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# Aggression in Popular Children's Picture Books: A Content Analysis

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Aggression in Popular Children's Picture Books: A Content Analysis

Karen D. Leach

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### Aggression in Popular Children's Picture Books: A Content Analysis

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The purpose of this thesis is to assess children's exposure to aggression through popular children's picture books. Little research has been performed regarding aggression in such books. By analyzing 301 picture books, this study found that the average picture book contained 1.36 aggressive acts, and that aggressive acts were more likely to be included in picture books meant for older children. Verbal aggression was the most widely used type of aggression in children's picture books. There was no significant relationship between the type of character (human or nonhuman) and whether the character acted aggressively. Male characters were more likely to be shown aggressing towards other male characters; they were also more likely to be shown using physical aggression and violent ideation. Aggressive acts in children's picture books are more likely to be portrayed as unjustified, with no consequences, and no adult involvement to help resolve the situation. Children's picture books could be a useful tool for parents, teachers, and adults to teach children about aggression and appropriate solutions for resolving conflict.

Keywords: aggression, children, picture books, general aggression model, uses and gratifications theory

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Violence and aggression have been popular topics in recent research. Many studies have reported on the frequency of aggression in the media and the effects of exposure to aggressive content, but most have focused on television, movies, video games, and other types of visual media.

Some children's television programming has been found to contain more acts of aggression than prime time television programming that is intended for adults (Huston et al., 1992). More recently, other studies found that children are exposed to 14–18 acts of aggression each hour they are watching television (Glascock, 2013; Martins & Wilson, 2012).

Children's movies display similar amounts of aggression to children's television programming (Linder & Werner, 2012). Additionally, around half of all video games include some sort of violent content (Dill, Gentile, Richter, & Dill, 2005). With all of these forms of media, the average child witnesses over 100,000 acts of violence by the time he or she reaches 18 years of age (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001).

While these visual forms of media have been extensively researched in regards to aggression, aggression in literature is an area of research that has been relatively untouched in comparison.

This study represents an adaptation of the article entitled "A Mean Read" (Coyne et al., 2011), which focused on aggressive content in adolescent literature. It cited that the average adolescent book had .51 acts of aggression per page. It also presented the argument that aggression from literature could have as much of an impact on behavior as that from other forms of media such as television, movies, video games, music, and so on (Brians & Wattenberg, 1996; Grunig, 1983, as cited in Coyne et al., 2011).

Of the aggressive acts coded in “A Mean Read”, 34.2% were accounts of relational aggression, 32.8% were instances of verbal aggression, physically aggressive acts accounted for 21.5%, and only 11.6% of the aggressive acts were accounts of violent ideation. Regarding gender, the study found that the frequency of aggressive acts did not significantly differ between males and females. It was discovered, however, that male characters were portrayed more often than female characters using physical aggression and violent ideation. The study also showed that 73.24% of the portrayed aggressive acts were not justified, and that 74.09% of the aggressive acts were portrayed as having no consequences.

Since children are typically more easily influenced than adolescents (Browne & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005; Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2009), the information found in “A Mean Read” raises concerns about aggressive content found in children's picture books.



## **Chapter 2: Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the exposure children have to aggression through popular children's picture books. Very few academic articles have covered the topic of aggression in children's literature. This thesis will provide the groundwork for future studies regarding aggression and children's picture books.

This study aims to look beyond just physical violence in children's literature; it will also review the content of multiple types of aggression in children's picture books by determining the following: whether aggression is typically portrayed as justified; whether there are consequences to acting out aggressively; whether there are gender stereotypes regarding the types of aggression used and how often; whether the underlying message regarding aggressions and conflict resolution for children includes telling an adult; and whether the characters involved in conflict are human or nonhuman characters to predict the ability for children to relate to the situation.

### Chapter 3: Literature Review

#### Definition of Aggression

Since this thesis presents the types of aggressive content found in popular children's picture books, it is important to include a definition of what is referred to in this article as *aggression*. At a general level, Anderson and Bushman (2002) defined aggression as "any behavior directed toward another individual carried out with the immediate intent to harm" (p. 28). This definition provides a sort of litmus test for telling whether an act was aggressive by asking a simple question: Was there intent to harm?

An aggressive act can fit into one of four categories: relational aggression, physical aggression, verbal aggression, or violent ideation. Physical aggression is subdivided into direct or indirect aggression. Direct physical aggression involves overtly causing physical harm or injury to a person (e.g., punching, kicking, etc.). Meanwhile, indirect physical aggression is defined as covertly causing physical damage or taking property (e.g., vandalism, mean notes, etc.).

Relational aggression can also be divided into the following subcategories: direct relational aggression, indirect relational aggression, and nonverbal relational aggression. Direct relational aggression is defined as overt and/or confrontational behaviors that directly harm others through damaging a relationship (e.g., threatening to dissolve friendship, etc.). Indirect relational aggression is defined as covert or non-confrontational behaviors meant to harm others through damaging relationships (e.g., gossiping, etc.). Nonverbal aggression is defined as gestural behaviors intended to exclude, alienate, or embarrass others (e.g., eye rolling, silent treatment, etc.).

Verbal aggression and violent ideation have been identified as their own categories. Verbal aggression is defined as a direct verbal confrontation that attempts to psychologically hurt, but is not aimed at harming relationships in the long- or short-term (e.g., insults, sarcasm, etc.). Violent ideation is defined as thinking, plotting, or planning an aggressive act without performing the act itself.

### **Exposure to Aggressive Media**

A child's development is greatly enhanced if he or she reads and/or is read to while young. Children read 40% more often than adolescents (Strasburger et al., 2009), since they are expected to practice reading for school and are more frequently evaluated on their reading ability.

There is currently a gap in the research concerning how much aggression is found in children's picture books, and it is the purpose of this thesis to fill a portion of this gap. Many other studies have focused on the amount of aggression or violence children are exposed to through other forms of media.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2001) found that the average child witnesses over 100,000 acts of violence by the time he or she reaches 18 years of age. Another study found that children's programming contained more violence than prime-time programming (Huston et al., 1992). Around half of all video games include violent acts toward other game characters (Buchman & Funk, 1996; Dietz, 1998; Dill et al., 2005).

Previous studies have found that children come across 18 counts of verbal aggression every hour through children's television programming and movies (Glascock, 2013; Linder & Werner, 2012). Moreover, Martins and Wilson (2012) found that children are exposed to 14 acts of social aggression per hour through children's television programming. This information is

even more of a concern because media research has found that violence is often portrayed in ways that may increase the likelihood of imitation (Thompson & Haninger, 2001; Yokota & Thompson, 2000).

### **Influence of Media**

In the literature on aggression in children's media, many articles report the effect of the consumption of aggressive media on children. Most articles deal strictly with violence, but the types of documented effects on a child exposed to aggression are vast, and can be both immediate and long-term (Anderson et al., 2003).

**Short-term effects.** Research showing that aggressive media have an immediate effect on children goes back almost half a century. Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963) presented a study offering proof that children mimic aggressive behavior they see on television. To build on their study, others have elaborated on the way that children mimic what they see on television. For example, Geen (1981) found that exposure to aggressive media can result in a child becoming verbally aggressive, and Huesmann and Malamuth (1986) presented a study showing children exhibiting anti-social behavior after watching aggressive media.

Researchers have found that the inclusion of consequences for aggressive behavior has a direct correlation with whether the child will imitate the behavior. Michelle Garrison of the Seattle Children's Research Institute Center for Child Health, Behavior, and Development explains, "With both preschool and school-aged children, studies have found that they are more likely to imitate the violence they see on screen if someone they see as a 'good guy' is using the violence to solve a problem, especially if there are no realistic consequences for the violence" (Emmons, 2013).

Short-term effects include an increase in aggressive behavior immediately after viewing aggressive content, with the effects lasting for a few days. In 2013, a study was published citing that increased aggressive behavior from playing violent video games could last as long as three days (Hasan, Bégue, Scharrow, & Bushman, 2013; see also Anderson & Carnagey, 2009).

Studies have shown the short-term effects on adolescents and adults of reading aggressive content. Coyne et al. (2012) showed that adults who read physically aggressive content exhibited more physically aggressive behavior afterwards. The same held true for adults who read relationally aggressive content; they displayed relationally aggressive behavior after reading that type of content. In another study from 2013, Stockdale, Coyne, Nelson, and Padilla-Walker found that reading aggression in books was positively associated with aggressive behavior.

**Long-term effects.** In addition to short-term effects for children exposed to aggression in media, children could also acquire negative long-term effects on their behavior and attitudes. In an article from 2003, Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, and Eron cited longitudinal studies in the 1960s that found that the relation between viewing violence on television and subsequent aggressive behavior was only applicable to boys. The same article looked at studies performed in later decades that showed that childhood exposure to media violence predicts aggressive behavior in young adults, both male and female.

Other research has shown that exposure to aggression can lead to long-lasting aggressive social scripts, interpretational schemas that perceive aggression where it may not exist, and a general aggression-supporting belief about social behavior (Anderson et al., 2003). Exposure to violent media desensitizes children or reduces their normal negative response to violence (Funk, Baldacci, Pasold, & Baumgardner, 2004; Lam, Cheng, & Liu, 2013; Thompson & Haninger, 2001; Yokota & Thompson, 2000).

### **Effects of Literature on Children**

Few studies have shown the effects on children of exposure to aggressive content in picture books, but studies have been conducted on how children's literature influences children. To demonstrate that literature has an impact on child development, Peterson and Lach (1990) reported that elementary school children who read stories about people that successfully fought gender discrimination demonstrated less stereotyped attitudes about the roles of boys and girls. They also cited a study by Barclay (1974) stating that children who were taught with nonsexist stories or books over sustained periods of time showed reduced sex-role stereotyping. Peterson and Lach determined that the content of the reading material to which children are exposed shapes their attitudes, understanding, and behavior.

Other studies explained that print media could have a greater impact than other types of media due to the cognitive involvement that takes place when a parent reads to a child or a child begins reading him or herself (Brians & Wattenberg, 1996; Coyne et al., 2011; Grunig, 1983). Children must use their imaginations and cognitive processes to comprehend the message of the book because illustrations do not encompass every aspect of the story; thus, they require more focus when reading than watching visual media. In the case of bullying, there have even been examples of children acting violently as a re-enactment of a book they read where the victim reacted violently to being bullied and was rewarded for that behavior (Oliver, Young, & LaSalle, 1994). It is possible that children's picture books can be a hindrance when it comes to teaching children how to appropriately handle conflict; however, they can also be an excellent resource for children to learn ways of avoiding and/or resolving aggressive situations.

Finally, children are influenced by picture books through the illustrations and images. When using picture books for learning purposes, the general population prefers pictures with

human characters, or animals exhibiting human characteristics, to learn from their wide range of physical, cognitive, and social features (Hansen & Zambo, 2005). In theory, children can learn from animals that are given "human" behaviors (talking, walking, etc.), but they may be able to relate to human characters more readily than they can to animals (Tare, Chiong, Ganea, & DeLoache, 2010), thus making them more apt to mimic human characters' behavior.

### **Aggressive Behavior in Reality**

There has been some research showing the effects of exposure to aggression through the media; this section outlines the current trends and tendencies of aggressive behavior regardless of whether a person has been exposed to aggression in media.

Previous research has captured the reality of gender differences in using aggression. While there is no difference in the amount of aggression displayed by both genders, males will typically use physical forms of aggression, while females will lean towards indirect forms of aggression, such as relational aggression (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008; Crick et al., 1999; Österman et al., 1998). Burbank (1987) found that females typically aggress toward other females. Research is not conclusive as to whether gender behaviors are learned or innate.

Another study presented data supporting the onset of physically aggressive behavior at approximately 17 months for 80% of children (Tremblay et al., 1999). Since children are acquiring aggressive tendencies so young, the next section will discuss the importance of reading to children or children spending time reading on their own. Future studies will have to cover whether or not aggression in children's picture books correlates with aggressive behavior in reality, but studies have been conducted that present the state of aggression in children to anticipate possible relationships between media and reality.

**Reading is Essential for Children**

Children who are read to are quicker to develop vocabulary, comprehension, spelling, and writing skills (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000; Krashen, 1989; Reese & Cox, 1999). Children who read outside of school are more likely to see gains in reading achievement in school (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1998). Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) found that the ability to read earlier in childhood had a strong correlation to reading comprehension, vocabulary, and general knowledge in high school.

Ginsburg (2007) pointed out that children who are read to, even at a young age, have a more balanced life, are able to exercise their imagination, and have increased cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being. This same study suggested that parents who read to their children learn to communicate more effectively with their children; this could lead a child to involve a parent to help resolve an aggressive situation.

While some studies have demonstrated that exposure to aggressive media can influence a child to behave aggressively, it is possible for a picture book to portray aggression along with a healthy solution or resolution, such that the child receives a message from the book to keep him or her from acting out aggressively. To better understand the thought processes used to process conflict situations, the general aggression model (GAM) should be taken into account.

**Theoretical Background**

This study will involve a content analysis using only the GAM (Anderson & Bushman, 2002) for interpretation of the results. As people interact with their environment, they will come across situations, or stimuli, that could influence their behavior. The GAM presented by Anderson and Bushman (2002) provides a framework for understanding why people choose to act aggressively.



The purpose of this thesis is to determine children's exposure to aggression through popular children's picture books. Since this study is solely based on content, the GAM may seem unrelated. Nevertheless, the GAM takes the environment and external stimuli into account when assessing the cause of behavior, and the books that children read or have read to them are part of their environment and can act as input stimuli to their behavior or affect their internal state by providing social scripts that define their expectations of how social interactions work. The GAM can give insight into how aggressive content found in children's picture books could impact children's behavior.

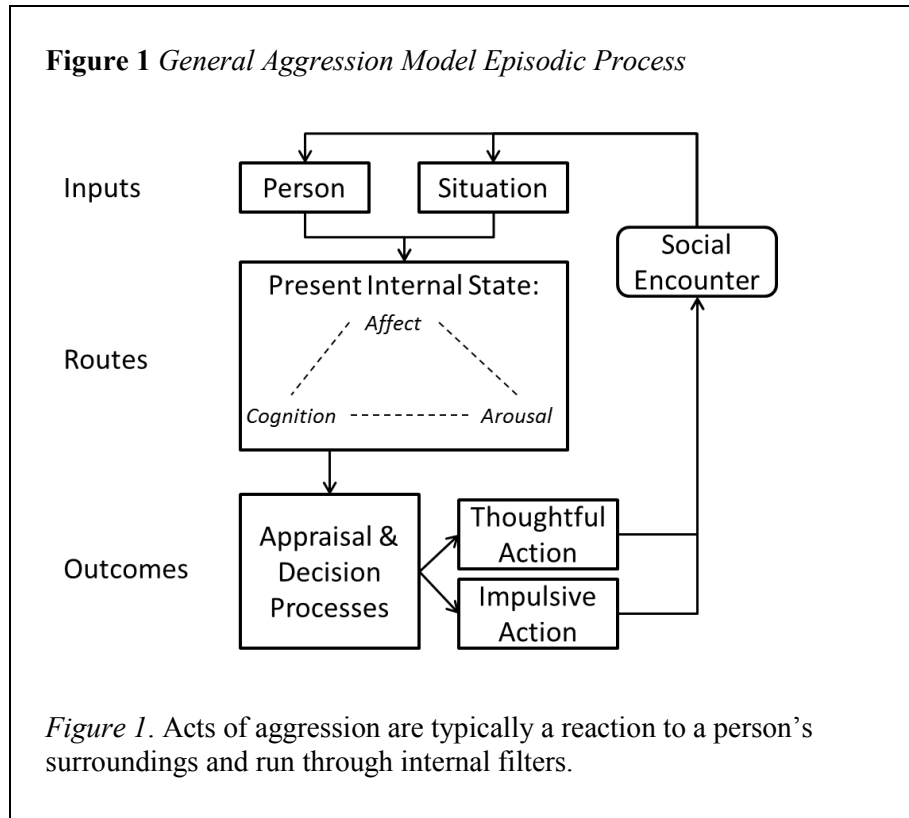
Anderson and Bushman (2002) combined these five theories to present a model for understanding that aggressive behavior is not just an automatic reaction. For most, there will be a personal or situational catalyst or input for acting aggressively. Personal inputs come from the traits of the individual; certain traits predispose people to high levels of aggression. For those who frequently aggress, the aggressive behavior is attributed to susceptibility towards a hostile disposition, antagonistic perception, and expectation bias towards aggression (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dill, Anderson, Anderson, & Deuser, 1997). Situational inputs are external factors that can have an impact on a person's preparedness to aggress. There are six known situational inputs: aggressive cues, provocation, frustration, pain and discomfort, drugs, and incentives.

Once they have encountered input stimuli, there are three routes, or thought filters, that the input variable could take depending on the person's current internal state. The cognition filter could include hostile thoughts and aggressive scripts. Recent exposure to violent media can prime aggressive thoughts, increasing the accessibility of the hostile thoughts or aggressive scripts (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). The affect filter considers the emotional response to stimuli. Anderson and Bushman (2002) specifically looked at mood and emotion, as well as

expressive motor responses. Depending on the circumstances, if a person is in a bad mood or experiencing negative emotions, the likelihood of acting aggressively increases. The arousal filter ties back to the excitation transfer theory described previously, although Anderson and Bushman (2002) discussed three ways that arousal can influence aggression. First, arousal from an unrelated source can enhance the aggressive action tendency. Second, the excitation from an unrelated source could be construed as anger or result in displaced aggression. Third, there is a possibility (although it is yet untested) that unusually high or low levels of arousal may be aversive states that could result in aggressive behavior.

After the interaction has been processed internally, the person has the opportunity to appraise the situation and make a decision about how to act. This process can be somewhat complex, but always results in either a thoughtful action or an impulsive one. The chosen action then moves the social interaction forward, causing the cycle to begin again with input stimuli. A visualization of this process is shown in Figure 1.

This model gives context related to why people choose to behave aggressively. The GAM shows the path that exposure to aggressive literature can take. Frequent exposure to aggressive literature can impact one's internal state, provide greater accessibility to hostile thoughts or aggressive scripts, and arouse a person, resulting in excitation transfer or displaced aggression.



At times, people act in opposition to their moral standards. They may disregard their typical standards if they feel that they have a moral justification or if their victim has been dehumanized. Common justifications include, “it is for the person’s own good,” “personal honor demands a violent act,” and finally, “it’s for the good of the society” (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). This study will also determine the degree to which aggressive behavior is portrayed as justified in children’s picture books.

Including aggressive content with positive resolutions in children’s picture books can be productive and give positive social scripts which children could apply to aggressive situations in reality. Any exposure to aggression can lead to the acquirement of lasting aggressive social scripts, interpretational schemas that perceive aggression where it may not exist, and a generally aggression-supporting belief about social behavior (Anderson et al., 2003).

### Chapter 4: Research Questions

This research is a continuance of the article “A Mean Read”, but applies to children’s picture books targeted for children up to age 10. As such, the following research questions are in line with those raised in “A Mean Read”, with the addition of a few questions to account for nuances related to studying children’s literature.

**RQ1:** How often do aggressive acts appear in children’s picture books?

**RQ2:** Are aggressive acts generally included in picture books meant for older children?

**RQ3:** Which type of aggression is most commonly portrayed?

**RQ4:** In children’s picture books, are aggressive acts typically demonstrated by nonhuman characters or human characters?

**RQ5:** Is there a relationship between the gender of the initiating character and the gender of the victim?

**RQ6:** Are there any relationships between gender and the type of aggression portrayed?

**RQ7:** How frequently do children’s picture books justify aggressive acts?

**RQ8:** To what extent are aggressive acts portrayed with consequences in children’s picture books?

**RQ9:** To what degree do children’s picture books include acts of aggression that lead to adult involvement as a means to resolve the issue?

## Chapter 5: Methodology

### Sample

For this study, a content analysis was conducted on 301 picture books from the *New York Times* Best Seller List. The weekly lists used for this study were published between July 27, 2003 and March 24, 2013. Using roughly 10 years of data was required to provide a sample size large enough for this study. Since Steinberg's (2007) definition of an adolescent is nine years and older, the selected books for this study will have an average target age of 10 years and younger; there is some expectation of overlap when determining the ages of children and adolescents. The *New York Times* Best Seller List was chosen as the benchmark for popular children's picture books because it reflects sales, and therefore is a strong indicator of a book's popularity.

### Scope

The purpose of this thesis is to determine children's exposure to aggression through popular children's picture books, but not to determine the impact or benefits of reading aggressive content to children. Aggressive acts from an institution, society, or culture will not be evaluated in this study. For example, if the plot of a book takes place during the time of slavery, the mere fact that a character was a slave is not coded; however, if that character is aggressive towards another character, or picked on by the owner, then an aggressive act will have taken place and this will be included in the study. In order for aggression to be evaluated in this study, there needs to be an aggressive act carried out by one character toward another character with the intent to harm.

### Methodological Approach

To perform a content analysis is to methodically study the content of communication messages (Stacks & Hocking, 1992). McLuhan (1964) is well-known for having coined the

phrase, “the medium is the message”; other academics, however, have supported the importance of the content to the meaning of the message (Anderson et al., 2003; Coyne et al., 2011). For this reason, there is a need to perform a content analysis to better understand the aggressive content and underlying messages regarding aggression in children's picture books. A proper content analysis should do the following: 1) describe trends in communication; 2) test hypotheses related to message characteristics; 3) compare media content to the “real world”; 4) assess images of groups in society; and 5) establish a starting point for studies of media effects (Stroman & Jones, 1998).

A very important role of a content analysis is to determine what behavior currently exists in the media and how it is portrayed. Other studies have performed content analyses on children's picture books to determine what type of content is available, but so far they have focused on the portrayal of societal characteristics such as socioeconomic status, gender, race, and so on. This study will follow the precedent set by Coyne et al. (2011) to determine what aggressive content is currently available in popular children's picture books. Aggressive content will be coded if it is included in the text of the book, as well as if it is represented visually through images.

### **Coding Scheme**

Every book in this study was coded page by page. The coder would first read the text on the page, tracking any acts of aggression, and then evaluate the images on the page and track any acts of aggression in the images. If the same act of aggression was represented in both the text and the picture, then it was only coded once and marked as both textual and visual. Each aggressive event was coded and assessed based on the categories described in the next section.

## Units of Analysis

**Type of aggression.** The most important key to telling whether an act is aggressive is whether there is *intent to harm* another individual who does not wish to be harmed. Physical aggression is also known as *violence*. Violence is defined in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary as “the use of physical force so as to injure or abuse.” Essentially, physical aggression is acting with the intent to cause bodily harm or property damage. Anderson and Bushman (2002) point out that all violence is aggressive, but not all aggression is violent. Coyne et al. (2011) divide physical violence into two subcategories: direct physical aggression and indirect physical aggression.

In “A Mean Read”, the authors coded an aggressive act as direct physical aggression if the assailant was overtly causing physical damage or injury to a person (Coyne et al., 2011). Direct physical aggression could be a direct attack such as pushing, hitting, biting, and so on, or an attack with a weapon or object, for example, shooting at someone or throwing an object at others. The term *fighting* is also used when discussing direct physical aggression. In “A Mean Read”, Coyne et al. (2011) defined fighting as a direct attack or an attack with a weapon that occurs multiple times in the same interaction.

Coyne et al. (2011) coded an aggressive act as indirect physical aggression if the assailant was covertly causing physical damage or damaging property. This type of aggression generally refers to improper use of others' property (punching a wall, throwing a rock at a person's window, etc.), getting someone else to harm a person, or covertly causing physical harm (poisoning, putting a bomb in someone's house, etc.).

Other nonphysical types of aggression were included in the research for “A Mean Read” (Coyne et al., 2011), because studies show that exposure to nonphysical types of aggression can

affect behavior, resulting in an increase in physical and/or nonphysical aggression (Coyne et al., 2008). The nonphysical types of aggression are: relational aggression, verbal aggression, and violent ideation.

Archer and Coyne (2005) described relational aggression as an act that seeks to cause harm to an individual's relationship or social standing. As used in the 2011 article, relational aggression is divided into three subcategories: direct relational aggression, indirect relational aggression, and nonverbal aggression (Coyne et al, 2011).

Coyne et al. (2011) described direct relational aggression as a confrontational and/or overt behavior aiming to directly harm others through damage to relationships. This type of aggression directly affects others' feelings of acceptance, friendships, or group inclusion. Examples of this type of aggression include threatening to destroy a friendship/relationship, direct social exclusion, blackmail, becoming friends under false pretenses, or other forms of emotional abuse.

The coding specifications for "A Mean Read" defined indirect relational aggression as covert and/or passive behavior intending to directly harm others through damage to relationships. This type of aggression indirectly affects others' feelings of acceptance, friendships, or group inclusion (Coyne et al. 2011). Behaviors such as covert social exclusion (getting others to socially exclude a person), gossiping, spreading rumors, getting others to dislike a person, secretly destroying a relationship, and so on are generally classified as indirect relational aggression.

Nonverbal aggression is also a subcategory of relational aggression. It generally refers to gestures intended to alienate, exclude, or embarrass others. Nonverbal aggressive acts can



include giving someone the silent treatment, rolling one's eyes, giving someone dirty looks, and so forth (Coyne et al. 2011).

Some of the aggressive acts will only be coded if they are considered aggressive based on the context of the story. For example, if a character runs into a door and his eyes are rolling around, then the eye rolling would not be coded as an aggressive act, since there is no intent to harm.

Opposing nonverbal aggression is the third category, namely verbal aggression. Archer and Coyne (2005) referred to this type of aggression as behavior aiming to cause psychological pain or hurt. "A Mean Read" used this same definition and typically coded an aggressive act as verbal aggression if a person ridiculed others, insulted others, denigrated others' ideas, used sarcasm in a hurtful way, yelled, or argued. With verbal communication, the receiver always knows who the initiator is, so the act is always direct.

The final and fourth type of aggression used in "A Mean Read", as well as in the present study, is violent ideation (Coyne et al., 2011). This refers to the thinking, plotting, wishing, or planning of aggressive behaviors (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Since a person can think about physically harming someone and/or injuring someone socially, violent ideation could also be referred to as physical ideation or relational ideation.

**Human/nonhuman.** Since children may be better able to relate to human characters, whether the initiators and victims are human or nonhuman will be specified for each aggressive act. Human characters include characters with a human appearance, such as wizards or vampires. Nonhuman characters include any being not in human form. These characters can exhibit the behavior and characteristics of human beings, but not human appearance.

**Gender.** The aggressor and victim of each event will be coded as a male, female, or unknown. Gender will be determined by the use of pronouns like she/he. If that fails, images of the subject will be used to determine gender.

**Justification.** In order for an aggressive act to be considered justified, it would need to be socially sanctioned or for the greater good. If the protagonist of the story aggresses against a villain or other evil character, such acts will also be coded as justified (Berkowitz & Rawlings, 1963). Some good questions to ask to determine if an aggressive act is justified are as follows: Would the reader believe the victim deserved to be a target? Was the person provoked to act aggressively?

**Consequences.** Aggressive acts are classified as rewarded, punished, or having no consequences (Perry, Perry, & Rasmussen, 1986). If the aggressor receives something positive for the aggression, then the act has been rewarded. On the other hand, if the aggressor receives something negative for the aggression, then the act has been punished. Finally, if the aggressor does not experience any positive or negative outcome, then the act has had no consequences.

**Adult involvement.** Adult involvement refers to an action after or during an aggressive event in which a parent or other authoritative adult is involved to help with conflict resolution.

### **Reliability**

This study had two coders who performed parallel analysis on 60 children's picture books. A two-hour training took place before actual coding began to foster a mutual understanding of the purpose of the study and to review the coding guidelines (see Appendix), which provided definitions and examples for all the variables that would be coded for each act of aggression. A sample of the coding sheet has also been provided in the Appendix to this thesis.

To determine the reliability of the data, Cohen's kappa was used as a statistical measure to determine inter-coder agreement. Cohen's kappa has become a widely used calculation, as the outcome is more than just a percentage of consistency; rather, it accounts for agreement occurring by chance, thereby resulting in more reliable research data. Table 1 presents a list of the variables coded with the corresponding  $\kappa$  value. The acceptable level of agreement was  $\alpha > .7$  between the two coders.

**Table 1** *Listing of Cohen's Kappa Reliability Results*

| Variable                           | $\kappa$ |
|------------------------------------|----------|
| Method of Depiction                | .7404    |
| Type of Aggression                 | .9839    |
| Behavior                           | .8830    |
| Sub-behavior                       | .8664    |
| Initiator's Number-Name Reference  | .9739    |
| Initiator's Type                   | .9769    |
| Initiator's Gender                 | .9206    |
| Initiator's Age Group              | .6775    |
| Initiator's Relationship to Victim | .8699    |
| Victim's Number-Name Reference     | .9547    |
| Victim's Type                      | .9791    |
| Victim's Gender                    | .8245    |
| Victim's Age Group                 | .7964    |
| Justification Context              | .7394    |
| Consequences                       | .7853    |
| Adult Involvement                  | 1.0000   |

The initiator's age group was the only category with a Cohen's kappa value less than .7. After consultation between the two coders to determine more specific guidelines for identifying the initiator's age group, the content analysis continued.

## Chapter 6: Results

### Results by Research Question

**RQ1: How Often Do Aggressive Acts Appear in Children's Picture Books?** For this study, 301 children's picture books were coded, including 9,632 pages of text. In these books, 410 acts of aggression were found. This equates to approximately 1.36 aggressive acts per book, or .04 acts of aggression per page.

**RQ2: Are Aggressive Acts Generally Included in Picture Books Meant for Older Children?** The target age group and the number of aggressive acts were tracked for each picture book. The books for children aged 2–4 accounted for 8.6% of the total pages coded, the number of pages for books for children aged 5–6 represented 71.8% of the total pages coded, and 19.6% of the total pages were found in the books for children ages 7–10. These percentages were used to calculate the expected number of aggressive acts for each target age group if authors randomly included conflict in children's picture books. Table 2 shows the expected and observed frequencies.

**Table 2** *Frequencies of Aggression by Target Age Group*

| Target Age Group | Observed N | Expected N | Residual |
|------------------|------------|------------|----------|
| Ages 2–4         | 24         | 35.3       | -11.3    |
| Ages 5–6         | 239        | 294.4      | -55.4    |
| Ages 7–10        | 147        | 80.4       | 66.6     |

A one-way chi-square analysis disclosed that picture books targeted for children aged 5–6 included fewer aggressive acts than expected, and picture books targeted for children ages 7–10 included more aggression than anticipated ( $\chi^2 (2) = 69.277, p < .001$ ). Aggressive acts are more likely to be included in picture books meant for older children.

**RQ3: Which Type of Aggression is Most Commonly Portrayed?** Each act of aggression was categorized into one of the following four types: physical, relational, verbal, or violent ideation. Physical aggression represented 33.4% of the aggressive acts, relational aggression accounted for 15.6% of the aggression included in picture books, 42% of the aggressive acts were verbally aggressive, and only 9% of the aggressive acts were accounts of violent ideation. Table 3 shows the expected and observed frequencies for aggressive acts by type of aggression.

**Table 3** *Frequencies of Aggression by Type of Aggression*

| Type of Aggression | Observed N | Expected N | Residual |
|--------------------|------------|------------|----------|
| Physical           | 137        | 102.5      | 34.5     |
| Relational         | 64         | 102.5      | -38.5    |
| Verbal             | 172        | 102.5      | 69.5     |
| Violent Ideation   | 37         | 102.5      | -65.5    |

A one-way chi-square analysis revealed that verbal and physical aggression were more often included in picture books than expected ( $\chi^2(3) = 115.054, p < .001$ ). Verbal aggression was the most widely used type of aggression in children's picture books.

**RQ4: In Children's Picture Books, Are Aggressive Acts Typically Demonstrated by Nonhuman Characters or Human Characters?** Each character that acted aggressively was coded as a human or a nonhuman character. Approximately 51.4% of the aggressive characters were human, and 48.6% of the aggressive acts were committed by nonhuman characters. The calculated frequencies are show in Table 4.

**Table 4** *Frequencies of Aggression by Character Type*

| Character Type | Observed N | Expected N |
|----------------|------------|------------|
| Human          | 209        | 203.5      |
| Nonhuman       | 198        | 203.5      |

A one-way chi-square analysis revealed that there were no significant relationships between the type of character (human or nonhuman) and whether the character acted aggressively ( $\chi^2 (1) = .298, p < .6$ ).

**RQ5: Is There a Relationship Between the Gender of the Initiating Character and the Gender of the Victim?** For this analysis, there were 165 male characters and 93 female characters that behaved aggressively. The characters where the gender was unknown were not included in this analysis. The frequencies of aggressive acts committed by males and females are shown in Tables 5 and 6.

**Table 5** *Frequencies of Aggressive Acts Committed by Males*

| Victim's Gender | Observed N | Expected N |
|-----------------|------------|------------|
| Male            | 111        | 82.5       |
| Female          | 54         | 82.5       |

**Table 6** *Frequencies of Aggressive Acts Committed by Females*

| Victim's Gender | Observed N | Expected N |
|-----------------|------------|------------|
| Male            | 52         | 46.5       |
| Female          | 41         | 46.5       |

Table 5 shows the results of a one-way chi-square analysis, which demonstrated that male characters were more likely to be depicted aggressing toward other male characters and were less likely to aggress toward females ( $\chi^2 (1) = 19.69, p < .001$ ). Table 6 illustrates the outcome of a separate one-way chi-square analysis looking at the aggressive tendencies of female characters. These results show that female characters aggress equally toward males and females ( $\chi^2 (1) = 1.3, p < .3$ ).

**RQ6: Are There Any Relationships Between Gender and the Type of Aggression Portrayed?** The chi-square analyses performed indicated that male characters were more likely

to be shown using physical aggression ( $\chi^2 (1) = 26.509, p < .001$ ) and violent ideation ( $\chi^2 (1) = 10.939, p < .001$ ) than females. No relationships were found between the initiator's gender and the portrayal of relational ( $\chi^2 (1) = .641, p < .423$ ) or verbal aggression ( $\chi^2 (1) = 2.935, p < .087$ ).

The results of these analyses are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7** *Frequencies of Aggression by Initiator's Gender*

| Initiator's Gender | Physical | Relational | Verbal    | Violent Ideation |
|--------------------|----------|------------|-----------|------------------|
| Male               | 82 (55)  | 22 (19.5)  | 71 (61.5) | 26 (16.5)        |
| Female             | 28 (55)  | 17 (19.5)  | 52 (61.5) | 7 (16.5)         |

Expected frequencies are shown in parentheses.

**RQ7: How Frequently Do Children's Picture Books Justify Aggressive Acts?** Each of the aggressive acts was coded as a justified or unjustified act of aggression. Of these 410 total aggressive acts, 64.1% of the actions were portrayed as unjustified and 35.9% were represented as justified acts of aggression. The results are shown in Table 8.

**Table 8** *Frequencies of Justification Status for Aggression*

| Justification Status | Observed N | Expected N |
|----------------------|------------|------------|
| Justified            | 147        | 205        |
| Not Justified        | 263        | 205        |

The one-way chi-square analysis uncovered that aggressive acts in children's picture books are more likely to be portrayed as unjustified ( $\chi^2 (1) = 32.82, p < .001$ ). Many of the aggressive acts portrayed in the books for this study were not provoked, or the initiator did not have a valid reason for behaving aggressively.

**RQ8: To What Extent Are Aggressive Acts Portrayed with Consequences in Children's Picture Books?** The aggressive acts in this study rarely showed actions as punished

or rewarded. Over 88% of the aggressive acts had no consequences at all. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 9.

**Table 9** *Frequencies of Consequence Status for Aggression*

| Consequence Status | Observed N | Expected N | Residual |
|--------------------|------------|------------|----------|
| Punished           | 12         | 136.7      | -124.7   |
| Rewarded           | 34         | 136.7      | -102.7   |
| No Consequence     | 364        | 136.7      | 227.3    |

There are strong results showing that aggressive acts portrayed in children's picture books do not show any subsequent consequences ( $\chi^2 (2) = 568.995, p < .001$ ).

**RQ9: To What Degree Do Children's Picture Books Include Acts of Aggression that Lead to Adult Involvement as a Means to Resolve the Issue?** For each aggressive act, the coder tracked whether an adult character was involved to help resolve the conflict. An overwhelming 96.6% of the instances did not lead to adult involvement. The results are shown in Table 10.

**Table 10** *Frequencies of Adult Involvement for Resolving Aggression*

| Adult Involvement | Observed N | Expected N |
|-------------------|------------|------------|
| Adult Involved    | 14         | 205        |
| No Adult Involved | 396        | 205        |

The chi-square analysis performed to answer this question uncovered that most aggressive acts portrayed did not include an adult to resolve the situation ( $\chi^2 (1) = 355.912, p < .001$ ). Adults are rarely portrayed in children's picture books as a resource to resolve conflict.



### Chapter 7: Discussion

There were a few differences in the results of this study and the findings in “A Mean Read” (Coyne et al., 2011). It was revealed for adolescent literature that there are around .51 acts of aggression per page and that 100% of their books contain aggression. The results of this study found that children's picture books only contain .04 acts of aggression per page and only 35% of picture books contain aggression. There is a relatively low frequency of aggression in children's picture books compared to books targeted for adolescents.

Coyne et al. (2011) found that adolescents are exposed to aggression at a rate of 30.23 acts per hour through adolescent literature. Children are exposed to all types of aggression through many different media. They come across at least 18 acts of aggression per hour through children's television programming, movies, and video games. Under the assumption that parents or adults are reading picture books to children, the average pace of reading is around 253 words per minute (Coyne et al., 2011). Other researchers have reported that children's picture books average between 600 and 1,400 words per picture book, and that there is an average of 32 pages per picture book (Russell, 2013), which would result in 31.25 words per page. With these figures, if a parent or adult is reading to a child, the child would be exposed to roughly 19.4 aggressive acts per hour, and since children typically read more slowly than the average adult, a child would be exposed to fewer aggressive acts per hour if he or she was reading a picture book alone. In effect, children are exposed to over half the amount of aggression through children's picture books relative to teenagers reading adolescent literature. In addition, if children are able to read on their own, they are also exposed to less aggression through picture books than any other type of media.

This research presents other interesting results in the context of the aggressive acts analyzed in this study. Generally, the context of aggression included in children's picture books is very similar to the findings of "A Mean Read" (Coyne et al., 2011). Most aggressive acts did not result in any sort of consequences, which could conceal the negative impact of aggression, causing children to develop a social script where they expect no significant consequences from behaving aggressively (Anderson et al., 2003).

Ideally, children's books would portray aggression in such a way that children would be encouraged to react appropriately to an aggressive environment. An appropriate response to a conflict situation would include involving an adult to help resolve the situation; however, less than 4% of the aggressive acts included in this study depicted any sort of adult involvement. As children are exposed to the aggressive situations in books, they will acquire social scripts that do not include adult involvement to resolve a conflict; this could lead to children believing that they are responsible for resolving conflicts on their own. On the other hand, children or adults may prefer to read books that show children how to handle complicated situations independently.

Another positive note from the results is that most aggressive acts found in children's picture books were portrayed as unjustified. This trend in both picture books and adolescent literature sends the message that aggression is not a typically accepted solution to one's problems. Conversely, the justified aggression included in picture books (over 35% of the aggressive acts) could send the message that there are circumstances where aggression is the proper social reaction.

An example of justified aggression found in this study was in the book *Duck, Duck, Goose*, by Tad Hills (2007). This book included a message that could be interpreted as supporting the use of relational aggression. The story starts with Duck and Goose, who are best

friends and love to play together. One day, Goose brings along another friend, Ducky, who tends to brag about herself and put others down. The last page of the book resolves the situation by Duck and Goose waiting for Ducky to fall asleep behind a bush, after which they happily go play without her. This is the kind of message could provide a social script for a child that relational aggression is an acceptable solution to fix a problem.

The results of this study aligned with the results of "A Mean Read" in terms of the portrayal of aggressive acts by gender. Mirroring reality, males were portrayed as being more physically aggressive than females (Björkqvist et al., 1992; Card et al., 2008; Crick et al., 1999; Österman et al., 1998). The results of both "A Mean Read" and the present study showed that males are portrayed in children's picture books and adolescent literature as using violent ideation more than female characters. Furthermore, the results of this study also demonstrated that male characters are more likely to pick on other male characters. Perhaps these findings indicate that young male readers are given storylines that reinforce gender stereotypes regarding males and the use of violence. Another perspective is that parents/adults are choosing these picture books for their boys to read in order to open a dialogue about aggression and the best way to handle conflict.

There is still a trend in today's academic research where physical violence is analyzed as the only type of aggression in media. However, this study showed that verbal aggression is widely portrayed in children's picture books, and "A Mean Read" found that verbal and relational aggression occur more commonly than physical forms of aggression or violent ideation. These findings reinforce the need to research all types of aggression in today's media, not just physical violence.

One of the books in this study that would not be included in studies looking only at physical violence is *The Junkyard Wonders* (Polacco, 2010). This book is based on a true story about a girl who attended a class for children with learning disabilities. There were many counts of verbal and relational aggression, as the author related how mean the “normal” kids could be to her and the other kids in her class.

Since children's picture books more commonly use nonhuman characters (such as animals) compared to adolescent books, this study also examined whether human or nonhuman characters were more aggressive since, children are more likely to relate to characters that are similar to them. For example, if a blond, Caucasian girl read a two stories—the first about a blond girl who went on an adventure, and the second story about a bear cub trying to make friends—the girl may relate more to the first story due to the fact that she is similar to the character in the book (Tare, Chiong, Ganea, & DeLoache, 2010). However, the findings of this analysis showed that aggressive acts were carried out equally by both human and nonhuman characters.

### **Limitations**

One possible limitation of this study is that it only evaluated children's picture books from the *New York Times* Best Seller lists. There is a possibility that if a more randomized selection of children's picture books were examined, the results may differ from those in this study. This is due to the active role of children and adults in selecting books to read. The picture books on the *New York Times* list are popular for a reason: Perhaps parents, teachers, and other adults are looking for these types of picture books because of the way in which aggression is included compared to other children's picture books that are not included on the *New York Times* list.

This study did not code any overarching positive or negative messages about aggression. The results of this study could be interpreted negatively, suggesting, for instance, that children's books portray aggression with few consequences. However, there is another aspect of children's books that has not been captured in the coding of this study. Two common plots in children's books should be considered when determining whether aggression is portrayed appropriately in children's picture books. These plot lines are as follows: 1) the main character behaves aggressively early in the story and then tries something nice at the end of the story and realizes he or she is happier when being kinder toward others, and 2) the main character is bullied but always tries to react kindly until he or she eventually becomes friends with the aggressor. These storylines present an overarching positive message about the use of aggression that cannot be captured in a content analysis focused specifically on aggressive acts.

Another limitation is that the scope of this thesis did not include measuring aggressive thoughts or behavior from reading aggressive content in children's picture books. The GAM was used to interpret the results to theorize possible effects on children, but it is left to another study to determine the impact on children of reading aggressive content in picture books.

Additionally, the units of analysis that were coded for in this study were limited. Although a well-rounded sample of data was collected, the analysis did not break down the nonhuman characters to identify which acted like humans and which were truly nonhuman in appearance and behavior. Nor did the dataset for this study indicate the level of intensity, pain cues, or humor that could be associated with aggressive acts.

### **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

This is the first study to determine the amount and types of aggressive content in children's picture books. This research opens an avenue for academics to study the effects of aggressive content in picture books further.

In the study, far less aggression was found in children's picture books compared to adolescent literature. This makes children's picture books a great source of entertainment, especially when children are the ones reading the book, because they will be exposed to less aggression than in other forms of media. Parents, teachers, and other adults can use picture books as teaching tools to talk about the effects of aggression.

There were some picture books that contained many accounts of aggression and other books that contained no acts of aggression. It would be helpful to parents, teachers, and other adults to have a content guide for children's picture books to indicate the level aggression included. Currently, there is no such resource available. This type of guidance would assist parents, teachers, and other adults who are looking for picture books that include aggression in order to develop an open dialogue with children regarding appropriate behavior and the use of aggression in society.

As a final point, it is discouraging to see a spike in the amount of aggressive content as the target age for books increases from children to adolescents. As studies have shown for adolescent literature, there is a positive correlation between reading aggressive content and behaving aggressively afterward (Coyne, Ridge, McKay, Callister, & Stockdale, 2012; Stockdale et al., 2013). To date, no research has examined the behavioral impact on children if they read aggressive content. If the results are the same as for adolescents, social environments can be relatively unforgiving. The more aggressive a child becomes, the more his or her social

environment will change. The child will encounter more negative interactions with others, and the types of situations/opportunities available to the child could change for the worse (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). It is important to understand all of the factors that cause a child to behave aggressively, regardless of the origin of the influence.

This study instigates a need to understand how aggression in children's picture books affects a child's behavior in reality. Knowing what aggressive content is available in children's picture books is the first step to identifying how children are affected by the examples in the books they read.

Children need to learn how to react to aggressive situations early in life, as their attempts to change will become increasingly less successful as they grow older (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). The content of the literature that they are exposed to when they are young will shape the way they interact with the world for years to come.

### **Ideas for Further Research**

The results of this study open a new area for research. Now that the general aggressive content in children's picture books has been presented, there is an opportunity for future studies to provide additional detail about this content. There is still a need to understand whether this study's results hold true for children's picture books in general, as opposed to just the bestselling books examined here. To truly gain an understanding of the context of aggression in children's picture books, a content analysis on kind deeds or prosocial behavior could be gathered to provide a high level of knowledge regarding the messages that children's picture books are sending about aggression.

Future work could test whether nonhuman characters with human behaviors have different aggressive tendencies than human characters do. Along with this, there is an

opportunity to study whether children really do relate to characters that are more similar to themselves.

Research has been performed regarding the impact of reading aggressive content on adolescents, but there are no such studies determining the effect on children of reading aggressive content. Finally, there would be a great benefit to society if future research were to consider whether a content guide would benefit parents, teachers, and other adults buying children's picture books.



## Appendix

### Coding Guidelines

#### GENERAL

Type of Depiction:

Textual: When the instance to be coded is described in words

Visual: When the instance to be coded is described through visual images

Both: When the instance to be coded is depicted in a combination of words and visuals

Page: Write down the page number in which the instance is found

THE GUIDELINES BELOW ARE THE SAME FOR INITIATOR AND VICTIM

Initiator: Write down the name of the character that began the act of aggression. If the initiator for an act of aggression was not an individual but a group, write down a description of the group.

Victim: Write down the name of the person who received the aggression. If the action did not specifically target anyone write down: NOT SPECIFIC.

*\*Sometimes it is really hard to identify the character's name. In these cases give them a descriptor and then use it throughout the book (including the character sheet). For example "young mother", etc.*

Type:

Human/Humanoids: Person, human being. (We are coding vampires and wizards/ witches as humans)

Non-Human: Characters that do not have a human appearance. This include characters that have characteristics and behavior of human beings but are not. They could be animal characters, robots, elves, etc.

Gender:

Male

Female

Both: Used when the initiator or receiver is compose of a group of people with men and women.

Unknown

Age Group: Use your best judgment, a 100-year-old elf that goes to high school should probably be coded as a teenager.

Child: A person that is elementary school age, usually below the age of 12 years.

Teenager: A person in junior high/ high school age, usually between 13-17 years old.

Adult: A person that has attained the age of maturity, usually between 18- 54 years old.

Elderly: A person that is 55 years old or more, often portrayed as grandparent or retired.

Unknown: The text/visual description doesn't describe or mention age related information

*\*Sometimes it is difficult to identify age groups. Lots of times the character's age it is not mentioned at all. In these cases try to make an educated guess if it is possible (grandparents and retired people are generally coded as elderly, for example).*

Relationship: Relationship between the initiator and victim, such as:

- Husband/Wife
- Parent/Child
- Siblings
- Other family relationship
- Date
- Friends
- Classmates
- Teacher/Student
- Co-Worker
- Enemy
- Neighbor
- Prisoner/Guard
- Acquaintance
- Strangers
- Other

*\*When in doubt, write down more information than is needed and we can check it later!!*

Adult Involvement: Whether or not an adult/authoritative figure was involved to help the situation.

- Yes – Adult was involved to help to resolve issue
- No – No adult involvement

Role:

Major Character: Central to the story, presence directly affects the plot or subplots of the book.

Minor Character: Central to given subplots, or parts of the story.

Sociometrics:

- Popular: Liked by most
- Rejected: Disliked by most
- Neglected: Not noticed by most
- Controversial: Liked by many, disliked by many
- Average: A combo of the above

Attractiveness:

Attractive: When attractiveness is mentioned or the character is clearly portrayed as attractive

Non-attractive: When ugliness is mentioned or the character is clearly portrayed as unattractive

Average: This the default value

Socio-Economic Status:

Lower Class: Skilled and semi-skilled blue-collar workers. Slum-type neighborhoods or old, run-down housing tract. Limited Possessions. Older/dilapidated car, simple/worn-out clothing.

Middle Class: Sales people, clerical workers, supervisors, teachers, contractors, owners of small stores. Own homes in the suburbs in well-kept urban neighborhoods. Modest clothing without too many brand names, basic needs met. Comfortable, but not luxurious home furnishing/possessions.

Upper Class: Professionals, independent businesspeople, or executives. Possessions are above average. Memberships in country-clubs, luxury cars, clothing always brand name, extra items not common to middle class. Grand technology gizmos not common to general population. Live in wealthy or high-society neighborhoods.

## AGGRESSION

*Aggression is defined as actions taken with the intent to hurt or harm another individual who does not wish to be harmed*

Physical Aggression:

Direct Physical Aggression: (overtly causing physical damage or injury)

Direct Attacks:

*i.e.:*    *Pushing*  
           *Hitting/Punching*  
           *Kicking*  
           *Slapping*  
           *Pinching*  
           *Biting*  
           *Scratching*  
           *Spitting*  
           *Pulling Hair*  
           *Other forms of direct attacks*

Attacks with weapon/object:

*i.e.:*    *Attacks with a weapon (stabbing, shooting, etc)*  
           *Throwing objects at others with intent to harm*

Fighting (when any of the above are used multiple times in the same paragraph. The first two acts would be coded, and then subsequent acts are coded as "fighting")

Other: any other type of direct physical harm not listed above

Indirect Physical Aggression: (covertly causing physical damage or taking property)

Improper Use of Others' Property: Destroying, damaging, stealing, failing to return or abusing others' property as a form of revenge, or intimidation.

*i.e.:*    *Toilet papering someone's house*  
           *Keying Someone's car*  
           *Letting the air out of or slashing car tires*  
           *Throwing a rock through somebody's window*  
           *Hacking into a computer and causing damage*  
           *Punch the wall*  
           *Take it out on inanimate objects*  
           *Mess with someone's food*  
           *Delete phone messages before they hear them*

*Stealing their property*

*Failing to return borrowed property*

Getting somebody else to harm: Having another person physically harm or injure somebody ("Hit man" or "Hit woman")

Physical Body Harm: Covertly physically hurting someone.

*i.e.: Poisoning*

*Using a potion to harm*

*Putting a bomb in someone's house.*

Other: Any other type of indirect physical aggression not covered above.

Relational Aggression:

*The "key" for Relational Aggression is to remember that it must aim to harm social status or relationship*

Direct Relational Aggression: (overt and/or confrontational behaviors which directly harm others through damage (or threat of damage) to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion; usually verbal in nature, may be reactive or proactive)

Threaten to destroy friendship/relationship: Threatening or overtly acting to dissolve a friendship or romantic relationship (without due cause)

*i.e.: "I'm not going to be your friend anymore unless..."*

*"I don't want to be your friend anymore..."*

*"I don't love you anymore..."*

Direct Social exclusion: Threatening or overtly orchestrating exclusion from the peer group (cause is irrelevant)

*i.e.: "You can't be in our group unless..."*

*"We don't want to play with you. Go away..."*

*"We are going to be in a group and you're not going to be in it..."*

*"You can't come to my party unless..."*

*Whispering in a friend's ear in front of another person with the intent to make the target uncomfortable*

Blackmail: Threatening to divulge another's personal secrets (engage in gossip) in order to gain control over a peer

Make friends under false pretenses: Making friendships under pretense and dissolving them in a public manner that demoralizes the victim (friendship as a cruel mind game)

Emotional Abuse: Put down partner in relationship to dominate or have control over another person. Very often Emotional Abuse and Insulting overlap.

Remember, emotional abuse is about getting control over another person, so it is a judgment call: is the intent to gain control over a person or just to hurt them?

Other: Any other type of Direct Relational Aggression not covered above.

*i.e.: Laying guilt trips on another in order to manipulate*

*Erratic emotional behavior*

*Acting hot and cold in order to manipulate another*

*Using somebody (a relationship) for personal gain and then ending the relationship*

*“Physically disrespect her then ditch her”*

*“Play the man by teasing him”*

*“Lead them on and then drop them”*

*“Set up a guy to be slammed emotionally”*

*Setting somebody up for a fall/embarrassment in front of others*

*“Invite somebody to a party and tell them to dress up as a character when it is a formal dinner”*

*Calling an unpopular girl and acting to be her friend and then humiliating her with others listening (3-way calls)*

Indirect Relational Aggression: (consistent with indirect aggression, covert and/or non-confrontational behaviors which harm others through damage to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion; may be verbal or nonverbal, reactive or proactive)

Covert Social Exclusion: Covertly orchestrating exclusion or isolation from the peer group or peer group activities

*“Let’s not invite her to our birthday parties, okay?”*

*“Don’t be friends with him!”*

Trying to get others to dislike a peer, using any of the following methods:

Gossiping: Revealing personal or sensational facts about others

i.e.: *Sharing a friend’s secrets with others*

Spreading Rumors (trash talk) Talk or opinion widely disseminated with no discernible source, without known authority regarding the truth of the matter (lies)

i.e.: *May be passed verbally or nonverbally (passed or “planted” notes, spray painting, snide comments written on the walls of the bathroom stall)*

Other ways of trying to get others to dislike:

i.e.: *Covertly calling another names (verbal or nonverbal)*

*Covertly making fun of another (verbal or nonverbal)*

*Talking behind another’s back (Backbiting)*

*“Yap about it to her friends FOREVER.”*

Covertly destroying relationships

i.e.: *Stealing a romantic partner*

*“Taking her man”*

*Flirting with another’s romantic partner or love interest*

*“Make them jealous”*

*Renewing relationships with former romantic partners (in the context of a subsequent, ongoing relationship)*

*Cheating, being unfaithful*

*“Making him think he’s the one and then dating his roommate”*

*Ruin the person’s chances of having romantic success with others*

Other: Any other type of Indirect Relational Aggression not covered above.

i.e.: *Covertly shifting alliances (Treasonous conduct; Backstabbing)*

*Being friendly with a friend’s enemies (loyalty issues)*

*Sharing a friend's negative thoughts about a particular person with that person*

Nonverbal Relational Aggression: (nonverbal and gestural behaviors intended to exclude, alienate or embarrass others)

Silent Treatment: (ignoring, avoiding): Threatening or overtly acting to withhold attention or affection (without due cause)

i.e.: *Walking away when the target seeks to engage the actor in play*

*Deliberately not listening to another*

*"Brush them off"*

*Withholding or refusing physical affection*

Rolling eyes: Rolling one's eyes in derision

Dirty Looks: Harsh or dirty looks

Other:

*Producing facial expressions of disgust or dislike*

*Staring in a disapproving or intense manner*

*Rolling one's head*

*Glancing sideways or downward*

*Smiling insincerely*

*Turning up one's nose*

*Certain types of backchannel responses (e.g., exasperated sighs)*

*Chin thrusts*

*Shaking one's fist at somebody*

*Negative hand gestures*

*"Give them the bird"*

*Showing obvious disinterest or boredom in the presence of another*

*Saying nothing is wrong but acting as if something is wrong*

*Being brusque or short with them*

*Treat them like they are stupid / act in a condescending manner*

Verbal Aggression:

*This is a verbal confrontation that attempts to psychologically hurt, but that is not aimed to harm relationship. It is always direct (The receiver knows who the initiator is/was). May be solely between the aggressor and victim or in front of others (public humiliation).*

Ridicule: intended to mock or humiliate another person, such as

Insult: Insulting or deliberately embarrassing in front of others.

i.e.: *Overtly calling others names*

*"Call them insensitive or unfeeling"*

*Swearing at somebody*

*Attack their masculinity or femininity/Question Sexuality/Sexist remarks*

*Attack their ego*

*Put down another's physical qualities or appearance*

*"Hurting his pride"*

Ignore/Denigrate Others' Ideas: Openly denigrating the ideas of others.

Interrupting or cutting someone off in conversation

i.e.: *"That's a really stupid idea."*

*Ignoring another's comments*

*"Telling a person that he is not always right"*

Sarcasm: A cutting ironic remark intended to hurt."

i.e.: *"Hide hurtful remarks with sarcasm and jokes*

*"Using a snide tone of voice".*

Yelling/Arguing: Speech that express conflict and/or is shouted. To be considered arguing it must have an interaction between two or more people (debate or dispute, not an insult)

i.e.: *"Telling them off"*

*"Telling them what's going on"*

*"Blow up at them*

*Get in their face*

Other: Any other type of Verbal Aggression not covered above

Violent Ideation: term for thinking, plotting, planning discussing about aggressive behaviors such as suicide, murder, hurting someone, etc.

*It may be as detailed as a formulated plan, without the act itself. For example: a traitor that trained an army against the king, planned a battle.*

Physical Ideation: Threatening, planning, and wishing for any form of physical aggression listed above.

Threats

Relational Ideation: Threatening, planning, and wishing for any form of relational aggression listed above.

Threats

## CONTEXT

Justified: The act should be coded as "justified" should the perpetrator be seen to have a valid reason for the aggression, and if it would be agreed to be necessary to achieve a moral or greater good (e.g.: super heroes chasing a murder). Also acts that are a reaction to other's aggression (i.e. self-defense) should also be coded as justified, provided the act is proportionate and not excessive (e.g., If someone steals my lunch and as retaliation I shoot him/her back in the head it wouldn't be considered justified form of aggression).

Unjustified: Aggression is "unjustified" if it is acted to simply achieve a selfish goal

Consequences: The effects and outcomes of the aggressive act (note: list specific consequence if there is one) that can be categorized into:

Rewarded: When the aggressive action results in short- or long-term positive consequences to the initiator.

1. *Tangible (something physical, e.g., money)*

2. *Reduction of annoyance (e.g., someone stops complaining when shouted at)*
3. *Peer approval (e.g., laughs from others at an insult)*
4. *Increase in self-esteem (e.g., feeling better at someone else's loss)*
5. *Increase in control or power (e.g., the aggressor gets more control over the victim)*
6. *Victim suffers (e.g., physical pain from a punch)*
7. *Apology (e.g., the victim apologizes for something).*

Punished: When the aggressive act results in short- or long-term negative consequences to the initiator or to the victim. (See above for examples, but opposite)

No Consequences: When the initiator does not experience either a positive or a negative consequence as a result of his/her aggressive action.



**Sample Coding Sheets**

**Coder:**

**Book Name:**

**Genre:**

**List of Characters:**

|    | <b>Name</b> | <b>Role</b> | <b>Sociometrics</b> | <b>Attractiveness</b> | <b>SES</b> |
|----|-------------|-------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| 1  |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 2  |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 3  |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 4  |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 5  |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 6  |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 7  |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 8  |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 9  |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 10 |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 11 |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 12 |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 13 |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 14 |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 15 |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 16 |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 17 |             |             |                     |                       |            |
| 18 |             |             |                     |                       |            |

**LABELS:**

**Role**

- 1. Major
- 2. Minor

**Sociometrics**

- 1. Popular
- 2. Rejected
- 3. Neglected
- 4. Controversial
- 5. Average

**Attractiveness**

- 1. Attractive
- 2. Average
- 3. Not Attractive

**SES**

- 1. Lower Class
- 2. Middle Class
- 3. Upper Class



**LABELS**

**Depiction**

- 1. Textual
- 2. Visual
- 3. Both

**Type of Aggression**

- 1. Physical Aggression
- 2. Relational Aggression
- 3. Verbal Aggression
- 4. Violent Ideation

**Behavior**

- 1. Direct Physical Aggression
- 2. Indirect Physical Aggression
- 3. Direct Relational Aggression
- 4. Indirect Relational Aggression
- 5. Nonverbal
- 6. Ridicule
- 7. Sarcasm
- 8. Yelling Arguing
- 9. Other

**Sub-behavior**

- 1. Direct Attacks
- 2. Attacks with a weapon
- 3. Fighting
- 4. Other Direct Physical Aggression
- 5. Improper Use of Other's Property
- 6. Getting Somebody Else to Harm
- 7. Threatening Physical Aggression
- 8. Other Indirect Physical Aggression
- 9. Threatening to Destroy Relationship
- 10. Direct Social Exclusion
- 11. Blackmail
- 12. Make friends Under False Pretenses
- 13. Emotional Abuse
- 14. Other Direct Relational Aggression
- 15. Covert Social Exclusion
- 16. Gossiping
- 17. Spreading Rumors
- 18. Other Ways of Getting Others to Dislike
- 19. Covertly Destroying Relationship
- 20. Other Indirect Relational Aggression
- 21. Silent Treatment
- 22. Rolling Eyes
- 23. Dirty Looks
- 24. Other Nonverbal Aggression
- 25. Insult
- 26. Ignore/ Denigrate Others Ideas
- 27. Other Verbal Aggression
- 28. Other Violent Ideation

**Initiator/ Victim's Type**

- 1. Human
- 2. Non-human
- 3. Both

**Initiator/ Victim's Gender**

- 1. Male
- 2. Female
- 3. Unknown
- 4. Both

**Initiator/ Victim's Age**

- 1. Child
- 2. Teen
- 3. Adult
- 4. Elderly
- 5. Unknown

**Context**

- 1. Justified
- 2. Not Justified

**Consequences**

- 1. Punished
- 2. Rewarded
- 3. No Consequences

**Relationship to Victim**

- 1. Friend
- 2. Stranger
- 3. Sibling
- 4. Parent/Child
- 5. Acquaintance
- 6. Spouse
- 7. Other Family Relationship
- 8. Date
- 9. Classmate
- 10. Teacher Student
- 11. Co-worker
- 12. Enemy
- 13. Neighbor
- 14. Prison Guard
- 15. Other

**Adult Involvement**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

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