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**Is it aggression? Perceptions of and motivations for passive and psychological aggression**

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This chapter reviews programs of research on correlates and perceptions of “everyday” forms of aggression that often are not considered in traditional aggression research. Studies of correlates and perceptions of passive aggression reveal that such behavior is often motivated by intentions other than the intention to cause harm (e.g., inducing guilt) – although the effect is to harm the target. Similarly, comparison of perceptions of psychological and physical aggression reveal that psychological aggression, which is defined in terms of harming an individual’s self regard, may be perceived as less damaging than physical aggression although the potential for long-term harm is greater. Psychological aggression appears to be motivated as much by the desire to control as by the intention to harm the target. The research summary will conclude by raising questions about our standard definitions of aggressive behavior.

*Introduction*

Aggression is typically defined as behavior intended to harm another person (Baron & Richardson, 1994). Although there has been some argument about whether intention should be part of the aggression (i.e., aggression is behavior that harms, regardless of intention of the aggressor), most current definitions of aggression involve the concept of intention to harm. This definition of aggression requires that we consider

the observer's inference about an actor's goals (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). Thus, this chapter will review research that has examined observer's perceptions of motivations for and effects of acts of everyday aggression.

Direct, physical aggression is clearly intended to harm a target. A person who delivers a blow or a direct insult to another person is clearly intended to cause harm to that individual. And, most theoretical treatments and empirical findings regarding human aggressive behavior have focused on such obvious aggressive acts. However, we humans are likely to cause harm to one another and to experience harm from others that is more elusive, more open to alternative interpretations. For example, I might comment on an acquaintance's unusual form of attire out of curiosity or in order to make him self-conscious; my curiosity is not harmful, but my attempt to make him self-conscious may be harmful. Similarly, forgetting to pick up the wine on the way home when we are having a dinner party might be an honest mistake or it might be an attempt to make my partner look bad to company (that I didn't want to have anyway). These less direct forms of aggression do indeed cause harm, but they are easier to deny and more difficult for the perceiver to interpret. Similarly, these forms of harm may have goals other than simple harm, goals that are nevertheless harmful to the target. Psychological aggression may harm the target by humiliating or demeaning; passive aggression may harm a target by obstructing a goal; indirect aggression may harm a target by disrupting relationships.

We argue that the aggression individuals are most likely to experience in their day-to-day lives is not direct or physical aggression. People are more likely to be victims of snide remarks or hostile attitudes than they are likely to be victims of criminal

violence. Individuals are likely to more frequently gossip about someone than slap or kick them. The more subtle, less direct kinds of aggression are likely to affect an individual's relationship experience and success as well as one's own sense of self. Thus, we have focused on these forms of aggression in an attempt to capture the experience of everyday people experiencing everyday aggression. Of course, there are a variety of forms of everyday aggression that we are not addressing in this chapter – experiences such as road rage, racial or sexual discrimination – but in many cases those specific forms of everyday aggression might be considered in the context of either passive or psychological aggression.

#### Passive Aggression

Passive aggression is behavior that is intended to harm another living being by *not* doing something, by obstructing others' goals. This is in contrast to other forms of aggression such as direct verbal or physical aggression or indirect aggression. Direct aggression involves direct confrontation with the target (e.g., physical blows, verbal insults), whereas indirect aggression is nonconfrontive, delivering harm through another person or object (e.g., spreading rumors, damaging target's property). Indirect aggression (sometimes called relational or social aggression), has received considerable attention from researchers in recent years (Archer; Crick). Passive aggression, however, has received little attention.

Passive aggression has been defined, conceptually and operationally, in a wide variety of ways in the research literature. In a study of driver characteristics associated with aggressive driving and road rage, passive aggression was defined as "impeding traffic" (Dukes, Clayton, Jenkins, Miller, & Rodgers, 2001, p. 323). Kingery's (1998)

Adolescent Violence Survey (Kingery, 1998) includes a passive aggression subscale consisting of items such as “Talked about someone’s faults to other people so others wouldn’t like them,” “Prevented someone from going where he/she wanted to go by getting in the way.” In a study in which participants judged a variety of aggression actions, passive aggression was defined as “withholding available and needed resources” (Berkowitz, Mueller, Schnell, & Padberg, 1986).

Although direct reference to passive aggression is relatively rare in the research literature, several lines of research are closely related. For example, Williams and colleagues’ work on social ostracism has some direct implications for our understanding of passive aggression (Sommer, Williams, Ciarocco, & Baumeister, 2001; Williams, 1997; Williams, Shore, & Grahe, 1998). They define social ostracism as “the silent treatment.” The primary motive reported in both source and target narratives was punitive, which Sommer, et al. (2001) defined as their being motivated “to punish or correct the target; to hurt or seek revenge” (p. 229). The primary emotion reported in both target and source narratives was anger. Thus, such social ostracism might be reasonably considered a form of passive aggression.

Passive aggression is likely to be a particularly attractive strategy in some contexts. Like other nondirect forms of aggression, passive aggression may be useful when an individual wants to avoid detection/retaliation. It provides the aggressor an easy opportunity for denial – “I didn’t *do* anything” as if by not doing he or she is blameless, denying the harm that may come from not doing what one is expected or ... to do. If an aggressor wishes to deny harm-doing intention, passive aggression should be especially appropriate.

We have conducted two lines of research aimed at providing a clearer understanding of the nature of passive aggression. The first was aimed at determining whether passive aggression can be considered a unique form of aggression, differentiated from other forms of nondirect aggression. The second was aimed at determining whether the different forms of aggression are perceived differently by aggressors and targets. The second line of research is most directly relevant to the topic of this chapter because it directly considers the question of the extent to which each form of aggression is perceived to be harmful and/or might be perceived as meeting other goals. However, an understanding of the distinctiveness (or lack thereof) of passive aggression is an important starting point. Thus, we will summarize the results of the first line of research before focusing on the research that examines motivations and effects of the different forms of aggression.

#### *Distinctiveness of passive aggression*

Three studies examined whether passive aggression could be distinguished from direct and indirect aggression. The Richardson Conflict Response Questionnaire (RCRQ), which has been used in a variety of investigations of direct and indirect aggression (Richardson & Green, 2003), was modified to include items measuring passive aggression (see Appendix A for the list of these items). The first study, on conflict in the workplace, collected participants' reports of how they responded when angry with a supervisor, a coworker, or a subordinate. The second study examined responses "in general." The third study inquired about responses when angry with romantic partners, siblings, coworkers, or friends. Our participants in these studies were

university students from three small colleges in the southeast; their ages ranged from 17 to 66; and all samples included approximately 25% minority respondents.

The RCRQ has been used in many previous studies and has demonstrated acceptable internal consistencies (Richardson & Green, 2003). Cronbach alphas in the present studies ranged from .76 to .86 for direct aggression, .82 to .88 for indirect aggression, and .85 to .86 for passive aggression. Correlations of direct aggression scores with indirect ( $r = .38 - .54$ ) and passive ( $r = .33 - .62$ ) aggression suggest independence of those measures; however passive and indirect aggression were notably more highly correlated with one another ( $r = .60 - .73$ ).

Passive aggression was the preferred anger response in all three studies. In general, participants reported more use of passive aggression than either direct or indirect aggression. In the workplace, they also reported more indirect than direct aggression, but in the other two contexts they reported equal amounts of direct and indirect aggression.

*Table 1.* Mean self-reports of aggression

	<i>direct</i>	<i>indirect</i>	<i>passive</i>	<i>partial eta squared</i>	<i>F</i>
Workplace	1.24 <sub>a</sub> (.31)	1.61 <sub>b</sub> (.54)	1.83 <sub>c</sub> (.61)	.60	(2, 184) = 79.30, $p < .001$
In general	1.78 <sub>a</sub> (.58)	1.69 <sub>a</sub> (.57)	2.21 <sub>b</sub> (.61)	.47	(2, 606) = 124.71, $p < .001$
Relationships	1.63 <sub>a</sub> (.53)	1.62 <sub>a</sub> (.49)	2.15 <sub>b</sub> (.64)	.34	(2, 764) = 196.98, $p < .001$

scale: 1 (never) to 4 (always)

If passive aggression is a distinct form of aggression it also should be differentially correlated with other measures. The second two studies in this series examined the relationship of the three forms of aggression with other measures of anger and aggression. We used Spielberger's (1999) State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory – 2 (STAXI-2), and the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ). The STAXI measures trait (i.e., dispositional) anger as well as anger expression subscales as anger-in, anger-out and anger-control. Anger-in involves the frequency with which an individual experiences anger but holds it in (i.e., "I tend to harbor grudges that I don't tell anyone about.") Anger-out measures the frequency with which a person experiences anger and openly expresses it (i.e., "I lose my temper."). Anger-control measures the frequency with which a participant experiences anger but controls it (i.e., "I control my temper."). As revealed in Table 2, the primary distinction revealed among the forms of aggression is that passive and indirect aggression are more highly correlated with Anger In than is direct aggression. This suggests that those forms of nondirect aggression may be preferred by individuals who experience, but may have difficulty directly expressing, their anger. Similarly, individuals who reported relatively frequent direct aggression also reported expressing their anger more (i.e., Anger Out), being generally more angry (i.e., trait anger), and having more difficulty controlling their anger.

*Table 2.* Correlations of RCRQ type of aggression with anger measures in two studies

	<i>Passive</i>	<i>Indirect</i>	<i>Direct</i>
Anger Control	-.11/-.08	-.12/-.15	-.23/-.37
Anger In	.36/.34	.23/.23	.06/.12

Anger Out	.38/.25	.40/.30	.56/.51
Trait Anger	.37/.30	.35/.31	.53/.42

Correlations with subscales of the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire reveal similar findings. RCRQ direct aggression was more highly associated with anger and direct verbal and physical aggression subscales of the AQ than were passive or indirect aggression.

*Table 3.* Correlations of RCRQ types of aggression with Buss-Perry subscales in two studies.

<u>Buss-Perry</u>	Passive	Indirect	Direct
Hostility	.38/.36	.31/.34	.27/.34
Anger	.34/.24	.25/.22	.49/.47
Verbal Aggression	.25/.21	.30/.20	.46/.37
Physical Aggression	.23/.23	.22/.19	.65/.53

Richardson and Green (2006) found that relationship was a better predictor of aggressive strategy than was gender. Direct aggression was preferred over indirect aggression when angry with romantic partners or siblings; indirect aggression was preferred in interactions with friends. Based on the everyday experiences of members of

the research team (who could give multiple examples of passive aggressive behavior from their romantic partners), we expected that passive aggression would be the preferred strategy in romantic relationships. We were correct in this prediction.

However, we found that passive aggression was the preferred response when angry with *anyone*. As revealed in Table 4, participants reported using passive aggression more than either direct or indirect aggression in all types of relationships.

*Table 4.* Mean aggressive responses in different relationships

	<i>passive</i>	<i>direct</i>	<i>indirect</i>	<i>partial eta squared</i>	<i>F</i>
partner	2.03 <sub>a</sub> (.59)	1.60 <sub>b</sub> (.45)	1.46 <sub>c</sub> (.41)	.41	(2, 192) = 65.46
sibling	2.16 <sub>a</sub> (.56)	1.98 <sub>b</sub> (.56)	1.72 <sub>c</sub> (.55)	.22	(2, 182) = 25.05
coworker	2.16 <sub>a</sub> (.73)	1.36 <sub>b</sub> (.41)	1.67 <sub>c</sub> (.49)	.51	(2, 194) = 102.74
friend	2.25 <sub>a</sub> (.65)	1.58 <sub>b</sub> (.52)	1.63 <sub>b</sub> (.48)	.49	(2, 204) = 99.43

Note: all  $p$ 's < .001; scale: 1 (never) to 4 (always)

Respondents reported more direct aggression when angry with siblings and less when angry with co-workers than when angry with romantic partners or friends,  $F(3, 386) = 26.90$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .$  They also reported more indirect aggression toward siblings and coworkers than toward romantic partners,  $F(3, 386) = 5.01$ ,  $p < .$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ . However, passive aggression did not vary by relationship,  $F(3, 386) = 2.06$ ,  $ns$ ,  $\eta^2 =$

.02; as mentioned previously, it was the generally most frequent form of aggression in all relationships.

### *Motivators and Effects of Different Forms of Aggression*

Thus, it may be the case that passive and indirect aggression are not clearly distinguishable, that they both represent a general category of nondirect aggression. On the other hand, indirect and passive aggression may be perceived differently. That is, aggressors might be motivated by different factors when they are using passive aggression than when they are using indirect aggression. For example, passive aggression, which involves harming another person by *not* doing something, may be intended to annoy the target as much as to harm and may not be perceived as particularly aggressive.

Thus we conducted two studies to determine whether people might perceive the aggressor's motives and the effects on the victim to vary as a function of type of aggression. We asked participants to evaluate a series of behaviors from either the perspective of the aggressor or from the perspective of the target. Direct aggressive behaviors included "yell or scream," "threaten to hit or throw something," and "push, grab, shove." Indirect aggressive behaviors included "make negative comments about appearance," "call names behind back," and "gather other people to my side." Passive aggressive behaviors included "give silent treatment," "avoid interacting," and "fail to return calls."

Participants responding from the perspective of the aggressor were asked why they would engage in the behavior and to imagine how the target would feel. For example, " why would you yell or scream at someone?" and "Imagine that you yell or

scream at someone. How do you think that person would feel?" Participants responding from the perspective of the target were asked why someone would behave that way, and how they would feel in response. For example, "Why would someone yell or scream at you?" and "How would you feel if someone yelled or screamed at you?" The aggressor motivations and target effects were: to harm/felt harmed; to gain power/felt powerless; to control/felt controlled; to cause distress/felt distressed; to humiliate/felt humiliated; to cause guilt/felt guilty.

The first study in this series asked for responses "in general"; the second study asked for responses in specific relationships. In both studies, responses for the specific forms of each type of aggression were highly consistent; so, we created summary scores for direct, indirect, and passive aggression.

In Study 1, because the different motivations and effects were highly correlated with one another, we also created indices of general motivation (i.e., average response to all motivations) and general effects (i.e., average response across all effects). Thus, we were actually assessing the extent to which aggressors would be *generally* motivated to perform the aggressive behaviors and the extent to which targets would be *generally* affected by the aggressive behaviors.

Participants perceived that passive aggression ( $M = 3.43$ ) would be generally less motivated than either direct ( $M = 4.07$ ) or indirect ( $M = 4.08$ ) aggression,  $F(2, 99) = 12.60, p < .001$ . Participants also perceived that passive aggression ( $M = 3.16$ ) would have less effect on the target than either direct ( $M = 3.91$ ) or indirect ( $M = 3.76$ ) aggression,  $F(2, 99) = 26.92, p < .001$ . In view of the fact that all of the motivations and effects involve a negative experience for the victim, we can infer that passive

aggression is perceived to be intended to produce a less negative experience for the victim, and it is perceived to be less motivated by the desire for negative outcomes for the victim.

The second study in this series involved the same basic procedures as the first, but participants were asked to respond with reference to either a same-sex friend or a romantic partner. That is, from the perspective of the aggressor, participants were asked the extent to which they were motivated by the various factors (e.g., ...) if they were to direct the passive, indirect, and direct aggressive acts toward a same-sex friend or a romantic partner and the extent to which their target would experience the different effects. When responding from the perspective of the target, participants were asked the extent to which they would experience the various effects and the extent to which they would perceive the aggressor to be motivated by the various factors.

*Table 5.* Motivations for passive, direct, and indirect aggression

	direct	indirect	passive
harm	2.89 <sub>b</sub>	2.81 <sub>b</sub>	2.16 <sub>a</sub>
power	3.00 <sub>b</sub>	2.86 <sub>ab</sub>	2.64 <sub>a</sub>
control	3.01 <sub>b</sub>	2.45 <sub>a</sub>	2.63 <sub>ab</sub>
humiliate	2.85 <sub>b</sub>	3.32 <sub>c</sub>	2.3 <sub>a</sub>
distress	3.31 <sub>b</sub>	3.05 <sub>a</sub>	3.28 <sub>b</sub>
guilt	3.03 <sub>b</sub>	2.72 <sub>a</sub>	3.97 <sub>c</sub>

scale: 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely)

From the perspective of aggressor motivation, participants perceived harm to be associated more with direct and indirect aggression than with passive aggression.

Control is associated with direct aggression; humiliation, and *not* distress with indirect aggression; guilt with passive aggression. Perceived as being less motivated by the intention to cause harm to or to humiliate the victim, everyday passive aggressive behavior is perceived as being motivated more by the desire to induce guilt in the victim. Interestingly, passive aggression is seen as being intended to cause as much distress as direct aggression. Indirect aggression is perceived as being motivated to cause harm to and to humiliate the target.

*Table 6.* Effects of passive, direct, and indirect aggression

	direct	indirect	passive
harm	4.38 <sub>b</sub>	4.22 <sub>b</sub>	2.76 <sub>a</sub>
power	3.37 <sub>b</sub>	2.91 <sub>a</sub>	2.88 <sub>a</sub>
control	3.09 <sub>b</sub>	2.95 <sub>b</sub>	2.67 <sub>a</sub>
distress	4.44 <sub>b</sub>	4.6 <sub>b</sub>	4.18 <sub>a</sub>
humiliate	3.67 <sub>b</sub>	4.75 <sub>c</sub>	2.57 <sub>a</sub>
guilt	2.63 <sub>a</sub>	2.51 <sub>a</sub>	3.4 <sub>b</sub>

scale: 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely)

From the perspective of the target of various aggressive acts, again harm is associated primarily with direct and indirect aggression and much less with passive aggression. Power is associated with direct aggression; humiliation and distress with indirect aggression; guilt and not control with passive aggression. In sum, everyday indirect aggression is seen as causing harm, humiliation, and distress – clearly consistent with our definition of aggression; everyday passive aggression is seen as causing distress and guilt but as causing relatively little harm.

*Conclusion: Is passive aggression aggressive?*

Our series of studies on passive aggression reveal that it is an “attractive” form of aggression. That is, it is the form of aggression that respondents indicated they performed most frequently in general and across a variety of relationships. The correlations of reports of passive aggressive responding with measures of anger suggest that nondirect forms of aggression, including indirect and passive aggression, are endorsed especially by individuals who report difficulty with expressing their anger. The nondirect nature of these forms of aggression allow the individual to respond when angry, but to avoid direct confrontation with the victim.

According to current definitions of aggression, a behavior must be intended to cause harm in order to be considered as aggressive. Our research suggests that the nature of that harm may vary with type of aggression. For example, although passive aggression was perceived to be less harmful than indirect or direct aggression, it was perceived as a mechanism for inducing guilt and for causing distress to the victim. An interesting corollary of this aspect of passive aggression is that the ultimate effect of the behavior of the victim may depend to a considerable extent on the victim’s chosen response to the aggression. For example, if I intend to induce guilt by passively aggressively noting how much hard work I have done for you, but you refuse to experience guilt, then my passive aggressive strategy has been unsuccessful. When one administers direct verbal or physical blows to a victim – or even indirect verbal or physical blows – it is difficult for the victim to avoid or deny the harm; the victim has little control over the administration of the harm. However, in the case of passive aggression, the victim can, in effect, choose whether to acknowledge or experience the harm. This

might be an interesting question for future research that would focus on differential victim response to passive aggressive attempts.

In sum, these examinations of passive aggression suggest that such behavior is deserving of the attention of aggression researchers. It is a behavior that can cause harm; it is a preferred response to anger; the nature and degree of harm is subject to interpretation by the victim.

### Psychological Aggression

Psychological aggression is a form of everyday aggression that has already received some attention from researchers, especially in the context of research on intimate partner violence. Although no consistent definition of psychological aggression has been proposed, a common theme in the definitions used by researchers is emotional harm or the use of tactics such as degradation, ridicule, and social and financial isolation. Research suggests that this type of aggression is quite prevalent in intimate relationships with one study suggesting that 80% of intimate partners engaged in at least one act of psychological aggression while being observed discussing a problem with a partner (Capaldi & Crosby, 1997) and with prevalence rates of approximately 90% in a study using a community sample (O'Leary, & Williams, 2006). Studies also suggest that this type of aggression is perceived by its recipients to be very negative and often more harmful to them than physical aggression (Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, & Polek, 1990; Katz, Arias, & Beach, 2000).

Studies of correlates of psychological and physical aggression reveal common predictors (e. g., Hammock, 2003; Hammock & O'Hearn, 2002) and the occurrence of the two forms of aggression is related (e. g., Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, &

Polek, 1990; Hamby & Sugarman, 1999; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989). However, it is not clear whether psychological aggression is motivated by the same factors as is physical aggression. Some researchers suggest that the underlying motivation involves attempts to control the partner or to dominate the partner and inflict emotional harm (Murphy & Cascardi, 1999; Stets, 1991). However, little research has addressed how these acts might be perceived by observers.

We conducted two studies to determine how third parties perceive the motivation or intentions behind psychologically and physically aggressive acts displayed in an ongoing conflict between a husband and wife. In both studies participants read a scenario in which a couple was fighting about money. The type of aggression displayed was systematically varied with some participants reading about the perpetrator using physically aggressive acts such as throwing books at the victim, slapping the victim, and slamming the victim against the wall. Others read scenarios in which psychologically aggressive tactics were used such as belittling the victim and the victim's family, ridiculing the victim, threatening to financially isolate the victim and insulting the victim. Before reading the scenario, participants were asked to imagine that they were observing a fight between a married couple who were their neighbors.

We also manipulated the sex of the perpetrator with some participants reading about an aggressive husband and others about an aggressive wife. For this chapter we will focus on effects of type of aggression. After reading the scenario, participants responded to number of questions about the actions and actors in the scenario. The ones of most interest here include: whether the behavior displayed would be considered abusive (1 = not at all abusive and 7 very abusive), whether the perpetrator should be

punished for his/her actions (1 = not at all, 7= very much), and whether the victim suffered any harm (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). In addition, participants responded to six potential reasons for the aggressor's actions: to make the victim feel bad to control the relationship, to injure the victim, to hurt the victim, to gain power in the relationship, and to control the victim. Participants used a 7 point scale anchored by 1 (not at all likely) and 7 (very likely) to rate the likelihood that the reason presented was the motivation behind the perpetrator's acts.

A multivariate analysis conducted on the questions concerning the perceptions of the need for punishment, the abusive nature of the actions and the amount of harm to the victim revealed a global main effect for the type of aggression displayed by the aggressor,  $F(3, 257) = 14.39, p = .00, \eta^2 = .14$ . As can be seen in Table 2, participants perceived physical aggression to be a more negative experience than psychological aggression. However, the mean ratings on these scales reveal that although participants viewed physical aggression as relatively harmful, they also saw the psychologically aggressive actions as causing harm, as abusive and as deserving of punishment.

*Table 2: Univariate Analyses for Perceptions of Aggressive acts – Study 1*

	$F(1, 257)$	$p$	$\eta^2$	Physical	Psychological
Should the aggressor be punished?	29.30	.00	.10	5.90 (1.18)	5.09 (1.23)
Were the actions abusive?	33.40	.00	.11	6.56 (.69)	5.92 (1.10)
Did the victim suffer harm?	3.64	.06	.01	5.50 (1.45)	5.22 (1.34)

A multivariate analysis of variance conducted on the motivational question responses resulted in a global main effect of type of aggression displayed,  $F(6, 252) = 4.29, p = .00, \eta^2 = .09$ . Overall, psychologically aggressive perpetrators were perceived to be more motivated to control the relationship or partner, to get power in the relationship and to make the victim feel bad than physically aggressive perpetrators. These findings suggest that third parties perceive psychological aggression to be motivated more by intents to manipulate the relationship and the victim to get what the perpetrator wants.

*Table 2: Univariate Analyses for Potential Motivations Behind Aggressive acts – Study 1*

	$F(1, 257)$	$p$	$\eta^2$	Physical	Psychological
Make feel bad	6.43	.01	.02	4.73 (1.90)	5.42 (1.71)
Control relationship	9.45	.002	.04	5.36 (1.79)	6.07 (1.29)
Injure victim	3.38	.07	.01	3.96 (1.81)	3.52 (1.88)
Get power in relationship	9.88	.002	.04	5.24 (1.80)	5.94 (1.45)
Hurt victim	.05	.81	.00		
Control Victim	7.82	.006	.03	5.22 (1.82)	5.88 (1.41)

Individuals who have been victims of psychological aggression may be more likely to recognize the pain and harm of such abuse. Thus, in Study 2, we hypothesized that those who had had been victims of physical or psychological aggression would perceive them differently than those who had not experienced such abuse. We used the same design and materials as Study 1, but included a measure of the participants'

own experience as a victim of physical and psychological aggression (Abusive Behavior Inventory: Shepard & Campbell, 1992). Again participants rated their perceptions of the abusive nature of the actions, whether the aggressor should be punished, how much harm the victim experienced and the potential motivation behind the use of the aggressive tactics and indicated the likelihood the aggressor and victim were experiencing negative emotions. Participants also responded to a question about the extent to which the behavior used was right or wrong (1 = wrong and 7 = right). Two sets of analyses were conducted. One set used a median split of the level of the participant's receipt of physical aggression and the other used a median split of the level of the participant's receipt of psychological aggression.

The MANOVAs conducted on the perceptions of the aggressor's actions (i.e., whether right or wrong, punishable, abusive, and harmful) replicated the results found in Study 1. Again participants believed the physically aggressive actions of the perpetrator were more deserving of punishment and more abusive than psychologically aggressive actions,  $F(4, 228) = 16.57, p = .00, \eta^2 = .23$ . In addition, they perceived the physically aggressive acts to be worse than the psychologically aggressive acts. It is notable that again, the means associated psychological aggression suggest the participants consistently see these behaviors as quite negative – though not as negative as those associated with physical aggression. Interestingly, past experience with physical and psychological aggression did not relate to participants perception of these actions.

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*Table ? : Univariate Analyses for Perceptions of Aggressive acts – Study 2*

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	<i>F</i> (1, 257)	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$	Physical	Psychological
Should the aggressor be punished?	24.90	.00	.06	5.60 (1.36)	4.70 (1.29)
Were the actions abusive?	23.38	.00	.09	6.60 (.62)	5.98 (.91)
Did the victim suffer harm?	2.25	.14	.01	5.42 (1.53)	5.56 (1.18)
Was the behavior wrong?	15.70	.00	.06	1.50 (1.03)	2.16 (1.35)

The MANOVA using the participant's receipt of physical aggression replicated the effect for type of aggression found in Study 1,  $F(6, 227) = 6.05, p = .00, \eta^2 = .14$ . The pattern of these results were very similar to those found in Study 1. No relationship was found between the participant's receipt of physical aggression in past relationships and their perception of the motivation behind such aggressive tactics used in the scenario.

*Table 2: Univariate Analyses for Potential Motivations Behind Aggressive acts – Study 2*

	<i>F</i> (1, 257)	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$	Physical	Psychological
Make feel bad	6.43	.01	.02	4.73 (1.90)	5.42 (1.71)
Control relationship	9.45	.002	.04	5.36 (1.79)	6.07 (1.29)
Injure victim	3.38	.07	.01	3.96 (1.81)	3.52 (1.88)
Get power in relationship	9.88	.002	.04	5.24 (1.80)	5.94 (1.45)
Hurt victim	.05	.81	.00		
Control Victim	7.82	.006	.03	5.22 (1.82)	5.88 (1.41)

The MANOVA using the participant's receipt of psychological aggression also replicated the effects found for type of aggression and again the pattern of results were similar to those found in Study 1,  $F(6, 227) = 7.66, p = .00, \eta^2 = .17$ . We also found a significant global effect for the relationship between the receipt of psychological and the perception of aggressor motivations,  $F(6, 227) = 3.46, p = .00, \eta^2 = .08$ . Greater experience with the receipt of psychological aggression in past relationships was related to a greater likelihood of seeing the aggressor's acts as more. So those who had experienced psychological aggression were more likely to perceive the motivations of the perpetrator of those acts to be motivated by intentions to harm.

A global interaction between type of aggression and receipt of psychological aggression also was found,  $F(6, 227) = 2.18, p = .05, \eta^2 = .06$ . The univariate analyses suggest that this effect is mainly due to interactions found on two of the motivation variables: making the victim feel bad about him/herself,  $F(1, 232) = 5.05, p = .03, \eta^2 = .02$ , and controlling the victim,  $F(1, 232) = 4.25, p = .04, \eta^2 = .02$ . As we expected, those individuals with more experience with psychological aggression were more likely to perceive the aggressor who used psychological aggression as intending to make the victim feel bad about him/herself and to be motivated to control the victim. Experience with psychological aggression was not related to the perception of physical aggression.

<i>Means for the interaction between type of aggression and level of experience with psychological aggression</i>			
<b>Make feel bad about him/herself</b>		Physical	Psychological

	More experience	4.64 (1.85)	5.91 (1.36)
	Less experience	4.65 (1.85)	5.01 (2.02)
<b>Control the victim</b>			
	More experience	5.78 (1.56)	6.09 (1.38)
	Less experience	5.87 (1.41)	5.58 (1.70)

These studies taken together suggest that people perceive psychological aggression as harmful to the target of such actions. The issue might be with the type of harm they perceive to be inflicted. Rather than harm to the physical person, the harm comes in terms of psychological distress (making the victim feel bad about him/herself) or in terms of manipulation of the victim (controlling the relationship or victim, gaining power in the relationship). Although these types of harm are not what is commonly thought of when thinking of the impact of aggressive acts, harm such as this is likely to have a very negative impact on the receipt and on the relationship between the victim and the aggressor.



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## Appendix A

### Passive Aggression Items for Revised RCRQ

1. Did not do what the person wanted me to do.
2. Made mistakes that appeared to be accidental.
3. Seemed uninterested in things that were important to the person.
4. Gave the person the "silent treatment."
5. Ignored the person's contributions.
6. Excluded the person from important activities.
7. Avoided interacting with the person.
8. Failed to deny false rumors about the person.
9. Failed to return calls or respond to messages.
10. Showed up late for planned activities.
11. Slowed down on tasks.