


### SPR 18th Annual Meeting

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#### **An Evaluation of the Application of the Articulated Thoughts in Simulated Situations Paradigm to Urban African American Adolescents**

*K. L. Pugh<sup>1</sup>; A. F. Bettencourt<sup>1</sup>; D. K. Titchner<sup>1</sup>; K. R. Mehari<sup>1</sup>; A. D. Farrell<sup>1</sup>*

1. Clinical Psychology, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, United States.

School-based violence prevention efforts frequently focus on addressing deficits in participants' social-information processing skills given their strong influence on the development of aggression (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Unfortunately, much of previous research in this area has been limited by the use of highly structured measures of these processes, including paper-and-pencil measures that have little flexibility for the identification of thought processes, limit the range in the content of responses, and include questions that may not be relevant across different populations. The present study describes the development of an innovative measure that taps into the reasoning and motivations for aggressive outcomes among adolescents using the Articulated Thoughts in Simulated Situations (ATSS) paradigm. This method uses a think-aloud approach to cognitive assessment that elicits adolescents' responses to progressive segments of relevant, meaningful problem situations. This study discusses the application of the ATSS paradigm, the cognitive structures (e.g., schemas) that emerged, and their relations to levels of adolescents' aggression.

In the present study, the ATSS paradigm was tailored to an urban African American adolescent population to assess their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to peer victimization. Participants were 176 students (43% male; 73% African American) from one rural and two urban public middle schools. Participants were presented with five audiotaped simulations of problem situations that were identified in previous research as being relevant and difficult for urban African American youth (Farrell et al., 2006). Their responses were coded for the presence and frequency of emotions, beliefs related to circumstances for fighting, internalized values, attributions, self-efficacy, and behavioral intentions.

The analyses will examine the frequency of themes and how they differ for aggressive versus nonaggressive adolescents. Preliminary analyses found support for the measure's construct validity based on correlations with related measures of beliefs ( $r_s = .22$  to  $.28$ ,  $p_s < .01$ ). Preliminary findings from a regression analyses indicated that high levels of adolescents' fear expressed during the ATSS were also related to beliefs about fighting.

Preliminary findings provide initial support for the ATSS paradigm tapping into cognitive structures (e.g. beliefs about fighting) among a sample of urban African American adolescents. The present study is in the process of completing second level coding of other themes that emerged in adolescents' thought processes (e.g. internalized values and attributions) and will incorporate findings linking these processes to levels of adolescents' aggression and victimization assessed on a concurrent measure.

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