Relational Aggression in School-Aged Girls: Levels of Awareness and Practice of School Psychologists in Two States

by

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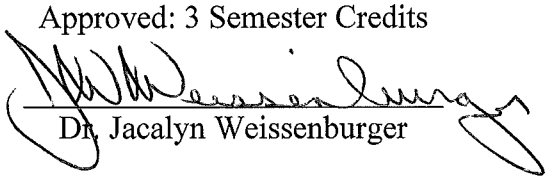
A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Education Specialist Degree
in School Psychology

Approved: 3 Semester Credits



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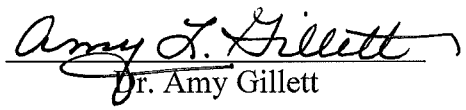

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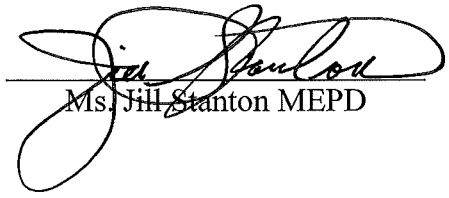

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Author:	**Johnston, Rachel L.**
Title:	***Relational Aggression in School-Aged Girls: Levels of Awareness and Practice of School Psychologists in Two States***
Graduate Degree/Major:	**Ed.S. in School Psychology**
Research Adviser:	**Jacalyn Weissenburger, Ph.D.**
Month/Year:	**April, 2009**
Number of Pages:	**71**
Style Manual Used:	**American Psychological Association, 5th edition**

ABSTRACT

This research compared the awareness and practices of school psychologists in Minnesota and Wisconsin about relational aggression among school-aged girls. Until the 1990s, the literature on aggression in schools primarily focused on boys and physical violence. Recently, more scholarly research has been dedicated to the issue of relational aggression in girls.

In this paper, scholarly research, intervention programs, and applied research literature were reviewed. Further, school psychologists' perceptions, knowledge, and practices were examined through survey research. Overall, the results of this study suggest that most school psychologists have been asked to address relational aggression in schools. Further, most school psychologists reported they address relational aggression in the schools by discussing relational aggression one-on-one with students.

By state, there were statistically significant differences in the answers of the respondents. School psychologists in Wisconsin reported a greater use of the Second Step/Steps to Respect, a comprehensive anti-bullying curriculum, compared to Minnesota school psychologists. Wisconsin school psychologists were also more likely to rate their knowledge of relational aggression intervention programs as "strong" compared to their Minnesota counterparts.

By years of experience, psychologists with less than four years of experience were more likely to have seen a movie or television show about relational aggression in school-aged girls compared to more experienced school psychologists. School psychologists with 10 to 17 years of experience rated their knowledge of research-to-practice literature about relational aggression in girls higher than those with five to nine years of experience.

By gender, female school psychologists were more likely than males to have used the Second Step/Steps to Respect program, and male school psychologists were statistically more likely to have conducted an in-service on bullying that contained relational aggression as one component.

Results point to the need for more training among school psychologists about relational aggression. This bullying behavior is unlikely to resolve itself in schools without more knowledge, awareness, and intervention among trained professionals. As school-based mental health experts, school psychologists have unique skills that can help girls navigate these difficult situations in schools.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the many people involved in making my specialist thesis an interesting and challenging learning experience. First, heartfelt thanks go to my thesis advisor, Jacalyn Weissenburger, for providing so many hours of her talents and skills to make this project so very rewarding. Thanks so much, Jackie. I truly respect your insight, work ethic, and dedication to your students.

Thanks also to my committee members, Jill Stanton and Amy Gillett for their insights and support during this process. Thanks for sticking with me! Susan Greene from Stout's Budget, Planning, and Analysis Department was also immeasurably helpful and encouraging.

Of course I would like to extend love and gratitude to my dear husband, Scott, for his friendship, encouragement, and patience through this process. To our children, Piper and Jackson, thanks for making me smile every single day and reminding me of what is truly important in life.

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Chapter I: Introduction

In modern society and in the public school system, much attention has been paid to spectacular violence, such as the school massacre disasters in Littleton, Colorado, Pearl, Mississippi, and Fayetteville, Tennessee. However, an increasing body of research has emerged to address a more common, but less sensational, form of aggression among school-aged children: relational aggression. The definition of *relational aggression*, most commonly attributed to Crick and Grotpeter (1995), can be described as gossiping, rumor-spreading, deliberately excluding (i.e., "silent treatment"), and/or withdrawing of one's friendship as a means of social manipulation with the intent to harm. Relational aggression, or girl bullying, is commonly known as the way girls exert power over one another.

In discussions of aggression among students, empathy often immediately falls to the victim. Victims of relational aggression are targeted, taunted, harassed, and sometimes threatened, both overtly and covertly, by those determined to torment them. As such, attending school may not be top priority for the victimized students. Victims go to school less and have higher instances of depression and suicidal ideations than students who are not bullied (Orpinas et al., 2003; Roecker Phelps, 2001; Roland, 2002). Further, victims have higher instances of bedwetting and psychosomatic complaints (Williams et al. in Orpinas et al., 2003).

Although many center their attention on the victims of relational aggression, research also suggests that a focus on the aggressors is needed, as they present a certain degree of maladjustment. For example, perpetrators identified as bullies by the age of eight years old are six times more likely to become involved in criminal behavior

(Olweus, 1987). Additionally girls who engage in bullying behavior as children often exhibit similar hostile behavior as adults by using more aggressive means of punishing their own children (*Bully-Proofing Materials*, 2003).

Roland (2002) compared the depressive and suicidal thoughts of aggressors, their victims, and a control group. Both genders of aggressors had higher scores for both depressive symptoms as well as suicidal ideations, and female aggressors scored slightly higher than their victims, with scores approximately twice as high as the norm group (also Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Such research suggests, like other learned behaviors, the cycle of these types of aggressive behaviors is not intrinsic, but gradually acquired throughout life.

Other results have indicated that both perpetrators and victims of bullying have higher incidences of long-term negative consequences, such as dropping out of school, criminal activity, or poor psychosocial adjustment (Cohn & Canter, 2003). Poor psychosocial adjustment is particularly problematic as positive peer relationships can have a significant impact on a student's academic success (Wentzel & Watkins, 2002). These findings suggest that both the aggressors and the victims of relational aggression are in need of the counseling and psychological services that may be provided in school settings.

School psychologists, as important members of the behavior and psychological specialist teams in schools, should have knowledge or expertise in relational aggression. Additionally, as relational aggression among girls gains more attention in popular media, schools psychologists will be expected to have knowledge of evidence-based practices, books, or other resources available to assist educators and parents. Furthermore, the

recent increase of scholarly research about relational aggression suggests that school psychologists must be prepared to work with students who use relationships to aggress (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006). As an example, the *Communiqué*, the newspaper for the National Association of School Psychologists, recently (February and March 2008) included a comprehensive, front-page two-part series including a literature review and review of interventions and treatment programs specifically about relational aggression (Crothers, Bell, Blasik, Camic, Greisler, & Keener, 2008).

Given that 1) relational aggression is prevalent in today's schools; 2) perpetrators and victims of relational aggression appear to be in need of evidence-based intervention strategies to prevent subsequent difficulties; 3) information regarding relational aggression has proliferated in popular literature; and 4) little research has examined the knowledge and practices of psychologists in the schools, a need exists to examine school psychologists' current levels of awareness, knowledge, and practices regarding relational aggression in the schools.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study, then, is to determine the levels of knowledge, preparation, and practices among school psychologists to address relational aggression in school-aged girls. Another purpose is to compare the knowledge and practices of school psychologists in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Research Questions

The following questions were addressed through this study:

1. Are school psychologists prepared to address issues related to relational aggression in the schools? If so, how have they become prepared?

2. What interventions are commonly implemented in the schools to address relational aggression?
3. Do differences exist in the knowledge, preparation, and practices of school psychologists according to state of employment, years of experience, and gender?

Definition of Terms

This paper contains many terms that are commonly used when describing social order and types of aggression. The following terms are defined:

Indirect aggression: Indirect aggression includes covert behavior, in which the perpetrator makes it seem as though there has been no intent to hurt at all, e.g., rumor spreading (Simmons, 2002). This perpetrator often uses the appearance of a friendly relationship to compile ammunition about their victim. This can be viewed as a "low-cost" way of harming others (Archer & Coyne, 2005 p. 212).

Peer ecology: Peer ecology is the way that children interact with one another; the ways in which their behavior influences their social system. A child's peer ecology does not include adults, teachers, or parents (Hodges & Rodkin, 2003).

Relational aggression: Relational aggression is gossiping, rumor-spreading, deliberately excluding (i.e., "silent treatment"), and/or withdrawing of one's friendship as a means of social manipulation with the intent to harm (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995). Relational aggression is also defined in the popular press as acts that harm others through damage (or the threat of damage) to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion (Simmons, 2002).

Social aggression: Social aggression is a less frequently used term to encompass the two constructs of indirect aggression and relational aggression (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will include an overview of the scientific and popular literature on relational aggression. Information about the identification, perpetrators, and victims will be addressed. In addition, the role of school psychologists, prevention programs, and intervention programs will be discussed.

Relational Aggression

Identification

To study relational aggression, one must first identify the behaviors associated with the phenomenon. Unfortunately, the identification of relationally aggressive behaviors in children can be subjective and reliant upon chance observation of the behaviors or from reports from the victims or bystanders. Additionally, less easily visible methods of communication, such as e-mails, text messaging, and instant messaging, are other platforms in which students can aggress against one another (Cullerton-Sen & Crick, 2005). Since school professionals are unlikely to see students' personal e-mails and text messages, it is difficult to determine if a student is a victim of relational aggression through these more covert methods unless that particular student or a bystander notifies school personnel.

Multi-modal observation tools, however, are one way in which school personnel can be aided in the identification of relational aggression. In one study, McEvoy, Estrem, Rodriguez, and Olson (2003) developed an intermethod study to identify relational aggression in pre-school children. For the purpose of that

study, relational aggression was defined as "any verbal or nonverbal behavior that (a) excluded others from play or encouraged others to exclude a child, or (b) threatened to exclude or ignore" (p. 53). Researchers used direct observation, teacher report, and peer-rating to define a relationally aggressive preschooler. Findings indicated that direct observation and teacher report identified the same student as relationally aggressive only one third of the time, suggesting that relational aggression is difficult to identify from varying perspectives. The authors suggested the best way to identify relational aggression is to compile input from all three sources: parents, teachers, and peers. As Cullerton-Sen and Crick (2005) stated, "a multi-informant, multi-method approach [is necessary] to fully capture the prevalence of victimization in schools" (p. 158). Cullerton-Sen and Crick concluded that developing methods to identify and measure such behaviors is an area of need.

In elementary schools, school psychologists and other school personnel can gain information about aggressive behaviors from observing students on the playground or in the lunchroom. In a study by Leff, Power, Costigan, and Manz (2003), data were collected from a Playground and Lunchroom Climate Questionnaire (PLCQ) to evaluate students' aggressive behaviors. Three sets of participants who supervised lunch and recess time at their schools were involved in the study, and the researchers evaluated the perceptions among these personnel about the frequency, importance, and identification of behaviors during this traditionally unstructured time in the school day. Results found that using this

questionnaire as a tool to help measure behaviors may aid in more accurate data collection and assist with staff collaboration.

An evaluation procedure such as the PLCQ can be used in two different ways in the schools:

> First, it could be combined with more traditional measures (e.g., peer rating scales, teacher report measures, and/or behavioral observations on the playground) to enable schools to conduct a comprehensive needs and safety assessment that can guide treatment planning. . . . In addition, individual items within a subscale on the PLCQ can give schools information about specific aspects of climate variables that need to be improved (p. 427).

Perpetrators

Based on direct observation, studies of early childhood students indicated that boys were more likely to be physically aggressive while girls were more likely to exhibit relationally aggressive behaviors (Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999; Ostrov & Crick, 2007). The findings of this research can help school psychologists and other personnel become more aware of the types of aggression to look for among early childhood students.

A longitudinal study conducted by Long and Pellegrini (2003) illustrated that physical aggression among girls decreased as relational aggression increased over time. The results of this study suggest as social interaction becomes more important, especially during middle school years and the common onset of puberty, dominance is manifested through aggression. As was stated: "For those

periods in which the dominance was being established, bullying tended to increase leading to an increase in dominance" (p. 415). This information is supported by data on bullying patterns indicating an increasing prevalence through elementary school, peaking in middle school, and subsiding by 11th and 12th grades (Brewster & Railsback, 2001).

Some researchers theorize that relational aggression is a learned behavior and students exhibiting these behaviors may be more likely to come from dysfunctional or disadvantaged home environments. In one investigation, Hipwell, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, Keenan, White, and Kroneman (2002) found that girls living in disadvantaged neighborhoods scored much higher in antisocial behavior than those living in moderate or above average neighborhoods (15.7% as compared to 8.5% and 4.7%, respectively). (For this study, "disadvantaged" was considered the 23 lowest income neighborhoods out of an 89 neighborhood sample.)

Crick and Grotpeter (1995) provided another perspective on relational aggression. These researchers posited that girls who exhibit relationally aggressive behavior toward peers are disliked by their peers, and the rejection by their peers then leads girls to act in relationally aggressive ways. Also, as relational aggression is "significantly related to maladjustment (depression, loneliness, social isolation) . . . relationally aggressive children feel unhappy and distressed about their peer relationships" (1995, p. 720). As Crick and Grotpeter asserted, "frequent engagement in relationally aggressive behaviors exacerbates, if not generates, feelings of social-psychological distress because these acts

potentially limit children's access to peer relationships; however, it may also be that feelings of psychological distress lead to engagement in relational aggression" (p. 720).

Underwood (2003) cited the American Psychological Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Ed. (DSM-IV) to support her argument that relational and social aggression are indicative of more serious mental health concerns:

> . . . no childhood disorder perfectly matches social aggression, but [it] appears related to at least some symptoms of the adult category of borderline personality disorder. [BPD] is characterized as, 'a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affects, and marked impulsivity' and includes at least two symptoms that may result from or contribute to social aggression: 'frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment' and 'a pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships characterized by alternating between extremes of idealization and devaluation' (2003, p. 190).

Adding further credence to the hypothesis that relationally aggressive behavior may be an indicator of more serious mental health problems is, as mentioned earlier, the idea that bullies have been found to maintain higher levels of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideations than even the victims (Orpinas, Horne & Staniszewki, 2003; Roland, 2002). If this assertion is verified, it suggests there is a need for help and counseling to be extended to the perpetrator as well as the victim.

Victims

Victims of relational aggression are targeted, taunted, harassed, and sometimes threatened; both overtly and covertly, by those determined to torment them. As such, school may not be a top priority for the victimized students. Research has found that victims go to school less and have higher instances of depression and suicidal ideations than students who are not bullied (Roecker Phelps, 2001; Roland, 2002; Orpinas et al., 2003). Other results indicate victims have higher instances of bedwetting and make more psychosomatic complaints (Williams, Chamgers, Logan, & Robinson, 1996). First-hand accounts of victims indicated plummeting grades and absenteeism were commonplace for girls whose first concern was survival in a hostile school environment (Simmons, 2004). Furthermore, others have found that students who were the targets of aggressive behavior early in school tend to stay victims throughout grade school (Roecker Phelps, 2001). As such, movement among social groups becomes almost impossible, leaving the victimized student unable to shake the label of social pariah (Rose, Swenson, & Waller, 2004). Additionally, a study by Prinstein, Boergers, and Vernberg (2001) of 566 students (55% girls) indicated that "results consistently revealed that adolescents who were both relational and overt victims [of aggression] had higher levels of depression, externalizing behavior, and loneliness" (p. 486).

Girls are frequently victimized by the peers whom they consider close friends (Dellasega & Adamshick, 2005). Often, aggressors tease and taunt to gain attention and social status, while passing it off to the victim as a joke, thus perpetuating a sadistic false friendship. According to Young, Boye, and Nelson (2006), this victimization has been often been tolerated by some as a "rite of passage" or a phase that is normal, without

resulting in damage to girls. As such, "a strategy of noninterference resists the truth of girls' friendships, remains aloof from the heart of their interpersonal problems, and devalues the emotional intensity that leaves permanent marks on [the girls'] self esteem" (Simmons, 2002, p. 34). Perhaps this behavior is condoned inadvertently through silence because teachers may simply not have the time or the ability to address situations that do not immediately and overtly disrupt the classroom.

School Psychologist's Role in Relational Aggression

Relational aggression among girls is an important school-related problem for school psychologists to address. First, relational aggression can negatively impact the school climate, have serious consequences for victims, and have implications for perpetrators. Second, research has shown that aggression is indicative of more systemic relationship challenges, often coming from home, thus increasing the chance that this will perpetuate in the future (Shields & Cicchetti, 2001). As indicated previously, girls who exhibit relationally aggressive behaviors may develop more aggressive parenting styles (Espelage and Swearer, 2003). Further, according to Shields and Cicchetti, home environments where the caregivers have a higher rate of aggressive behaviors that show value to aggression as a means of conflict resolution are likely to produce children with similar behaviors. Shields and Cicchetti also found students who are maltreated in the home environment may be at a greater risk both to victimize their peers and be victims themselves, gender notwithstanding.

Ultimately, school psychologists can play an important leadership role in identifying relational aggressions in schools (Leff et al., 2003). As personal

observations and perspectives are subject to interpretation, tools like observation instruments can be useful in using common definitions of behaviors into meaningful and consistent constructs. Using a common language when identifying behaviors can help school personnel when discussing relationally aggressive behaviors. Accurately identifying relational aggression can be a useful first step in addressing it in schools. School psychologists, with their training and expertise in observation and data collection and interpretation, are well-suited for the responsibility of identifying perpetrators and their victims.

Crockett (2004) stated that school personnel provide "little or no support" (p. 79) on bullying and harassment in the schools. As a school resource and implementer of social and behavioral interventions, the school psychologist must be able to provide worthwhile assistance to teachers and other school personnel who may witness this behavior frequently. Further, Hodges and Rodkin (2003) suggested that school psychologists should help teachers develop a more active role as a combater of aggression in schools rather as passive condoners of these behaviors through a strategy of noninterference. Additionally, Orpinas et al. (2003) argued that intervention programs have a higher chance of success when implemented at the school level, rather than through at-home, parent-driven programs.

Leff et al. (2003) and Hodges and Rodkin's (2003) research suggests that passivity on the part of school professionals can be interpreted as muted approval by the perpetrators. Leff and colleagues focused on the playground and lunchroom settings as environments with high incidences of bullying where fewer

teachers are available to observe students' behaviors. Recess and lunch aides now serve as integral parts of the behavioral support team as these professionals play the same crucial role in observing and intervening in aggressive and relationally aggressive behaviors. School districts are much more likely to have written policies about physical aggression without mentioning relational aggression or verbal forms of bullying (Mullin-Rindler, 2003). As identification and awareness of relational aggression as a form of bullying becomes more prevalent to school staff, administrators and other school personnel should address it specifically in their anti-bully policies.

As the role of the school psychologist continues to move from that of a special education gatekeeper to that of a professional within schools who provides mental health services, including behavioral interventions, these key professionals will be increasingly looked to as knowledgeable sources of social and developmental information about relational aggression. As experts in mental health, it becomes increasingly important for school psychologists to address relational aggression, as research has shown that students who have been victimized by aggressive behavior are less likely to want to go to school from as early of an age as kindergarten (Roecker Phelps, 2001). Also, as victims go to school less and have higher instances of depression and suicidal ideation, their academic performance tends to suffer. Additionally, a school that tolerates relational or physical aggression fosters a negative climate for its students. As a result, these schools are more likely to have higher incidence of these behaviors as students see few consequences (Espelage & Swearer, 2002). Students with

positive school attachment have shown lower incidences of aggression, both physical and relational (Griner Hill & Werner, 2006). Therefore, addressing relational aggression in schools can potentially make a significant impact on the academic success and overall well-being of students.

Review of Popular Literature

As relational aggression has received much more attention recently by researchers and in the popular culture, educators should have an understanding of both scholarly research as well as resources that may appeal to teachers and parents. Recent publications such as *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* (Simmons, 2002), *Odd Girl Speaks Out: Girls Write About Bullies, Cliques, Popularity, and Jealousy* (Simmons, 2004), *Please Stop Laughing at Me: One Woman's Inspirational Story* (Blanco, 2003), and *Queen Bees and Wannabes* (Wiseman, 2002) have brought relational aggression into popular awareness.

In *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*, Simmons (2002) detailed the stories of torment that young girls can inflict upon each other, such as backstabbing, rumor-spreading, silent treatment, alliance building, lying, and other devastating behaviors. Many of these behaviors have been chalked up to a *girls will be girls* phase of development. Simmons' book became a bestseller as victims began to speak out about the shame they had experienced. In researching her book, Simmons built trust and respect among girls in several different schools representing a variety of socioeconomic populations, and her book facilitated candid conversations about their childhood experiences as victims of relational aggression.

As awareness of relational aggression increased, there is now much more information about the victims of these behaviors. In her books, Simmons compiled numerous girls' descriptions of their own experiences of being either victims or perpetrators of relational aggression, submitted via web-site (www.rachelsimmons.com). One girl described being new to a school: She was befriended by a popular girl, only to later be tormented because the popular girl was jealous of how thin she was (incidentally, the new girl was suffering from anorexia nervosa). The aggressor turned the girls in school against the new girl, screaming "anorexic bitch" at her and threatening to punch her face. Reportedly, the new girl ended up being diagnosed with clinical depression and was prescribed anti-depression medication. Simmons' (2004) work, while anecdotal, presents a compelling case for ways in which relational aggression among girls can snowball into physical aggression and threats, thereby creating an increasingly hostile and dangerous school environment.

In *Odd Girl Out*, Simmons (2002) hypothesized that some of the main reasons that girls victimize each other is not due to territorialism, but rather due to a lack of effective communication skills and jealousy. According to Simmons, these young people may have a very difficult time telling another girl they are mad at them or that something she did was hurtful due to their still-developing interpersonal communication skills. This, according to Simmons, stems from the ever-present demands of being "nice." Ironically, though avoiding direct conflict is imperative to keep the peace, the resultant lack of confrontation can worsen the situation, sometimes pulling in otherwise innocent third parties as mediators or bystanders. According to Simmons, girls have an awkward bond where they often expect others to know how they are feeling without open discussion.

From Simmons' research, "Many girls reported feeling indignant because their friends didn't know how they felt. These girls felt it should be obvious from the clipped tone of their voices, the terseness of their notes, the nights they didn't call. Yet their friends never responded. And as the girls silently willed their friends to know their inner feelings, their rage doubled when their friends didn't" (p. 74).

Concluding her book, Simmons (2002) gave suggestions to parents of victims and other key school personnel such as school counselors, to intervene and prevent future occurrences: "Existing rules should be amended to prohibit specific behaviors such as rumor spreading, alliance building, secret telling, and severe episodes of nonverbal aggression" (p. 249).

In the autobiography, *Please Stop Laughing at Me. . . One Woman's Inspirational Story*, Blanco (2003) detailed a life of being beaten, tormented, spat at, ridiculed, and ostracized by her classmates. Through her academic progression through elementary school, middle school, and high school, her peers appeared to be relentless. Blanco's book followed the same path as Simmons, as the girls she thought were her friends were only maintaining a friend-like façade to further torment her, dissolving the trust she had of any of her classmates and causing her to develop a self-loathing due to her own desires to be liked and accepted by the very people who were causing her grief. Whereas Simmons' (2002) book reads more like an academic resource, Blanco's is a memoir in which the author details the success and accomplishments she achieved in spite of a difficult childhood filled with many victimizing experiences.

Queen Bees & Wannabees: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, & Other Realities of Adolescence (Wiseman, 2002) is a

comprehensive resource for parents. *Queen Bees & Wannabees* has a "handbook" feel to it, supplied with many definitions, diagrams, strategies, interventions, and advice on how to help adolescent girls navigate the social minefield of adolescence. More utilitarian than Blanco's book, *Queen Bees* provides a generous amount of direct quotes from victims and perpetrators. Wiseman's technique helps draw the reader in and illustrates the complexities of the adolescent girl's world.

Blanco's, (2002) Wiseman's, (2002) and Simmons's (2002) books have all received popular acceptance by the general population. All three were *New York Times* bestsellers and have received much television and newspaper coverage. These three books are important pieces of the popular literature that have brought so much attention to this important topic among the general population. Additionally, as they are reader-friendly, these sources can be used by girls (and/or their parents) who are dealing with relational aggression. However, since the recommendations in these books have not been verified through scientific research, caution should be exercised before drawing conclusions or implementing interventions based on these sources of information.

Fortunately, there are resources for school psychologists and other school personnel to use when addressing relational aggression in schools. While the majority of pre-packaged aggression prevention programs do not focus entirely on female relational aggression, they provide a starting point for developing intervention and prevention strategies in the schools. The recently published workbook, *Mean Girls: 101 ½ Creative Strategies and Activities for Working with*

Relational Aggression (Randall & Bowen, 2007) directly addresses relational aggression for those working with young girls. The book contains an assessment for educators to help identify relational aggression perpetrators, interventions, classroom/small group activities, and parent interventions. Randall and Bowen provide a brief introduction to relational aggression and definitions of terms, including a glossary of cyber-bullying, cyber-language, and emoticons. A survey to determine the baseline amount of knowledge girls have about relational aggression as it applies to them is provided, as are reproducible worksheets and activities that educators can use when working with relational aggression with students. However, again, caution is warranted as the book contains no empirical data substantiating the effectiveness of these interventions. Tools such as these as well as the popular literature on relational aggression are best considered supplemental to scientific and evidence-based approaches for addressing relational aggression. The emergence of relational aggression in popular literature and mainstream media underscore the importance of identifying evidence-based intervention strategies for school-based mental health providers (Merrell, Buchanan & Tran, 2006).

Prevention Programs

As research has emerged on this important topic, so have empirically-based interventions. Programs to combat school violence have been around for quite some time, and relational aggression is also becoming an area that is directly targeted. The following section addresses better-known violence prevention and relational aggression prevention programs.

The Ophelia Project

The Ophelia Project is more than one specific relational-aggression prevention program: It is a non-profit organization that creates and sells a variety of products and maintains a research arm (The Ophelia Institute) to promote awareness and prevention of relational aggression. The goal of the Ophelia Project is to prevent relational aggression and bullying through character development. Objectives include (a) team-building of school professionals to address relational aggression, (b) working as a unified group with common language to address relational and other forms of social aggression, (c) using older students as peer mentors to model positive peer ecologies, (d) including parents in creating and maintaining a positive school climate, and (e) empowering students to take a role in changing the environment. (http://www.opheliaproject.org/main/cass.htm)

The Ophelia Project has become a very popular program to address relational aggression in the schools. Dellasega and Adamshick (2005) evaluated Camp Ophelia™ and Club Ophelia™, two relational aggression prevention programs that use an "ERI model: educate, relate, and integrate" (p. 68). Anecdotally, Dellasega and Adamshick and found that middle school girls were affected negatively by relational aggression. Upon completing Camp Ophelia™ and Club Ophelia™, participants "developed a sense of confidence about themselves, their friend-ability, and what to do when hurt and where to go for help" (p.72).

Steps to Respect

The *Steps to Respect* (Committee for Children, 2001) is a bullying-prevention program is considered one of the best-marketed and highly referenced bully-prevention programs available (McDowell, 2006). *Steps to Respect* focuses on identifying bullying, responding to bullying, reporting bullying behavior to adults, and developing students' friendship skills. *Steps to Respect* also has a parent and staff component which guides them in best practices for responding to the victims as well as the perpetrators. The program contains classroom curricula through sixth grade, scripted lessons, posters, and topic-based reading for students (for example, *Blubber* by Judy Blume). *Steps to Respect* also emphasizes character development and friendship skills as primary methods to prevent bullying. As the program is intended to be school-based, school-wide implementation is recommended to encourage systemic attempts to address aggression. A longitudinal study by Hirschstein, Edstrom, Frey, Snell, and MacKenzie (2007) of 36 third- through sixth-grade classrooms showed that after one year, this program "corresponded to positive changes in playground behavior" (p. 18).

Empathy training is another important element to *Steps to Respect*. The training encourages pro-social development in an attempt to help every child be part of creating a positive school environment, further developing personal responsibility in one's own community. The *Steps to Respect* program is broken down into three levels: Level 1 is for third or fourth graders, Level 2 is for fourth

or fifth graders, and Level 3 is for fifth or sixth graders, with the curriculum varying at each level.

While *Steps to Respect* cites excellent statistics in lowering instances of reported bullying and office referrals, it unfortunately does not offer a curriculum for younger students. Furthermore, as with other bullying prevention programs, empirical data substantiating their claims of effectiveness are scarce.

Olweus Bully Prevention Program

Dan Olweus is a prominent psychology professor at the University of Bergen in Norway and is considered a pioneer in the field of bullying research. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has been selected as one out of ten model programs by the United States Department of Health and Human Services to be implemented in a nationwide U.S. violence prevention test (http://www.uib.no/psyfa/hemil/ansatte/olweus.html). The Olweus program's shortcomings mirror those of *Steps to Respect*: The lack of empirical research proving the program's validity and a lack of specific intervention methods to address relational aggression, specifically. The Olweus program, however, is intended to be appropriate for students as young as six years old, thereby making it suitable for early elementary school students.

Critical Analysis

Relational aggression among girls appears to pose a significant challenge for students in schools. Relational aggression can, at a minimum, impede learning for those involved. In more severe cases, instances of relational aggression can

escalate into much larger problems with significant consequences, including school absenteeism and depression.

Based on the literature reviewed for this proposal, the body of scholarly research regarding relational aggression among girls is growing, as is the awareness of the problem by the general population through popular literature. However, as most of the research is less than ten years old, the study of relational aggression among girls is still in its infancy. Fostering a school climate in which all students are aware of relational aggression and are given the tools to recognize it and stop it among their peers may be the most effective strategy to prevent relational aggression in the schools. As mental health experts, school psychologists play an integral role in the identification, prevention, and treatment of relational aggression among girls. As such, more information is needed regarding school psychologists' awareness, preparedness, and the interventions used to address relational aggression in the schools.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology of the study that measured Minnesota and Wisconsin school psychologists' awareness, preparedness, and the interventions used to address relational aggression in their schools. It also includes a description of the respondents, procedures, instrumentation, and data analyses.

Participants and Settings

Data were collected via an internet survey of the practicing school psychologists in Minnesota and Wisconsin during the fall of 2008. E-mail addresses were acquired via an internet search of lists of practicing school psychologists in both states. For Wisconsin practitioners, a list of practicing school psychologists was acquired from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) website. From the original DPI list of 960 practitioners, every fourth name was taken and e-mail addresses were acquired by searching the directory of each individual school psychologist's school. This procedure yielded 237 e-mail addresses. Of those, 40 proved invalid, leaving a net sample of 194 practitioners in Wisconsin.

Because the Minnesota Department of Education (MN DoE) does not maintain and allow public access to an e-mail distribution list of practicing school psychologists, participant e-mail addresses were acquired differently: A list of names and e-mail addresses was compiled through creating a list of schools by using the MN DoE's list of school districts, and from that list, 253 e-mail addresses were obtained through an internet search of each individual school. From that list, 37 e-mail addresses proved invalid, yielding a net sample of 216 practitioners.

Completed surveys were submitted by Wisconsin practitioners (n = 111) and Minnesota practitioners (n = 115). Specific demographic data regarding the respondents can be found in Tables 1-3 in the Appendix A.

Procedures

Initially, 490 potential participants were requested to participate in this survey research by an introductory e-mail sent during the first week in October of 2008. This introductory e-mail explained that an internet survey questionnaire would be forthcoming within one week. This procedure was done for the following purposes: (a) to notify participants that the upcoming e-mail was not "spam" (junk or solicitous e-mail) which would likely be summarily deleted, and, (b) to allow the researcher to eliminate invalid e-mail addresses by deleting addresses returned to sender. The introductory e-mail was sent both as a courtesy to participants and to increase the response rate.

The following week, another e-mail with a link to the survey was sent to potential participants inviting them to participate in the study (please refer to the survey in Appendix B). Participants were asked to complete the 36 question survey. Respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary, and an introductory statement explained that the survey was approved by the University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The internet survey allowed participants to skip any questions except for an item that asked participants to indicate if they practiced school psychology in Wisconsin or Minnesota. A follow-up e-mail was sent to all participants in late November of 2008, and participants who had already completed the survey were asked to disregard the request. The survey closed on December 1, 2008.

Instrumentation

A brief on-line survey developed by the researcher was the instrument used for the study. The survey was constructed to address the following research questions:

1. Are school psychologists prepared to address issues related to relational aggression in the schools? If so, how have they become prepared?
2. What interventions are commonly implemented in the schools to address relational aggression?
3. Do differences exist in the knowledge, preparation, and practices of school psychologists according to state of employment, years of experience, and gender?

Data Analyses

To answer research questions one and two, descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency counts, means, and percentages) will be used. To answer question three, comparative tests of significance (i.e., Chi Square, ANOVA tests and analyses) were employed to determine group differences by item. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a probability value of equal to or less than .05 was adopted to determine any statistical differences between the groups.

Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine how knowledgeable and prepared school psychologists in Minnesota and Wisconsin are when it comes to addressing relational aggression in the schools. The study also was intended to identify common practices or interventions used by the school psychologists in two states. Results will be reported according to research question.

Research Question 1: Are school psychologists prepared to address issues related to relational aggression in the schools? If so, how have they become prepared?

Assessing school psychologists' preparedness is multi-layered. To address this, the survey began with questions to assess school psychologists' overall training, research-based knowledge, professional development, curricular knowledge, and awareness of popular sources (movies or television shows, either fiction or non-fiction) of information in which relational aggression is featured prominently. School psychologists were then asked whether they had read three research-based journal articles specifically pertaining to relational aggression. Please refer to the survey in its entirety in Appendix A. For the purpose of this study, *preparedness* is discussed in two ways: School psychologists' affirmative responses to survey questions that addressed items noted above; and affirmative responses to whether they had read the three articles cited in the survey. Percentages can be found in Table 4 in Appendix C.

Specifically, answers to the first research question were addressed through analyzing the respondents' answers to the following questions: Have they attended a training session or seminar on relational aggression? Have they read a journal article on

relational aggression? Have they studied relational aggression as part of their professional development? Have they studied relational aggression as a component of an anti-bullying curriculum or program? Have they seen a movie or television show about relational aggression in school-aged girls? Data will be discussed using descriptive statistics.

Results indicated that 64.3% of school psychologists reported they read a journal article on relational aggression ($n = 144$), while only 24.9% attended a training session or seminar on relational aggression ($n = 56$). In rank order from most frequent to least frequent, school psychologists reported they became prepared to deal with relational aggression by: a) reading a journal article about relational aggression, b) seeing a movie or television show about relational aggression, c) studying relational aggression as one component of an anti-bullying curriculum, d) studying relational aggression as part of professional development, and e) attending a seminar on relational aggression (please refer to Table 4 for specific frequencies and percentages for each question).

Preparedness was also assessed by asking the school psychologists whether they had read three research-based journal articles pertaining to relational aggression. Affirmative responses were tallied to determine whether they had read each of the three articles cited in the survey. In terms of the specific research-based articles identified in the survey, 15.2% ($n = 34$) and 16.6% ($n = 37$), respectively, of the school psychologists reported they read each of the two articles published in *Communiqué*. Only 8.5% ($n = 19$) of the respondents reported they read the *School Psychology Review* article (refer to Table 4 for more complete data).

Research Question 2: What interventions are commonly implemented in the schools to address relational aggression?

Respondents provided information on commonly implemented interventions used in schools in two ways: By their affirmative responses to questions that asked whether they used any of five specific bullying prevention programs; and by answering questions related to non-curricular intervention methods.

Results indicated less than half of the school psychologists used the curricular intervention programs listed in the survey. In rank order from most frequent to least frequent, respondents reported they used the: a) Second Step and/or Steps to Respect, b) The Ophelia Project, c) Making Choices: Social Problems Skills for Children; d) WITS, and e) SAPP (refer to Table 5 for specific frequencies and percentages).

In response to the non-curricular intervention items, 66% of the respondents reported they discussed relational aggression one-on-one with students. Less than half of the respondents used other means to address relational aggression in the schools. In rank order from most frequently used to least frequently used, respondents reported they used the following non-curricular methods to address relational aggression in their schools: a) conducting groups to address relational aggression, b) conducting a bullying in-service that contained relational aggression as one component; and c) conducting an in-service in which relational aggression was the sole topic. Specific frequencies and percentages on these interventions can also be found in Table 5.

Research Question 3: Do differences exist in the knowledge, preparation, and practices of school psychologists according to state of employment, years of experience, and gender?

Given the last research question has three components, results will be reported as such. First, whether there are any significant differences in the knowledge, preparation,

and practices of school psychologists according to state of employment will be discussed. *Knowledge* will be addressed by the psychologists' responses to Likert scale questions about their overall knowledge of relational aggression in schools, relational aggression intervention programs, recent scholarly literature about relational aggression, and applied or research-to-practice writings on relational aggression. *Preparation* will be addressed by psychologists' responses to the survey questions stated in question 1; and *Practice* will be addressed by psychologists' responses to questions about activities relating to their daily practice (e.g., discussing relational aggression one-on-one with students, conducting groups for girls regarding relational aggression, working with specific bullying-prevention curriculum (or curricula), and conducting in-service presentations that address relational aggression.

State of Employment

In comparing Wisconsin and Minnesota school psychologists' knowledge of relational aggression, there was a statistically significant difference in how they would rate their knowledge of relational aggression intervention programs. One-way ANOVA statistics indicated that Wisconsin school psychologists rated their knowledge higher ($F(1) = 4.751, p < .030$). The other three survey questions that addressed areas of knowledge showed no other statistically significant differences by state.

One statistically significant result was found between Wisconsin and Minnesota school psychologists regarding their practice. Using Chi-squared analyses, Wisconsin school psychologists were more likely to use the Second Step and/or Steps to Respect program than were Minnesota respondents ($\chi^2(1,222) = 24.041$, $p < .05$. As measured by

this survey, no statistically significant differences were found between the preparation of Minnesota and Wisconsin school psychologists.

Years of Experience

Data regarding the school psychologists' years of experience were grouped in the following way: a) less than four years of experience, b) five to nine years of experience, c) 10 to 17 years of experience, and d) more than 18 years of experience. A significant difference was found in the preparedness of school psychologists by years of experience using Chi-square analyses (χ^2 (3,223) = 21.03, $p < .05$). This difference occurred on the item asking whether or not they had seen a movie or television show in which relational aggression in school-aged girls was featured prominently. School psychologists with less years of experience were more likely to have viewed a movie or television show on relational aggression. By age group, 75.9% ($n = 41$) of the group with less than 4 years of experience answered affirmatively to that item, whereas only 34.5% ($n = 19$) of those with 18 or more years of experience indicated they had watched a movie or television show on relational aggression. For specific frequencies and percentages by category, see Table 10 in Appendix C.

One statistically significant difference ($F(3,223) = 2.69$, $p < .05$) was also found in school psychologists' knowledge of relational aggression based on their Likert scale responses to the item that asked them to rate their knowledge of applied or research-to-practice writings on relational aggression. Those with 10 to 17 years of experience reported they had more knowledge in this area compared to those with 5 to 9 years of experience, based on post hoc Bonferroni analyses (means of 2.25 and 1.76, respectively).

Gender

Gender differences among school psychologists were also analyzed by item. No statistically significant differences in self-reported knowledge were found between the genders.

There were, however, statistically significant differences by gender regarding school psychologists' practices. Female school psychologists were more likely than male school psychologists to have used the Second Step/Steps to Respect program as an intervention ($\chi^2(1,222) = 4.66, p < .05$). Further, there was a statistically significant difference between the genders on the item that asked whether the respondents had conducted an in-service at school on bullying that contained relational aggression as one component. Per Chi-square analyses, male school psychologists were more likely to have answered affirmatively to this item ($\chi^2(1,223) = 6.67, p < .05$). Twenty percent of the male school psychologists indicated they had conducted such an in-service, whereas only 7.6% of the female school psychologists reported affirmatively to this item. For specific data by gender, refer to Table 11.

Chapter V: Summary and Discussion

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the important findings of this study and discusses how the results can guide both practitioners and researchers in working with or studying relational aggression in school-aged girls. As all studies have limitations, those are addressed as well.

Important Research Findings

Results of the survey indicated school psychologists have been asked to address relational aggression in schools. The majority (68%) of respondents were asked to intervene in an episode of relational aggression at the school(s) in which they work. Sixty five percent had discussed relational aggression one-on-one with students, and 23% had conducted groups with students to address relational aggression. This level of involvement in working with relational aggression seemed to be at odds with the limited amount of training and preparation, as less than one third of the respondents reported they had attended a training session or participated in a professional development session on relational aggression. Although 64% reported reading a journal article on the subject, many of the school psychologists (57.8%) had become aware of relational aggression through less scholarly means, such as by viewing a movie or television show in which relational aggression was featured.

Not surprisingly, findings indicated that there were few differences by state of employment, years of experience, and gender. However, Wisconsin school psychologists rated their knowledge higher than the Minnesota school psychologists. Further, the

Wisconsin school psychologists were more likely to have used the Second Step and/or Steps to Respect curriculum to address bullying and aggression in the schools. These findings were surprising given the similarities between the two states. Furthermore, post hoc comparisons between the Wisconsin and Minnesota samples found few demographic differences between the samples. However, the Wisconsin school psychologists reported smaller school psychologist-to-student ratios than the Minnesota school psychologists. Perhaps the Wisconsin school psychologists have more time to become prepared and to implement curricular prevention programs in their schools. It is also possible that the Wisconsin school psychologists have had more opportunity to become trained in the Second Step and/or Steps to Respect curriculum through their state's professional organization.

Two differences were found by years of experience. Less experienced school psychologists were more likely to have viewed a television show or movie in which relational aggression was featured prominently. Further, those with 10 to 17 years of experience rated their knowledge higher than those with 5 to 9 years of experience. Perhaps more experienced school psychologists are less likely to watch television, but have had the time to prepare themselves in this area through trainings and readings.

By gender, female school psychologists were statistically more likely than the males to have used the Second Step/Steps to Respect program, and male school psychologists were statistically more likely to have conducted an in-service at the school on bullying that contained information on relational aggression as one component. These differences may be attributed to gender-based preferences in addressing school-based

needs. Further study on the effects of gender on the role and practices of school psychologists are needed.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited in a few ways. First, the survey was regional and encompassed only two contiguous Midwestern states. These states were chosen because they were the states in close proximity to the researcher. A national study would have provided a larger scope of respondents, and national data would likely provide a greater breadth of comparison data when evaluating regions of the country or making comparisons between different states. Further, a national representative sample of respondents across states would allow for generalizations when making recommendations for training and practice.

This study also evaluated school psychologists' preparation through reading sources. One question asked about whether the respondents had read a journal article on relational aggression and three questions asked whether the respondents had read specific articles. Two of these articles were published in *Communiqué*, the newspaper of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), and the third referenced article was published in *School Psychology Review*, the quarterly, peer-reviewed journal of NASP. Of the total respondents, less than half (47%) reported they were members of NASP and 27% reported they were not members of any professional organization. Though *Communiqué* and *School Psychology Review* are accessible to non-members, respondents who are members of NASP or other professional organizations may have been more likely to answer affirmatively to any of the three questions pertaining to research-based articles. Therefore, knowledge of relational aggression may be limited for

those school psychologists who are not members of NASP or other professional organizations.

A third limitation of this study was the method used to acquire the school psychologists' names and e-mail addresses varied slightly by state. As mentioned in Chapter III, a comprehensive list of school psychologists was obtained by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, whereas a similar list was not available from the Minnesota Department of Education. As such, a slightly different method of obtaining names and e-mail addresses between states was implemented. Demographic data collected (in Tables 1, 2, and 3) indicated that 58% of Minnesota respondents practiced in suburban schools, whereas Wisconsin respondents indicated practices more evenly distributed among environments (urban: 28%, suburban: 30%, rural: 28%, and a combination: 14%). Further, other post hoc demographic comparisons by state indicated the Minnesota school psychologists had higher levels of education and higher student-to-school psychologist ratios than the Wisconsin school psychologists. It was unclear if the method of respondent acquisition impacted the study's findings in any way.

Another limitation was that, although school psychologists were asked about having seen a movie or television show about relational aggression, the survey didn't specifically address whether they had read any of the popular literature resources that were reviewed in Chapter II. It would have been informative to have data pertaining to school psychologists' familiarity with the writings of Simmons, Wiseman, and Blanco, particularly since school psychologists have been encouraged to seek out evidence-based sources and to avoid popular sources of information to guide their practice.

Implications for Future Research

Without question, it is the researcher's opinion that the lack of scholarly research about the effect of intervention programs designed to address bullying in general, and relational aggression in particular, provides the greatest need for future study about this topic. Prevention programs reviewed in this study cited anecdotal evidence about the efficacy of their programs via their own web-sites. Even the Hirschstein et al. (2007) study published in *School Psychology Review* (the quarterly, peer-reviewed journal of the National Association of School Psychologists) that studied the effectiveness of *Steps to Respect* was sponsored by Committee for Children, the publisher of that program. An independently-funded, longitudinal study comparing several intervention programs in multiple states would provide much-needed and objective information about the effectiveness of these programs. Fortunately, the need for further research on empirically-based school setting interventions for relational aggression will soon be addressed, as there has recently been a call for papers addressing this important topic in the March/April 2009 issue of *Communiqué*.

Implications for Practice

Results of this study will help guide practitioners in a number of ways. Results suggest that most school psychologists are expected to intervene in episodes of relational aggression in schools. As such, current practitioners and current school psychology students should seek out evidence-based interventions to help students recognize and combat relational aggression within their own peer ecologies. Further, training programs and districts should offer more professional development opportunities for school

psychologists and other educators to equip them with strategies to address bullying and relational aggression in the schools.

Additionally, the increasing occurrences of relational aggression as a topic addressed by the popular media suggest that this is a social construct that is pervasive and unlikely to recede on its own. The majority of school psychologists surveyed indicated they were familiar with popular media depictions of relational aggression. As popular media have a broad reach, it is likely that other school professionals and parents of students may have some level of familiarity with them, as well. School psychologists, as mental health professionals in schools, should have the tools and knowledge required to address questions and concerns, as research suggests relational aggression can be quite damaging to students in many ways.

Summary

Overall, the results of this study suggest that most school psychologists have been asked to address relational aggression in schools. Further, most school psychologists reported they addressed relational aggression in the schools by discussing relational aggression one-on-one with students.

By state, there were statistically significant differences in the answers of the respondents. School psychologists in Wisconsin reported a greater use of the Second Step/Steps to Respect program compared to Minnesota school psychologists. Wisconsin school psychologists were also more likely to rate their knowledge of relational aggression intervention programs as strong compared to their Minnesota counterparts.

By years of experience, psychologists less than four years of experience were more likely to have seen a movie or television show about relational aggression in

school-aged girls compared to the more experienced school psychologists. School psychologists with 10 to 17 years of experience rated their knowledge of research-to-practice literature about relational aggression in girls higher than those with five to nine years of experience.

By gender, female school psychologists were more likely than males to have used the Second Step/Steps to Respect program, and male school psychologists were statistically more likely to have conducted an in-service on bullying that contained relational aggression as one component.

Results point to the need for more training among school psychologists about relational aggression. This bullying behavior is unlikely to resolve itself in schools without more knowledge, awareness, and intervention among trained professionals. As school-based mental health experts, school psychologists have unique skills that can help girls navigate these difficult situations in schools.

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Appendix A: Courtesy E-mail Sent Prior to Deployment of Survey

October 7, 2008

Greetings school psychologists.

As you are undoubtedly aware, relational aggression has received much attention in the media over the past few years. However, little information about relational aggression has been solicited from the practitioners in the field – people like you! Because it is important to gather evidence-based information about the levels of awareness and training needs of school psychologists in the area of relational aggression, I have chosen to survey practitioners in the states of Wisconsin and Minnesota as my field study in order to complete my Ed.S. Degree in school psychology.

In the interest of respecting your time, I have devised a very brief internet survey that will take less than 5 minutes to complete. Please look for this survey to be in your email in-box on Friday. Of you have any questions, please contact me, Rachel Johnston, via e-mail at johnstonra@uwstout.edu.

Again, thank you in advance for your participation in my research study. Your responses will provide valuable information about this important issue.

Sincerely,
Rachel Johnston, M.S. Ed.
School Psychologist

Survey E-mail with Link to Internet Survey

October 13, 2008

Greetings again, fellow school psychologists.

Per my e-mail last week, relational aggression has received much attention in the media as well as in peer-reviewed literature over the past few years and I believe it is important for us as practitioners to be aware of ways to help our students deal with such issues in schools. As such, I would very much appreciate it if you would take the time to complete the very brief survey by following the link below. The survey should take less than five minutes to complete. All responses will be completely anonymous and your name will not be connected in any way with your responses.

If you choose to participate, please follow the link at the end of this email, which will bring you directly to the survey. Please note that if you complete this survey, the information provided by you will be done so with your informed consent. You have the option to not respond to any questions that you choose. The survey will be active for 30 days. If you have any questions, please contact me, Rachel Johnston, via email at johnstonra@uwstout.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the UW Stout Institutional Review Board at UW-Stout's Research Services Department at (715) 232-1126. Should you be interested in the results of this survey, please contact me at the above email address.

Please click below or copy and paste the following address into your browser:
http://www2.uwstout.edu/generalsurveys/TakeSurvey.asp?PageNumber=1&SurveyID=3KH9631J26m2Ll

Thank you so much for your participation in my field study research. Your input provides valuable information as to how practitioners are becoming prepared to deal with this frequently-missed bully behavior.

Sincerely,

Rachel Johnston, M.S. Ed.
School Psychologist

Final Reminder E-mail with Survey Link

November 20, 2008

Hello and happy Friday!

Per my recent e-mails, relational aggression has received much attention in the media as well as in peer-reviewed literature over the past few years and I believe it is important for us as practitioners to be aware of ways to help our students deal with such issues in schools. As such, I would very much appreciate it if you would take the time to complete the very brief survey by following the link below. So far, the feedback that I have received is that it takes approximately two-to-three minutes to complete. All responses will be completely anonymous and your name will not be connected in any way with your responses. I still need more responses in order to have a sample large enough to complete a valid study. If you get a moment to help, I would sure appreciate it! My survey closes this Sunday, November 23. I'd also like to thank those of you who sent kind words of encouragement or have notified me if the survey wasn't opening properly. If you have already completed this survey, thanks again and please disregard this request.

If you choose to participate, please follow the link at the end of this email, which will bring you directly to the survey. Please note that if you complete this survey, the information provided by you will be done so with your informed consent. You have the option to not respond to any questions that you choose. If you have any questions, please contact me, Rachel Johnston, via email at johnstonra@uwstout.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the UW Stout Institutional Review Board at UW-Stout's Research Services Department at (715) 232-1126.

Please click below or copy and paste the following address into your browser:

http://www2.uwstout.edu/generalsurveys/TakeSurvey.asp?PageNumber=1&SurveyID=3KH9631J26m2Ll

Thank you so much for your participation in my field study research. Your input provides valuable information as to how practitioners are becoming prepared to deal with this frequently-missed bullying behavior. I know this is a busy time for all of us and I truly appreciate your input. If you are interested in the results of my study, please contact me directly at this e-mail address or at 952-457-[redacted].

Sincerely,

Rachel Johnston, M.S. Ed.
School Psychologist

Appendix B: Survey

Survey

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

Relational aggression among school-aged girls has been an increasingly studied area of child development. The term relational aggression, commonly attributed to Crick and Grotpeter, can be defined as gossiping, rumor-spreading, deliberately excluding (i.e.: "silent treatment"), and/or withdrawing of one's friendship as a means of social manipulation with the intent to harm (1995). The purpose of this survey is to determine the level of awareness among school psychologists about this type of behavior.

1. I have attended a training session or seminar on relational aggression.
Yes
No

2. I have read a journal article on relational aggression.
Yes
No

3. I have been asked to intervene in an episode of relational aggression in my school.
Yes
No

4. I have studied relational aggression as part of my continuing professional development.
Yes
No

5. I have studied relational aggression as a component of an anti-bullying curriculum or program.
Yes
No

6.
Yes
No
If yes, please insert name of movie or TV show here

7. I have discussed relational aggression one-on-one with students.
Yes
No

8. I have conducted groups with students on relational aggression.
Yes

No

9. I have conducted an in-service at my school(s) on bullying that contained relational aggression as one component.
Yes
No

10. I have conducted an in-service at my school(s) in which relational aggression was the sole topic.
Yes
No

INTERVENTION METHODS

Several intervention curricula are available that address relational aggression either by itself or in part of an overall bullying prevention program. Have you worked with any of the following five programs in your school(s)?

11. WITS (Walk Away, Ignore, Talk – Use words, Not Fists, and Seek Help)?
Yes
No

12. The Ophelia Project?
Yes
No

13. Second Step and/or Steps to Respect (by Committee for Children)?
Yes
No

14. The Social Aggression Prevention Program (SAPP)
Yes
No

15. Making Choices: Social Problems Skills for Children
Yes
No

16. Please list other intervention methods that you have used in your school(s) that address the issue of relational aggression:

RECENT RESEARCH

The National Association of School Psychologist's newspaper, Communiqué, recently published a two-part article on relational aggression and addressing it in schools. Have you read the following articles?

17. Article 1: Relational aggression in children and adolescents: An overview of the literature for school psychologists. Communiqué 36 (5). Crothers, L., Bell, R. Blasik, L., Camic, L. Greisler, M., & Keener, D. (2008).
Yes
No

18. Article 2: Relational aggression in children and adolescents: Interventions and treatment programs. Communiqué 36 (6). Crothers, L., Bell, R. Blasik, L., Camic, L. Greisler, M., & Keener, D. (2008).
Yes
No

19. The following article was published in School Psychology Review: Understanding the effects of physical and relational victimization: The utility of multiple perspectives in predicting social-emotional adjustment. School Psychology Review 34(2), 147-160. Cullerton-Sen, C, & Crick, NR (2005). Have you read this article?
Yes
No

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being "not at all" and 5 being "very strong," please rate your preparedness, knowledge, or skill level in the following issues:

20. How would you rate your knowledge of relational aggression issues in the schools in which you work?
1 2 3 4 5

21. How would you rate your knowledge of relational aggression intervention programs?
1 2 3 4 5

22. How would you rate your knowledge of recent scholarly literature on relational aggression in schools?
1 2 3 4 5

23. How would you rate your knowledge of applied or research-to-practice writings on relational aggression?
1 2 3 4 5

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

24. I practice school psychology in (required item):
Minnesota
Wisconsin

25. I have been practicing school psychology for _____ years.
(Please insert number of years here.)

26. Please list your highest level of education.
Master's Degree
Specialist Degree
Doctorate Degree

27. I work:
Full-time
Part-time

28. I work in:
One school
Two schools
Three schools
More than 3 schools

29. I am:
Male
Female

30. I am _____ years old.

31. My ethnicity is:
White/Caucasian
Black/African American
Asian American
Native American/American Indian
Hispanic/Latino
Pacific Islander
Other
(no answer)

32. I would categorize the school(s) I work in as:
Urban
Suburban
Rural
A combination of the above

33. The schools I work in are (check all that apply): Select at least 1 response.
Pre-Kindergarten
Elementary
Middle school / Junior High
High School
I am in private practice

34. I am a member of the following professional organizations (please check all that apply):
Minnesota School Psychologists Association
Wisconsin School Psychologists Association
National Association of School Psychologists
None of the above
Other, please specify

35. The school(s) that I work in are:
Public
Private
I work in both public and private schools

36. Please indicate the approximate Psychologist-to-student ratio in your district or agency:
1 to 500 (or less)
1 to 501-1,000
1 to 1,001-1,500
1 to 1,501-2,000
more than 1 to 2,001

Appendix C: Tables

Table 1

Total Respondent Demographics

Demographic	*n*	%
Gender		
Male	51	23%
Female	172	77%
Age		
Under 30	43	19%
30 to 39	67	30%
40 to 49	49	21%
50 and older	67	30%
Years of Experience		
Less than 4 years	54	24%
5 to 9 years	59	26%
10 to 17 years	57	25%
More than 18 years	56	25%
Degree		
Master's Degree	64	28%
Education Specialist	139	62%
Doctorate	22	10%
Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	213	95%
Other	12	5%
School District		
Urban	53	24%
Suburban	98	44%
Rural	42	19%
Combination of above	30	13%

Note. Respondent sample ranged from 223-225 by item.

Table 2

Minnesota Respondents

Demographic	*n*	Percentage
Gender		
Male	28	25%
Female	86	75%
Age		
Under 30	21	18%
30 to 39	39	34%
40 to 49	25	22%
50 and older	30	26%
Years of Experience		
Less than 4 years	32	28%
5 to 9 years	30	26%
10 to 17 years	29	25%
More than 18 years	24	21%
Degree		
Master's Degree	18	16%
Education Specialist	81	70%
Doctorate	16	14%
Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	109	96%
Other	5	4%
School District		
Urban	22	19%
Suburban	65	58%
Rural	11	10%
Combination of above	15	13%

Note. Respondent sample ranged from 110-115 by item.

Table 3

Wisconsin Respondents

Demographic	*n*	Percentage
Gender		
Male	23	21%
Female	86	79%
Age		
Under 30	22	20%
30 to 39	28	25%
40 to 49	24	22%
50 and older	37	33%
Years of Experience		
Less than 4 years	22	20%
5 to 9 years	29	26%
10 to 17 years	28	25%
More than 18 years	32	29%
Degree		
Master's Degree	46	42%
Education Specialist	58	53%
Doctorate	6	5%
Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	104	99%
Other	1	1%
School District		
Urban	31	28%
Suburban	33	30%
Rural	31	28%
Combination of above	15	14%

Note. Respondent sample ranged from 108-111 by item.

Table 4

Preparation (N = 224)

Mode of Preparation	*n*	Percentage
Attended a training session or seminar on relational aggression	56	24.9%
Read a journal article on relational aggression	144	64.3%
Studied relational aggression as part of continuing professional development	65	29.0%
Studied relational aggression as a component of an anti-bullying curriculum	127	56.7%
Have seen a movie or television show about relational aggression	129	57.1%
Read *Communiqué* 36(5) article	34	15.2%
Read *Communiqué* 36(6) article	37	16.6%
Read *School Psychology Review* 34(2) article	19	8.5%

Table 5

Interventions (N = 225)

Mode of Intervention	*n*	Percentage
Discussed relational aggression one-on-one with students	149	66.2%
Conducted groups addressing relational aggression	42	18.7%
Given an in-service on bullying that contained relational aggression as one topic	23	10.4%
Given an in-service solely on relational aggression	1	.4%
Have worked with the following bully-prevention program(s) in my school(s):		
WITS (Walk Away, Ignore, Talk – Use Words, Not Fists, and Seek Help)	10	4.4%
The Ophelia Project	14	6.2%
Second Step and/or *Steps to Respect* by Committee for Children	89	39.4%
The Social Aggression Prevention Program (SAPP)	2	.9%
Making Choices: Social Problems Skills for Children	13	5.8%

Table 6

Levels of Knowledge by State (N = 224)

Type of Knowledge	Minnesota	Wisconsin
How would you rate your knowledge of relational aggression issues in the schools in which you work?	2.83	3.05
How would you rate your knowledge of relational aggression intervention programs?	2.04	2.30
How would you rate your knowledge of recent scholarly literature on relational aggression in schools?	1.96	2.08
How would you rate your knowledge of applied or research-to-practice literature on relational aggression?	1.91	2.10

Note. The higher the mean score, the greater the knowledge. Mean scores were based on ratings ranging from 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "very strong."

Table 7

Preparation by State (N = 224)

Mode of Preparation	Minnesota	Wisconsin
Attended a training session or seminar on relational aggression	23.5%	26.4%
Read a journal article on relational aggression	63.2%	65.5%
Studied relational aggression as part of continuing professional development	30.4%	27.5%
Studied relational aggression as a component of an anti-bullying curriculum	52.6%	60.9%
Have seen a movie or television show about relational aggression	56.6%	59.1%
Read *Communiqué* 36(5) article	13.0%	17.4%
Read *Communiqué* 36(6) article	16.8%	16.4%
Read *School Psychology Review* 34(2) article	7.9%	9.1%

Note. Respondent sample for Minnesota ranged between 114 and 115 per item, and between 109 and 110 per item for Wisconsin.

Table 8

Practices by State (N = 224)

Type of Practices	Minnesota	Wisconsin
Have discussed relational aggression one-on-one with students.	67.0%	65.5%
Have conducted groups with students on relational aggression.	14.8%	22.7%
Have conducted an in-service at my school(s) on bullying that contained relational aggression as one component.	8.7%	12.1%
I have conducted an in-service at my school(s) in which relational aggression was the sole topic.	0.0%	0.9%
Have worked with the following bully-prevention program(s) in my school(s):		
WITS (Walk Away, Ignore, Talk – Use Words, Not Fists, and Seek Help)	7.0%	1.8%
The Ophelia Project	5.2%	7.3%
Second Step and/or *Steps to Respect* by Committee for Children	24.1%	56.4%
The Social Aggression Prevention Program (SAPP)	1.8%	0.0%
Making Choices: Social Problems Skills for Children	5.3%	6.5%

Table 9

Levels of Knowledge by Years of Experience (N = 224)

Type of Knowledge	≤ 4 years	5-9 years	10-17 years	≥18 years
How would you rate your knowledge of relational aggression issues in the schools in which you work?	2.91	2.76	3.04	3.04
How would you rate your knowledge of relational aggression intervention programs?	2.13	2.14	2.30	2.11
How would you rate your knowledge of recent scholarly literature on relational aggression in schools?	2.07	1.84	2.19	1.98
How would you rate your knowledge of applied or research-to-practice writings on relational aggression?	1.98	1.76	2.25	2.04

Note. The higher the mean score, the greater the knowledge. Mean scores were based on ratings ranging from 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "very strong."

Table 10

Preparation by Years of Experience (N = 224)

Mode of Preparation	≤ 4	5-9	10-17	≥18
Attended a training session or seminar on relational aggression	22.2%	23.7%	28.1%	25.5%
Read a journal article on relational aggression	69.8%	59.3%	64.9%	63.6%
Studied relational aggression as part of continuing professional development	25.9%	25.4%	40.4%	24.1%
Studied relational aggression as a component of an anti-bullying curriculum	50.0%	55.9%	61.4%	59.3%
Have seen a movie or television show about relational aggression	75.9%	65.5%	55.4%	34.5%
Read *Communiqué* 36(5) article	11.1%	10.3%	22.8%	16.4%
Read *Communiqué* 36(6) article	13.0%	15.5%	21.1%	16.7%
Read *School Psychology Review* 34(2) article	5.7%	5.1%	15.8%	7.3%

Table 11

Levels of Knowledge by Gender (N = 224)

Type of Knowledge	Male	Female
How would you rate your knowledge of relational aggression issues in the schools in which you work?	2.96	2.92
How would you rate your knowledge of relational aggression intervention programs?	2.08	2.20
How would you rate your knowledge of recent scholarly literature on relational aggression in schools?	2.00	2.02
How would you rate your knowledge of applied or research-to-practice writings on relational aggression?	2.06	1.98

Note. The higher the mean score, the greater the knowledge. Mean scores were based on ratings ranging from 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "very strong."

Table 12

Preparation by Gender (N = 224)

Mode of Preparation	Male	Female
Attended a training session or seminar on relational aggression	21.6%	26.6%
Read a journal article on relational aggression	66.7%	63.2%
Studied relational aggression as part of continuing professional development	31.4%	28.7%
Studied relational aggression as a component of an anti-bullying curriculum	49.0%	59.1%
Have seen a movie or television show about relational aggression	47.1%	61.8%
Read *Communiqué* 36(5) article	19.6%	13.5%
Read *Communiqué* 36(6) article	20.0%	15.2%
Read *School Psychology Review* 34(2) article	7.8%	8.8%

Table 13

Practices by Gender (N = 224)

Type of Practices	Male	Female
Have discussed relational aggression one-on-one with students.	70.6%	65.7%
Have conducted groups with students on relational aggression.	17.6%	19.2%
Have conducted an in-service at my school(s) on bullying that contained relational aggression as one component.	20.4%	7.6%
I have conducted an in-service at my school(s) in which relational aggression was the sole topic.	2.0%	0.0%
Have worked with the following bully-prevention program(s) in my school(s):		
WITS (Walk Away, Ignore, Talk – Use Words, Not Fists, and Seek Help)	7.8%	3.5%
The Ophelia Project	7.8%	5.8%
Second Step and/or *Steps to Respect* by Committee for Children	27.5%	44.4%
The Social Aggression Prevention Program (SAPP)	0.0%	1.2%
Making Choices: Social Problems Skills for Children	8.0%	5.3%