical abuse as stated in the previous studies. Further, negative effects of parental abuse during childhood are not limited to physical violence. Relationships between verbal aggression and the development of adulthood
problems, such as alcohol dependence, have also been found (Miller, Downs, & Testa, 1993). In the study completed in 1993, researchers defined verbal aggression as a part of physical abuse. Overall, verbal aggression is mainly observed or studied as a co-occurrence.

**Verbal Aggression and Self-Esteem**

As expected during childhood verbal aggression has a damaging effect. Most studies exam those of the ones who are affected but not many studies examine those of the ones who perpetrate. A study completed in 1985 at Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children, focused on the self-esteem of abused children including those who were verbally abused (Oates, Forrest, & Peacock, 1985). Self-Esteem was reported to be lower in those who suffered verbal aggression; which would definitely be expected due to the psychological effects of verbal aggression. Very few studies have observed the long term effects in later adulthood or young adulthood however it is a constantly occurring issue.

A comparison study was completed on those who experienced parental verbal affection and those that experienced parental verbal aggression and how it influences the psychiatric health of young adults. In this study there was an apparent correlation between self-reported parental verbal aggression in childhood and low self-esteem results. The more parental verbal aggression the lower the self-esteem of the young adult appeared to be. Even though the task was completed in childhood it still posed to have a lasting effect.
In the final study observed there was a clear relation noted between Differential adult symptomatology and three types of child abuse histories (Briere & Runtz, 1990). One of the three histories focused on verbal abuse and the reported adult symptomologies included low self-esteem and a history of perpetrating verbal aggression. Therefore, a clear construct of verbal aggression and self-esteem was displayed.

**Verbal Aggression and Intimate Relationships**

Intimacy can be defined as a close familiarity or friendship; closeness or trust. Most relationships are based on trust and communication. Studies have shown that individuals that experience verbal aggression/abuse during childhood report doubt in their ability to communicate effectively. A prospective study completed to extend prior research on childhood maltreatment and social functioning in adults, displayed negative effects on intimacy levels in adulthood (Colman & Widom, 2004). Male and female abuse and neglect victims reported higher rates of cohabitation, walking out, and divorce (Coleman & Widom, 2004). Abused and neglected females were also less likely to have positive perceptions of current romantic partners and to be sexually faithful.

When verbal aggression is used, verbal aggression has been cited to be negatively related to satisfaction and trust in relationships (Martin, Anderson, Burant, & Weber, 2009). A study completed in 2009 focused on the relational effects of verbal aggression amongst siblings. The study displayed a correlation between those who displayed verbal aggression in relationships and those who were “teased” during childhood. Teasing was found to be positively related to being verbally aggressive. Sibling satisfaction was
positively related to being hurt from receiving verbally aggressive messages (Martin, Anderson, Burant, & Weber, 2009). Therefore, a clear construct of verbal aggression and intimate relationships, whether it be communal or familial, was displayed. With the factor of verbal aggression being present in an individual’s life, it causes conflict in relationships with the perpetrator.

**Afrocentric Perspective**

The Afrocentric Perspective serves as a concept in facing the needs of the African American and African communities worldwide (Manning, Cornelius, & Okundaye, 2004). The Afrocentric Perspective in this aspect can be defined by a focus on a philosophic understanding that places African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior (Manning, Cornelius, & Okundaye, 2004). It also acknowledges both the issues and the strengths of African Americans with a better understanding of this group’s needs and significance for effective interventions. The African-American community has much strength but also a few flaws; one issue or flaw being that of physical and verbal aggression amongst both family units and peers. The issue of verbal aggression amongst African Americans has been studied as early as 1964. One study observed the differences between punishment in a lower class white family, African American family, and a Mexican family; the African Americans in the study were more open to using verbal aggression as a form of coercion (Berlin et al., 2009). A clinical psychologist named Jazz Keyes discussed verbal aggression in the community in the form of “joning”. For decades, the sport of “joning” has been a factor
in Black culture. Joning is when two people exchange verbal insults about one another until one person backs down, leaving his or her opponent to gloat in victory. This “game” always requires eager spectators, who are responsible for increasing the hostility between opponents. It is also believed that “joning” serves as means to prepare African Americans for the real world, especially African American children. The ability to endure verbal thrashings and remain silent and composed is a survival tactic African American children are forced to learn in order to survive in a society of “hate and depravity”.

When addressing verbal aggression from an Afrocentric Perspective many core values can be applied; specifically humanistic values and the significance of knowledge and personal experiences. The humanistic values can be identified as values that place importance on eradication human oppression and increasing human potential. It also values human values over all values. Verbal aggression can be a factor that de-values a human. When addressing this issue and providing proper understanding and intervention an increase in human potential and decrease in human oppression can occur. The significance of knowledge and personal experiences can be described as the warrant of the use of self, that is, one’s emotions, experiences, and values as a factor for creating knowledge and executing. This core value corresponds with the study of verbal aggression due to verbal aggression having a lasting effect on one’s emotions and experiences.

The Afrocentric Perspective on verbal aggression can provide insight when social workers examine the family unit in African American or African homes. It can provide a better understanding of the lasting effects, not only in the home but also in the
community. Verbal aggression is very common amongst the African American and African communities which in turn show that the Afrocentric Perspective is very important when studying this issue to better understand.

Taking the Afrocentric Perspective on the topic of verbal aggression and the effects thereof can provide a safer more understanding environment amongst the communities than just taking the Eurocentric Perspective into accountability.

**Theoretical Framework**

In the field of social work, there are many theories to help describe life’s outcomes and expectancies. Observing the theoretical framework provides a better understanding of the human processing of external and internal factors. When observing and analyzing the effects of aggression whether it is physical or verbal multiple theories can be applied. Of the theories that can be applied two that support this research would be the social development theory published in 1962 by Lev Vygotsky and the experiential learning theory developed in the 1970’s by David A. Kolb. With these theories in mind a better understanding can be developed on the effects thereof.

When observing the social development theory it can be directly applied to the effects of verbal aggression on an individual. The social development theory was constructed based off of Jean Piaget’s social interaction theory. This in turn relates by realizing that experiencing verbal aggression during social interactions in turn has some form of effect on development whether it be behaviorally or cognitively. When defining the experiential learning theory by Kolb, it examined that learning occurs from
experience. Basically, what is experienced teaches the individual how to handle certain situations.

Another theory that can be applied to verbal aggression in this aspect would be Bandura’s theory of Social Learning. Bandura believed in “reciprocal determinism”, that is, the world and a person’s behavior cause each other. While behaviorism essentially states that one’s environment causes one’s behavior, Bandura, who was studying adolescent aggression, found this jejune, and so in addition he suggested that behavior causes environment as well (Bandura, 1973). Aggression can be a learned behavior much like other behaviors learned through social interaction. When experiencing verbal aggression it will affect how an individual reacts to others based off of previous experiences. In conclusion, these theories intertwine in the relation to the topic of this thesis. The theories previously discussed develop on understanding of possible factors that contribute to verbal aggression. Once the development of verbal aggression is determined the focus turns to the effects of verbal aggression on intimacy and self-esteem. Here, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs or the Motivational Theory comes to pass. If an individual’s “safety and security” is compromised due to verbal aggression; according to Maslow “love and belonging” then becomes compromised (Maslow, 1943). Both factors in the end effect the development of “self-esteem” and the individual with verbal aggression at the root.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will focus on the methodology and limitations in preparing this thesis. The methodology will provide details as to how study was conducted as how relevant information was gathered. The limitations will include details as to problems identified when researching and gathering information.

Methods of the Study

This study was conducted in order to assess the later effects of verbal aggression on self-esteem and intimate relationships. To be able to gather the necessary data the researcher utilized the qualitative approach. The chosen respondents were selected between the ages of 18 and 55 throughout the state of Georgia via e-mail and face-to-face contact. A survey questionnaire was the research instrument used to collect data from the participants. The researcher opted to use this kind of research considering the desire to acquire first hand data from the respondents so as to formulate rational and sound conclusions and recommendations for the study.

The recruitment of study participants consisted of utilizing the “snow-ball” method in South East Georgia. The researcher introduced the study during a meeting
the Abundant Life Fellowship Church of God In Christ, Incorporated of Jesup, Georgia where 49 participants participated. The researcher also discussed the study with the Commandant of the Noncommissioned Officers Academy, of Fort Stewart, Georgia in order to recruit additional participants. A total of 102 participants completed the survey at the Fort Stewart Noncommissioned Officers Academy.

The participants who have been chosen in this study completed a survey questionnaire to evaluate the self-esteem levels and intimacy levels after experiencing verbal aggression during childhood. The survey questionnaire was developed based off of the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale and the FAP Intimacy Scale (Functional Analytic Psychotherapy Intimacy Scale). The results of the survey were then processed by computing the weighted mean of each survey item. The computed values were compared to the Likert scale for data interpretation. Relevant literatures were also used to support the gathered findings. The aim of the survey is to obtain pertinent data to achieve the research objective. The site of the study was the within community. Samples were taken using a convenience sampling approach.

Data Analysis Plan

The data was analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS 24). Means, standard deviations and frequencies were used to present the descriptive data analysis of the major constructs. Descriptive statistics were used to assess how the type of verbal aggression experienced impacts individual’s intimacy levels and self-esteem; an independent-samples t-test was conducted to gauge the difference in the mean self-
esteem score and intimacy score between the verbal aggression groups. A composite score was computed on SPSS for both self-esteem levels and intimacy levels. A reverse score was also created to better interpret the results in the SPSS 24 system. The correlation test was used to assess the correlates between the type of verbal aggression experienced and intimacy scores. A separate correlation test was used to assess the correlates between the type of verbal aggression experienced and self-esteem scores.

**Limitations of the Study**

In researching verbal aggression there were a few limitations. Verbal aggression is such a broad topic to research. Also verbal aggression is usually studied as a co-occurrence therefore discovering an operational definition for the term was a limitation. There were difficulties in finding articles specifically relating to verbal aggression and intimate relationships. There are multiple factors to intimacy including the physical aspect, therefore researching intimacy in the perspective of trust and closeness had its difficulties.

Collecting individuals that had not experienced verbal aggression was very difficult, due to the fact that the use of verbal aggression is so universal; there were not enough unexperienced individuals to compare the experienced individuals to. When it comes to the holistic approach there were also limitations. When speaking to the individuals there were co-occurring factors that could have affected levels of intimacy and self-esteem that were not thoroughly examined. A large limitation was the inability to thoroughly assess each individual further than a survey due to limited time and resources.
Last but not least questioning a history of verbal aggression is a sensitive topic for most participants. Therefore collected data might be fabricated by participants to make one’s life seem better. A few individuals stated that they felt uncomfortable further discussing the type of verbal aggression experienced, specifically when discussing their upbringing. A large amount of the study consisted of African American individuals; a large amount of the African American individuals were not open to discussing their family history. For future research, more impactful data would be collected through a longitudinal study. A longitudinal study would allow for a more direct and accurate follow up as the individual progress through time in intimate relationships. A longitudinal study for a sensitive topic allows for rapport building. When completing a quick survey with no rapport built the individuals were more reserved with answers.
CHAPTER IV  
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS  

The results of this study are presented in this chapter. The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of verbal aggression on self-esteem and intimate relationships in adulthood. Self-esteem is a measure of confidence in one's own worth or abilities. Intimacy is a measure of familiarity, friendship, or rapport; closeness. Self-Esteem in adulthood is affected by the presence of childhood verbal aggression. In addition, childhood verbal aggression’s degree of impact on an adult individual has consequences for their self-esteem levels and intimacy levels based on the type of aggression. A lower level of intimacy in personal relationships can be implied by the presence of childhood verbal aggression.

Sample Characteristics

This study consisted of a total of 151 individual respondents. Of the respondents 27.81% were male and 72.19% were female. The ages ranged from 18-55 years of age. A total of 8.61% reported to be 18-24, 28.48% replied as 25-34, 39.74% replied as 35-44,
and 23.18% replied as 45-55. Only about 25% of the respondents reported as married and the remaining 75% reported as single, divorced, or separated. Of the 151 individuals about 2% were white, about 3% were Hispanic/Latino, about 86% were Black, and about 5% were Native Americans and about 4% reported as “other” (Table 1).

Table 1

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>72.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>8.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>28.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>39.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-55</td>
<td>23.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single/Never Married</td>
<td>60.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>25.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>9.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>3.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>3.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>86.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>4.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 presents the mean, minimum, maximum, and the standard deviation scores for the self-reported self-esteem and intimacy levels. The average self-esteem score was 3.39, with a standard deviation of 0.3, while the maximum was four. The average intimacy score was 4.25, with a standard deviation of 0.3, while the maximum score was five. Table 2 summarized the levels of self-esteem and intimacy. For self-
esteem the higher number on a scale of 1-4, the lower the self-esteem level. For intimacy levels the higher the number on a scale of 1-6 the lower the intimacy in the described relationship.

Table 2

Levels of Self-Esteem and Intimacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Esteem</strong></td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.3947</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intimacy</strong></td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.2507</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Verbal Aggression and Self-Esteem**

Question 1: Does verbal aggression experienced between the ages of 4 and 17 have an effect on self-esteem in adulthood?

Hypothesis: Verbal aggression experienced between the ages of 4 and 17 has an effect on self-esteem in adulthood.

Below is a table that shows the average levels of self-esteem grouped by the type of verbal aggression experienced between the ages of 4-17. The categories consist of those who have experienced threats, insults, or ridicule between the ages of 4-17 and those who have not. Among the individuals in the study the average self-esteem score of those who experienced threats or insults was higher than those who did not and displayed
a significance level less than 0.05 (Table 3). This suggests that individuals that experience threats or insults between the ages of 4-17 are more likely to have a lower self-esteem as an adult. From the study those that experienced ridicule between ages 4-17 did not show lower self-esteem levels in comparison to those who did not.

Table 3

*Self-Esteem Scores of Those Who Experienced Verbal Aggression between the Ages 4-17*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-Esteem Score With Verbal Aggression</th>
<th>Self-Esteem Score Without Verbal Aggression</th>
<th>t-Score</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threats</strong></td>
<td>3.5857 (SD=.3)</td>
<td>3.3512 (SD=.2)</td>
<td>3.513</td>
<td>&lt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Insults</strong></td>
<td>3.4932 (SD=.3)</td>
<td>3.3315 (SD=.2)</td>
<td>3.532</td>
<td>&lt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ridicule</strong></td>
<td>3.3857 (SD=.3)</td>
<td>3.4060 (SD=.3)</td>
<td>.457</td>
<td>&gt;.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Verbal Aggression and Intimate Relationships in Adulthood**

Question 2: Does verbal aggression experienced between the ages of 4 and 17 effect intimate relationships in adulthood?

Hypothesis: Verbal aggression experienced between the ages of 4 and 17 has an effect on intimate relationships in adulthood.

Table 4 shows the average levels of intimacy grouped by the type of verbal aggression experienced between the ages of 4-17. The categories consist of those who have experienced threats, insults, or ridicule between the ages of 4-17 and those who
have not. Among the individuals in the study the average intimacy score for those who experienced threats and/or insults between the ages of 4-17 was higher than those who did not with a significance level less than 0.05 (Table 4.). This suggests that those who experience threats and/or insults are more likely to be less intimate in personal relationships. Those who experienced ridicule also had higher intimate scores; however the p-value for ridicule was greater the 0.05 which meant the scores were insignificant.

Table 4

*Intimacy Scores of Those Who Experienced Verbal Aggression between the Ages 4-17*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intimacy score With Verbal Aggression</th>
<th>Intimacy score Without Verbal Aggression</th>
<th>t-Score</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threats</strong></td>
<td>4.4821 (SD=.4)</td>
<td>4.1980 (SD=.3)</td>
<td>3.548</td>
<td>&lt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Insults</strong></td>
<td>4.2688 (SD=.3)</td>
<td>4.2391 (SD=.4)</td>
<td>.513</td>
<td>&lt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ridicule</strong></td>
<td>4.2755 (SD=.4)</td>
<td>4.2196 (SD=.3)</td>
<td>.986</td>
<td>&gt;.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Summary of the Study

The present research aimed to investigate the relationship between verbal aggression experienced during childhood, and self-esteem and interpersonal relationships in adulthood. The goal was to determine the later effects, if any, on self-esteem and intimacy levels in adults that have a childhood history of experiencing verbal aggression from the familial unit or community. Verbal aggression is often displayed during childhood through different forms of parenting. A study completed on a nationally representative sample of 3,346 American parents with a child under 18 living at home found that 63% reported one or more instances of verbal aggression, such as swearing, insulting, or threatening the child. “Children who experienced frequent verbal aggression from parents displayed higher rates of physical aggression, delinquency, and interpersonal problems than other children” (Vissing, Strauss, Gelles, & Harrop, 1991, p. 223).

Verbal aggression was not only experienced in a parent/guardian to child relationship but also within the community during childhood. Threats, teasing, criticism, and other forms of verbal aggression, all of which are types of bullying in general, occur
in many schools and neighborhoods (Nansel et al., 2001). Verbal aggression may be an ignored and under-reported problem. Perpetrators don’t volunteer information, victims don’t usually report the verbal aggression, and adults generally don’t perceive it as a problem. Other students may refuse to speak out for fear of becoming targets themselves. The shame associated with being victimized is so strong that many children will refuse to admit it, even to their parents and siblings.

Moreover verbal aggression is very prevalent in childhood. The effects of it and the awareness of it has been downplayed for years based off the old childhood saying “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me”. Children are exposed very young and it affects adulthood. It was hypothesized that an individual’s experience with verbal aggression during childhood effects self-esteem in adulthood. Results revealed that individuals that those who experience threats or insults between the ages of 4-17 are more likely to have a lower self-esteem as an adult. Most individuals that reported experiencing threats or insults between ages 4-17, stated that they disagreed with the statement “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Assessment as adults.

It was also hypothesized that an individual’s experience with verbal aggression during childhood effects intimate relationships in adulthood based off the FAP intimacy scale. Results revealed that those who experience threats and/or insults are more likely to be less intimate in personal relationships. Most individuals that reported experiencing threats or insults between the ages 4-17 also reported that they were less likely to “reveal their shortcomings” and more likely to hide their emotions from the relationships they described on the FAP intimacy assessment.
Other research has shown similar results in children (Vissing, Strauss, Gelles, & Harrop, 1991), however, experiences from childhood often carry over into adulthood whether it is good experience or a bad experience. These factors can effect the overall functioning adult in society without proper prevention and intervention. This study overall concludes based off of this research that an individual that experiences verbal aggression between the ages of 4 and 17 is more likely to display intimacy deficits in relationships in adulthood.

**Implications for Social Work**

There are many implications of social work practice with regards to the treatment/prevention of victims and/or perpetrators (adults or children) of verbal aggression/verbal violence in the home or community. This study brought to light the later effect on self-esteem and intimacy in adulthood due to childhood verbal aggression. This study implies and provides the importance of early intervention due to effects still being prevalent in adulthood. In addition, this will help with understanding adulthood self-esteem and intimacy from a holistic approach by also considering childhood experiences in the home and community as part of an individual. This will aid in developing more intimate relationships in adults who display trouble with intimate relationships.

Also this study provides insight on the necessary implications of social work policy and social work research. In regards to social work research, this study provides a research insight from the victim of verbal abuse, post event occurrence. This study provides research from the adult’s perspective about their experience with verbal
aggression between the ages of 4 and 17. It provides detailed information from an intimate stand point in later adulthood by examining the lasting effects. Research currently does not often follow up with the children that have been verbally abused as much as those that have been physically abused. This study fosters the idea of further research in later adulthood of those who have experienced verbal aggression. This study can imply that further research will assist in early intervention methods to prevent intimacy and self-esteem deficits in adulthood due to verbal aggression. The social work policy implications that can be drawn from this study are very important to the development of the individual. Social work policy is very important in regards to how clients or individuals are treated. The social work policy implications of this research are related to the social work child welfare policy. Social workers play a critical role in child welfare systems nationwide by protecting the well-being of children, youths, and supporting families in need. This research provides a source of evidence for a need for early intervention methods for victims of verbal aggression in the family and community.

It will then assist social work in developing more awareness programs of the later effects of verbal aggression. Also health mental/health social workers can use this information when discussing the importance of word choice and processing, in parenting and social interactions. In conclusion social workers can further imply that focusing on an individual’s choice of words can overall better the present state and the future state of people whether child or adult. Social workers should strive to reduce the effects of verbal aggression through early intervention, prevention, and awareness.
REFERENCES


