

Jennifer Ruh Linder & Emily R. Anderson
Linfield College

Sarah Coyne
Brigham Young University

Introduction

- Correlational and experimental research indicates that relationally aggressive media exposure is associated with increased aggression (e.g., Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2004; Coyne et al., 2008; 2011).
- The General Aggression Model (GAM) (Anderson & Bushman, 2002), suggests that cognitions about aggression mediate the relationship between aggressive media exposure and subsequent behavior, but little research has examined this possibility in regards to *relationally* aggressive media.
- The GAM suggests that the interaction of personological variables (e.g. pre-existing aggression) and situational variables (e.g., aggressive media exposure) activates aggressive cognitions, which in turn influence decision processes (e.g., response generation) during social encounters. Individual differences in these decision processes predict aggressive behavior (Crick & Dodge, 1994).
- Therefore, research on the short-term effects of relationally aggressive media exposure on aggressive cognitions is needed in order to increase our understanding of the mechanisms underlying relationally aggressive media effects on behavior.

GOAL OF THE STUDY:

1. To examine the short-term effects of viewing relationally aggressive media on hostile response generation in women.
2. To examine whether pre-existing relational aggression moderates these effects.

Method

Participants

- 158 college women (Mean age = 19.2, $SD = 1$)

Stimuli

- (1) Relationally aggressive movie clip from *Mean Girls*
 - (2) Neutral movie clip from *What Lies Beneath*
- Pilot testing ensured the clips were matched on physiological arousal, excitement, and appeal. Clips were from 10-15 minutes in length.

Procedure

- Participants were randomly assigned to view one of the two movie clips.
- After viewing, participants read 6 vignettes that described interpersonal conflicts, and then were asked to generate a behavioral response to each scenario (“Please list 1 thing you could do next if this actually happened to you”).

Variables

Hostile response generation

- Responses were coded using 16 categories (e.g. retaliation, withdrawal, prosocial).
- Inter-rater reliability was calculated on 10% of the data (Kappa = .83).
- The 5 categories that included aggression (physical, relational, or verbal) or angry, confrontational behaviors were labeled as “hostile”.
- Total number of hostile responses across all vignettes were calculated; therefore, total scores could range from 0-6.

Relational Aggression

- Pre-existing relational aggression was assessed with the relational aggression subscale (24 items; $\alpha = .87$) of the Peer and Romantic Relations Inventory (Nelson, 2005). Items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = “never” to 5 = “almost always”).
- A sample item includes, “When mad at a person, I try to make sure that the person is excluded from group activities”.

Results and Discussion

A 2-way ANOVA was conducted with the type of movie clip (RA, neutral) and relational aggression (low, high) as the independent variables and hostile responses to the vignettes as the dependent variable. Means and post-hoc paired comparisons were also examined.

There were no main effects of type of movie clip viewed or level of relational aggression on hostile response generation.

Type of movie clip ^a	Hostile responses	
	Mean	SD
Relational aggression ($n = 76$)	.66	.76
Neutral ($n = 82$)	.66	.83
Relational Aggression ^b		
Low ($n = 76$)	.59	.75
High ($n = 82$)	.72	.84

^a $F(1, 154) = .01, n.s.$

^b $F(1, 154) = 1.20, n.s.$

Brief exposure to a relationally aggressive movie clip may not be sufficient to activate aggressive cognitions in all individuals.

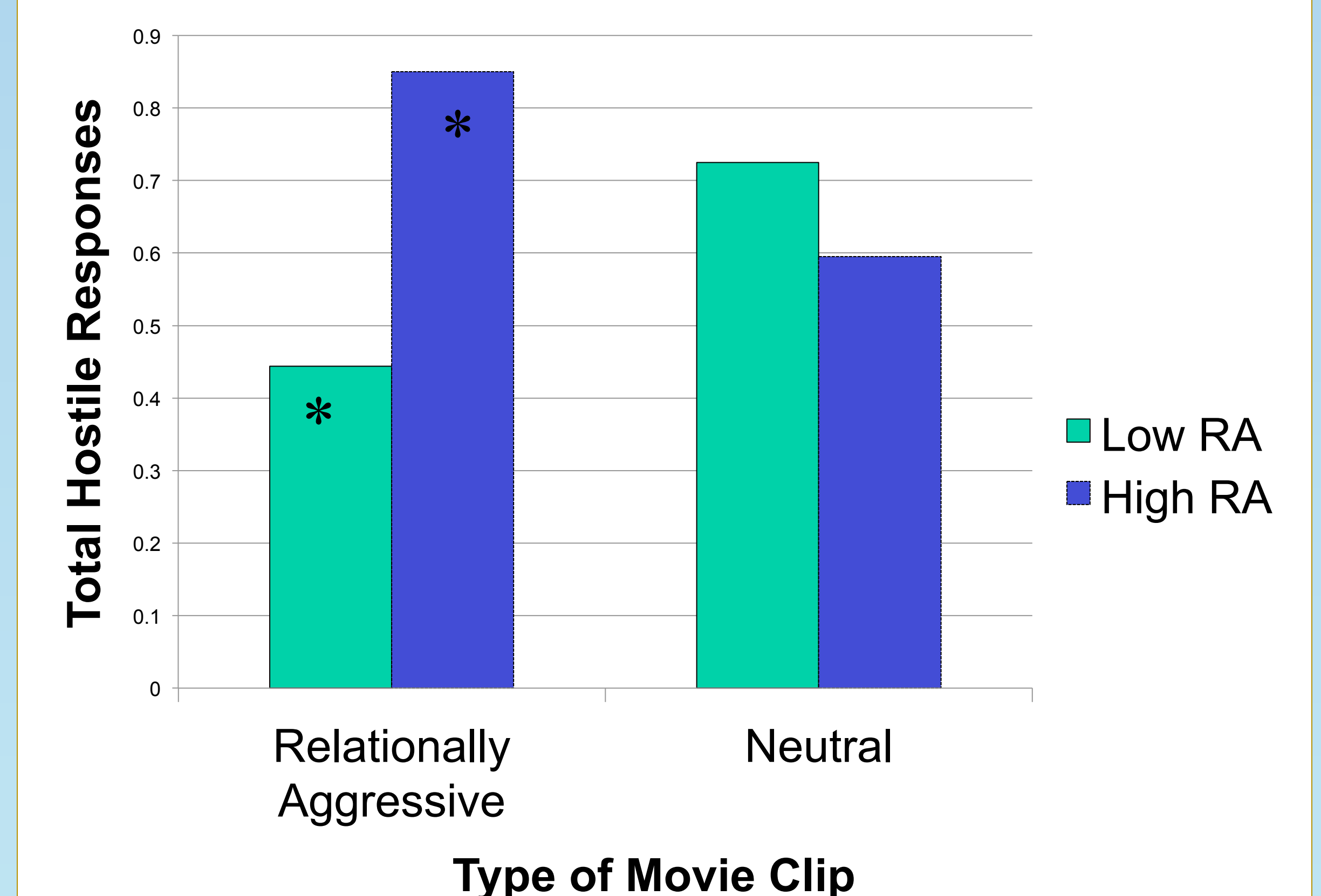
Conclusions and Future Directions

- ✓ These findings provide evidence that relationally aggressive media exposure affects cognitive processes underlying aggressive behavior, but that these short-term effects are moderated by individual differences in aggression.
- ✓ Additionally, these results suggest that relationally aggressive individuals are more susceptible to the negative effects of relationally aggressive media exposure.
- ✓ Future research should examine whether these different patterns of aggressive script activation after viewing relationally aggressive media account for previous research linking relationally aggressive media exposure and aggressive *behavior*.
- ✓ Additionally, given the research suggesting that children and adolescents may be more vulnerable to the effects of aggressive media exposure, future studies should focus on these populations.

Results and Discussion (cont.)

There was a significant interaction of type of movie clip viewed and pre-existing relational aggression.

Specifically, watching the relationally aggressive movie clip caused participants who were high on relational aggression to generate significantly more hostile responses than those low on relational aggression.



$F(1, 154) = 4.51, p < .05$

* Means differed at $p < .05$ in an independent samples t test.

It may be that hostile response generation after viewing relational aggression is only increased for relationally aggressive individuals, who already have well-developed and accessible aggressive scripts.