The Role of Language in Aggressive Behavior
Beautiful
It looks like a Corona commercial
There must be a god
Gorgeous
Hurry up, Sun, kick-off is in 10 minutes
Sunsets are better on the beach…
This is totally worth the $500 plane ticket
Is this safe for my eyes?
Who has a camera?
…but west coast sunsets are better
Not bad
Jimmy Buffett is cheesy
Okay. I’m bored.
Philosophy of Science

- Science requires “truth criteria”
  - Pre-analytic rule of evidence
  - Means of analysis versus results of analysis
- Four worldviews (Pepper, 1942):
  - Formism
  - Organicism
  - Mechanism
  - Contextualism
Core characteristics:

• Focus on the natural world’s organization of events, relations, and forces
  • Root metaphor: computer
  • In psychology: mental mediation

• Truth criterion:
  • Elaborated correspondence between a model and a natural system
Functional Contextualism

Core characteristics:
- Focus on whole event
  - Also called: “act-in-context”
  - Non-reductionist analysis
- Focus on role of context in understanding the nature and function of an event
  - Also called: “independent variables”
  - Non-exhaustive analysis
- Truth criterion:
  - “Successful working”
  - A-ontological analysis
Definition of verbal behavior:
- Arbitrarily applicable relational responding
- Defined by three criteria:
  - Mutual entailment
  - Combinatorial entailment
  - Transformation of stimulus functions

Example: Xyzzuux
- “Frame of coordination”
- Many other frames too!
Clinical applications

- Clinician’s job: Prediction and influence
- What kind of “truth” is needed?
  - “I am oppressive.”
    - Accurate? (Yes)
    - Helpful? (Maybe not…)
  - “I am having the thought that I am oppressive.”
    - Accurate? (No)
    - Helpful? (Maybe…)
Definition
• A functional contextual program of research and practice in the behavioral sciences

Association for Contextual Behavioral Science
• Develop manipulable, contextual behavioral principles organized into analytic abstractive theories that are useful in the functional analysis of events (e.g., RFT)
• Develop useful middle level terms (e.g., the psychological flexibility model)

State of research
• Skinner boxes for humans
• What about context?
Case study: Darth Vader

- Demographic information
  - Alias: Anakin Skywalker
  - Occupation: Lord of the Sith

- Treatment target:
  - Aggressive behavior
  - Meaningful life
Darth Vader’s Verbal Community

**VS.**

Use your aggressive feelings, boy.
Let the hate flow through you.

Be mindful of the future but not at the expense of the present.

Be mindful of your thoughts; they betray you.

Train yourself to let go of everything you fear to lose.

Give into your anger.
“Let her go, Anakin!”

-Obi Wan Kenobi
“If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can possibly imagine.”

-Obi Wan Kenobi
If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can possibly imagine.

- Obi Wan Kenobi

Research Questions:

Can the rule compete with proximal contingencies? If so, for how long?

Social reinforcement for rule-following?

Do the consequences specified align with reinforcement history?
My Study: Variables

**IVs:**
- Nonaggression-specifying instructed rule
  - *Definition:* Any rule communicated from one person or group to another person or group that specifies punishments following aggressive behavior or rewards following nonaggressive behavior
  - *Random assignment:* Rule Group vs No Rule Group
- Provocation
  - *Measure:* Taylor Aggression Paradigm (TAP)
  - *Operationalization:* Increasing noise blasts from confederate
- Trait aggressiveness
  - *Measure:* Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire – Short Form (Bryant & Smith, 2001)
  - *Operationalization:* Upper and lower thirds of total score used to identify high and low trait aggressiveness, respectively

**DV:**
- Aggressive behavior
  - *Measure:* Taylor Aggression Paradigm (TAP)
  - *Operationalization:* Noise blasts intensity levels sent by participant
Recruitment:
- “Games and Competition” in Sport Psychology Lab
- Male PSYC 102 students that completed BPAQ-SF during mass survey

Participants:
- 189 (total participants)
  - 11 (deception fail)
  - 46 (did not complete mass survey)
  - 50 (moderate trait aggressiveness)
- 82 Final N

Rule manipulation:
- “Okay, we’re ready to begin. By the way, the noise blasts can be irritating. In the past, we have found that when participants use high levels of noise blasts, their opponents generally respond with high levels. We recommend that you use low levels, that is, below a three on the ten-point scale.”

2 x 2 x 3 Repeated-measures ANOVA:
- Between Subjects: Experimental Groups (Rule Group, No Rule Group)
- Between Subjects: Trait Aggressiveness Groups (Low, High)
- Within Subjects: Provocation (Low, Moderate, High)
No Rule Group

Rule Group

Mean TAP Aggression Ratings

TAP Block 1  TAP Block 2  TAP Block 3

TAP Block 1  TAP Block 2  TAP Block 3

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Nonaggression-specifying rules
- Only one relational frame:
  - “If – then”: If you harm you will receive harm
- But these rules didn’t prevent aggression…
- What rules can?
  - Accurate specification of contingencies?
  - Can rules ever overcome provocation?

Aggression-specifying rules
- More useful target?
- Methodological concerns
The end.

- Questions?