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The first published use of this version of the "Word Pair Similarity Task" was Anderson and Morrow, 1995, in a study of how cooperative versus competitive instructions influence a person's view of how aggressive the task is, and the influence of cooperative versus competitive instructions on aggressive behavior during the playing of a video game. We also used the task in a study of trait hostility, pain and aggressive thoughts (Anderson, Anderson, Dill, & Deuser, 1998). More recently, we used this task in a study of violent music lyrics (Anderson, Carnagey, & Eubanks, 2003).

Scoring directions can found in the original research articles listed below. Researchers may use these materials free of charge for research purposes.

This task, modified from that developed by Bushman (1996), consists of rating the degree of meaning similarity of each paired combinations of 20 words. Ten of these words can be interpreted as either aggression-related words or as aggression-unrelated words (e.g., bottle, night, stick). These words are referred to as ambiguous words. The remaining ten words are more obviously related to aggression (e.g., butcher, choke, hatchet). Ratings of each word pair were made on a 1 to 7 scale of how similar, associated, or related they were. A rating of 1 represented "not at all similar, associated, or related" and 7 represented "extremely similar, associated, or related." Ratings were paced by computer-generated tones spaced nine seconds apart.

There are several ways to administer the Word Pair Similarity Task. One could give participants more time, less time, or an unlimited amount of time to work on the task. This task could easily be computerized so that the researcher could control how long each word pair appears on the screen before a rating is required. One can also add additional words to the task, as was done in the Anderson and Morrow paper (we added the words "competitive" and "cooperative").

We hope you find this task useful in your research. I would love to see copies of your research papers that use this task. Please send them to me at:

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Thank you!

Anderson, C.A., & Morrow, M. (1995). Competitive aggression without interaction: Effects of competitive versus cooperative instructions on aggressive behavior in video games. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 21, 1020-1030.

Anderson, K.B., Anderson, C.A., Dill, K.E., & Deuser, W.E. (1998). The interactive relations between trait hostility, pain, and aggressive thoughts. Aggressive Behavior, 24, 161-171.

Bushman, B. J. (1996). Individual differences in the extent and development of aggressive cognitive-associative networks. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 22, 811-819.

Anderson, C.A., Carnagey, N.L., & Eubanks, J. (2003). Exposure to violent media: The effects of songs with violent lyrics on aggressive thoughts and feelings. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84, 960-971.

Not at all
Similar, Associated, or Related
1 2

Moderately
Similar, Associated, or Related
3 4 5

Extremely
Similar, Associated or Related
6 7

Choke

drugs fight gun hatchet hurt kill knife movie night police red rock stick wound
— — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Drugs

fight gun hatchet hurt kill knife movie night police red rock stick wound
— — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Fight

gun hatchet hurt kill knife movie night police red rock stick wound
— — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Gun

hatchet hurt kill knife movie night police red rock stick wound
— — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Hatchet

hurt kill knife movie night police red rock stick wound
— — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Hurt

kill knife movie night police red rock stick wound
— — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Kill

knife movie night police red rock stick wound
— — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Knife

movie night police red rock stick wound
— — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Not at all
Similar, Associated, or Related
1 2

Moderately
Similar, Associated, or Related
3 4 5

Extremely
Similar, Associated or Related
6 7

Movie

night police red rock stick wound

Night

police red rock stick wound

Police

red rock stick wound

Red

rock stick wound

Rock

stick wound

Stick

wound
