A Review of Literature on Relational Aggression and Social Exclusion in Adolescent Girls

by

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ABSTRACT

This study reviewed the pertinent literature on relational aggression among adolescent girls as well as one its strong correlation with social exclusion. The purpose of this study was to also examine the various forms and characteristics of relational aggression such as indirect and social aggression that many researchers frequently use interchangeably. The research conducted on relational aggression is relatively new, though it has revealed evidence that suggests it is highly prevalent in adolescent girls. Social exclusion was found by research to be one of the main characteristics of relational aggression because a large fear of many girls is to be excluded and feel lonely. This study also looked at the affects of the aggressor and victim of relational aggression. The research has demonstrated evidence that there can be serious social-psychological adjustment issues, depression, severe loneliness, and low self-esteem that affect both the victim and the aggressor. The detrimental effect relational aggression has on girls only strengthens

reasons why this behavior should be researched more in depth including effective prevention and intervention strategies.

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this research study to all the girls who have felt the painful affects of relational aggression in their lives. Girls should be taught how to express their emotions in a healthy way so that relational aggression will not destroy so many friendships and self-esteems. I dedicate my career as a school counselor to helping students through some of the hardest stages in life by empowering them to discover who they are and figuring out who they want to become.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The hidden world of aggression amongst females is a culture in which relationships are fought with language instead of fists and knives (Simmons, 2002). In the culture of this aggression, the weapons are the silence of body language, the wildfires of rumors and gossip, and ultimately the threat of lost relationships (Simmons, 2002). The phenomenon of female aggression does not produce bruises, cuts, or broken bones; but tears, fear, and potentially the loss of self-worth. The scars do not naturally disappear. Unlike physical aggression, these scars are not often visible to others. Therefore, the perilous effects of this hidden culture of aggression need to be recognized and understood by teachers, counselors, parents, and these adolescent girls witnessing and experiencing it first-hand. This knowledge can be powerful to better comprehend, identify, and take preventative and responsive action to diminish the prevalence and effects of this behavior. Relational aggression in female adolescents is an imperative group to research and study due to the fact that previous research has found that relational aggression tends to be more characteristic of girls than boys (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

The concept of relational aggression can be difficult to grasp due to overlapping definitions in the field. Indirect, relational, and social aggression are three subtypes to this hidden culture of aggression (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Simmons, 2002). These types of aggression are very complex, making them difficult to decipher. Unlike direct aggression, indirect, relational, and social aggressions are not easily seen with intent to harm, since these types are more covert (Archer & Coyne, 2005). These three types of manipulative forms of aggression have been found to have more similarities than differences between them (Archer & Coyne, 2005). The researchers behind these definitions may disagree;

however for future research it would be advantageous to have an umbrella definition for all three. Therefore, for the purpose of this literature review on such a broad concept, the term relational aggression will be used to encompass indirect, relational, and social aggression.

Relational aggression is a new term used to describe the hidden culture of aggression in girls as seen through research studies, books such as *Odd Girl Out*, movies such as *Mean Girls*, and through being integrated into the language of the field. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) were the first to introduce and study the term relational aggression. However, it was not a new phenomenon (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006). Relational aggression was first defined as the manipulation of relationships by controlling another child by damaging the friendship and/or his/her feelings (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006). Relational aggression is a very complex form of aggression, containing numerous ways of using the relationship itself to harm the other person(s). Studies have found various forms of relational aggression that are acted upon in order to harm relationships, such as gossip, rumor spreading, ignoring, excluding, and breaking confidences (Archer & Coyne, 2005). One of the main goals of relational aggression is to damage feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996). Manipulation of the relationship is the intent of this behavior, with friendship being the tool for destruction. The intensity of manipulation is magnified if the importance of the relationship is high (Simmons, 2002). When the harmful effects of relational aggression are discussed, the victim is often thought of first instead of the aggressor. However, studies are also looking at the effects on and functions for the aggressor. This study of

literature focuses on the effects of relational aggression on both the victim and the aggressor.

Aggression is a characteristic of human nature and relational aggression has been labeled as a "rite of passage" for the transition between adolescence and becoming an adult woman (Simmons, 2002). Therefore, this detrimental behavior can potentially be seen as normal or just a phase. A study conducted by Werner and Nixon (2005) indicated that adolescents who believed both relational aggression and physical aggression were an appropriate response to conflict reported more acts of aggressive behavior than those who did not believe aggression to be an appropriate response.

Social developmental tasks in relationships such as peer status, approval, identity, intimacy, and a sense of belonging are all significant in the lives of adolescents (Werner & Nixon, 2005). According to Simmons (2002), these tasks have a potential to muster up relational aggression by leading to increased peer competition, confusion, and selfishness. Adolescents view friendships and peer support to be highly important in their lives. Consequently they tend to spend more time within peer groups (Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001). Parker, Rubin, Price, and DeRosier explained that this weight on peer relationships indicated why forms of relational aggression and victimization are more salient during this developmental time period (cited in Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001). During adolescence, peer status, approval, identity, intimacy, and a sense of belonging are all very common issues within relationships. This only creates a breeding ground for relational aggression when needs are not being met within friendships (Werner & Nixon, 2005).

According to Crick, Bigbee, and Howes (1996), social exclusion is one of the main forms and goals of relational aggression. Social exclusion was found to decrease prosocial behavior, decrease emotional responses, and impair the ability to have empathetic understanding for someone else (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007). This in itself highlights the importance of understanding social exclusion, as well as the damaging effects it causes.

Statement of the Problem

Relational aggression is a relatively new term in the field of human development and is being specifically studied more amongst adolescent females. Aggression is seen in both males and females, but relational aggression has increased significantly in female relationships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Relational aggression takes on many forms and has been significantly associated with social-psychological adjustment problems in childhood (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). There is evidence that experiencing relational aggression causes lasting and harmful effects. The pain and suffering involved in this more subtle and less direct form of aggression is felt by both the victims and the aggressors. The lasting impact is enough to warrant more research to understand this sort of behavior. This literature review will explore the various aspects of relational aggression, social exclusion, and look at the evidence of the damaging effects this behavior causes. Adolescent girls will be the primary focus, since the prevalence of relational aggression is so significant. The hope of this literature review is to help parents, teachers, counselors, and other professionals working in the field to better understand and recognize relational aggression in order to potentially reduce the occurrence and damage of this harmful behavior.

Purpose of the Study

In this study the researcher will review significant literature on relational aggression and social exclusion in adolescent females, as well as the effects on victims and aggressors. Information will be collected from available resources during the academic year of fall 2008 and spring 2009.

Research Questions

The questions utilized to facilitate this review of literature include:

1. What is relational aggression?

2. What is social exclusion?

3. What affects do relational aggression and social exclusion have on the victim and the aggressor?

Definition of Terms

In order to comprehend the research on relational aggression and related concepts, frequently used terms must be recognized and understood for the purpose of this review.

Clique is a close-knit group that allows relational aggression to prosper amongst its members.

Gossip within relational aggression is done maliciously through rumor spreading, a way to build an alliance against the other, or a way to indirectly harm the target (Simmons, 2002).

Indirect aggression is a covert behavior that allows the aggressor to avoid confrontation with the target while causing harm simultaneously. Acts may include intentionally excluding, ignoring, or rejecting someone (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Simmons, 2002).

Relational aggression is acts intended to manipulate, disrupt, threaten, or damage relationships, feelings of acceptance, or group inclusion and is usually done indirectly, but can be direct as well (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Simmons, 2002).

Social aggression is indirect and direct acts that are intended to harm self-esteem or social status within a group by manipulation of group acceptance. For example, rumor spreading or gossiping maliciously are often used with this form of aggression (Simmons, 2002).

Social exclusion is the intention to ultimately reject or leave someone out of a group of friends or close relationships.

Assumptions and Limitations

An assumption of this research is that resources pertaining to relational aggression and social exclusion are readily available for review. Due to the specific focus of this study, there may be limited resources pertaining to social exclusion and relational aggression in adolescent females.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

Relational aggression encompasses a wide range of definitions, related terms, observed and reported forms, and ties to the world of girls' relationships and aggression. Through research there have been variations to this kind of non-physical form of aggression, often found within girls' friendships and relationships. Indirect, social, and relational aggressions are three of the variations to this type of aggression that are discussed. To make the present study more comprehensive and concrete in the language, the term relational aggression will be used to encompass all three terms following the review of each.

Research has found many forms of relational aggression. Acts are overt and covert and have reactive and instrumental functions and purposes. Particular attention is made to relational aggression in girls for the purpose of this study since there is a higher volume of research as well as a higher salience in females as opposed to males. Social exclusion is one of the main forms of relational aggression which involves indirect and direct observations. Social exclusion also serves various functions in the relationships of adolescent girls. The effects of social exclusion and relational aggression can be detrimental and scarring on both the victim and the aggressor. There is a risk for serious adjustment difficulties for those who have experienced relational aggression. This review of literature primarily focuses on the variations, forms, and effects of relational aggression, along with a concentration on social exclusion.

Relational Aggression

Up until the early 1990s, aggression was looked at and thought of as primarily an issue in boys' physical aggression. Physical aggression is blatantly observed by parents, teachers, and other professionals working with children, so it is easy to empirically document. Much of the research conducted has found that boys are more aggressive than girls, which has led to the interpretation that girls lack aggressive tendencies (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). However, a unique form of aggression is being studied in relationships and is termed relational aggression. Researchers found that children view relationally aggressive acts as mean and aversive and that these acts occur most frequently amongst girls (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996). Relational aggression is a new facet in the realm of aggression.

Relational aggression involves acts intended to manipulate, disrupt, threaten, or damage relationships, feelings of acceptance, and/or group inclusion (Simmons, 2002). Acts can be both overt and covert; however a large amount of relational aggression is covert. The relationship is the weapon of destruction amongst friendships and the mere threat of loss can be severely damaging in itself. Relationships have been reported to be highly valued especially in girls as found by Apter and Josselson, as well as Cramer (cited in Remillard & Lamb, 2005).

Crick and Grotpeter (1995) first defined the term as relational aggression as inflicting harm through injury to another person or manipulation of a relationship. However, the term relational aggression was not the first concept that encompassed this non-physical form of aggression. Indirect aggression and social aggression are terms used to describe this hostile behavior as well. Ignoring someone to punish or get one's way,

excluding someone to get revenge, or using negative body language to send a message to the victim are just some of the ways in which relational aggression is manifested (Simmons, 2002). The forms of relational aggression are extensive and complex and are looked at in more detail later on in this literature review. In middle childhood, relational aggression transforms into a more complex and sophisticated behavior (Crick et al., cited in Archer & Coyne, 2005). During this age period, relational aggression tends to become more focused on the social group by excluding others, ignoring, or spreading nasty rumors (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

Indirect Aggression

Indirect aggression is a term that focuses primarily on social manipulation when the victim is not directly confronted (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). The original definition of indirect aggression came out of the late 1980s and since then has been revised and expanded to include other forms of such behavior. It is argued by Bjorkqvist that a defining attribute to indirect aggression is behind-the-back behavior (cited in Archer & Coyne, 2005); however, a more recent definition suggests that this does not always have to be the case. In 2001 Bjorkqvist et al. defined indirect aggression as attempts to cause harm to the target person by social manipulation, usually by attacking the victim through a third person in order to conceal the aggressive intent or pretending it was not meant to harm the victim at all (cited in Archer & Coyne, 2005).

Indirect aggression takes a more covert approach than relational and social aggression, resulting in a lower-cost way for the aggressor to harm others (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Indirect aggression is an alternative tactic to direct aggression, when the aggressor does not want to be identified or the harmful behavior to be seen as intentional.

Archer and Coyne (2005) provided the example of ignoring someone or becoming friends with someone else in order to stir up jealousy as an indirect form of aggression. The intent is not blatantly seen as harmful from an outsider. However, it is the victim who directly feels the pain, while observers may question why it is seen as intentional. Bjorkqvist pointed out that indirect aggression usually occurs through a third party person by damaging the victim's reputation or helping to spread rumors (cited in Gomes, 2007).

There are many forms of indirect aggression. Archer and Coyne (2005) provided some of the forms, such as: backstabbing, social exclusion, spreading rumors, ignoring, rejection, breaking secrets, criticism, turning others against, huddling in a tight circle, eye rolling, dirty looks, abusive phone calls, anonymous notes, imitating behind their back, becoming friends with another as revenge, embarrassing them in public, indirect physical aggression such as vandalism, and practical jokes have been observed in middle childhood and pre-adolescence. The behaviors that were found to be specific to indirect aggression from relational aggression were dirty looks, eye rolling, and indirect physical aggression. Compared to social aggression, the only difference in behaviors was that social aggression included verbal insults, while indirect aggression included indirect physical aggression. The forms of each aggressive behavior are quite similar in how they occur in middle childhood and adolescence according to Archer and Coyne (2005).

Bjorkqvist et al. found that older girls aged 11 and 15 years used more indirect aggression than 8 year old girls and the older social groups were more developed and also more exclusive (cited in Archer & Coyne, 2005). Indirect aggression partially replaces direct aggression as social intelligence develops over time (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

Ranging from preschool to old age, indirect aggression has been found to occur at every age studied thus far (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

Social Aggression

Social aggression has been seen as a broader term than indirect aggression because it includes both overt and covert forms of relational manipulation, as well as damaging nonverbal behaviors (Archer & Coyne, 2005). It includes physical behaviors that occur in social environments, making it broader in spectrum compared to indirect and relational aggression (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006). Various researchers continue to study this form of aggression. In 1997, Galen and Underwood interpreted the term as both indirect and direct attempts to harm others' friendships and social status by verbal and nonverbal social exclusion, malicious gossip, and manipulation of friendships (cited in Underwood, Scott, Galperin, Bjornstad, & Sexton, 2004). Social aggression is said to be the term least used in recent literature, with more focus on relational aggression (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006).

As Merrell, Buchanan, and Tran (2006) indicated, social aggression has been studied more in animals and the research is looking to know more about this form of human aggression. It was also pointed out that social aggression is not necessarily as indirect as relational and indirect aggressions are defined (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006). However, Underwood et al. (2004) argued that it should be used to encompass all three terms. There is much debate between what term should be used and what should be further researched. However, as noted by Merrell, Buchanan, and Tran (2006), researchers must be careful not to fill the field with too many terms for such a similar construct.

Forms of Relational Aggression

There are various forms of relational aggression within social relationships amongst adolescents. It is important to note that the form of relational aggression heavily depends on the goal of the act, which includes, but is not limited to excluding, manipulating, or socially destroying (Simmons, 2002). Psychological attacks consist of humiliation and/or manipulation of relationships which is also the form of bullying relational aggression is in (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Overt (more direct forms) and covert (more indirect forms) encompass what relational aggression is defined as in recent literature (e.g. Archer & Coyne, 2005; Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006; Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001; Simmons, 2002). As Archer and Coyne (2005) pointed out, relational aggression is usually seen in covert forms such as behind-the-back behavior or acts in which it is hard to recognize by outsiders. However, one must not get overt aggression confused with overt relational aggression.

Grotpeter and Crick (1996) explained the differences of relational aggression and overt aggression in a study conducted about dyadic friendships amongst the two different forms. Interestingly, the relationally aggressive children were found to have higher levels of intimacy, exclusivity/jealousy, and relational aggression within the dyadic friendship. Overtly aggressive children, however, were found to team up with a friend and engage in aggressive behavior towards other children, rather than within their own friendship (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996). Covert forms of relational aggression are like wearing an innocent mask in which the point is not just about avoiding being revealed by the victim; but it is also appearing as though your intention was never to really hurt anyone (Simmons, 2002). Girls know that the sugar-and-spice image is very powerful in the eyes

of outsiders such as teachers and parents and that by covering up the evidence of their vicious acts with sweetness, the aggressors are disguised (Simmons, 2002).

Relational aggression takes on many subcategories, names, and behaviors, causing harm and damage in the lives of those affected. Common forms seen in relational aggression include gossiping, spreading rumors, breaking secrets, directly giving the silent treatment, threatening exclusion to get what the aggressor wants, and/or rejecting certain people from the aggressor's acceptance (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Simmons, 2002). Nonverbal gesturing is also a distinct form of relational aggression where mean looks, rolling of the eyes, turning one's back on the victim, as well as many other body language tactics are used by aggressors (Simmons, 2002). Social exclusion is not only one of the main forms of relational aggression, but it is also one of the primary goals for this type of behavior (Simmons, 2002; Underwood et al., 2004; Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). Social exclusion is discussed in detail later on in this literature review because of its significance to relational aggression.

Adolescents right now are the first teen generation to be fully immersed in a culture of instant messaging, Facebook/MySpace/other networking websites, text-messaging, photo/video messaging, and facilitating the internet (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Electronic bullying is a form of relational aggression that is being studied by researchers more and more as Generation Y becomes more engrossed in the perils of what the internet can destructively create. Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) conducted a study that looked at electronic bullying among adolescents due to the significant increase of access to information on the internet and to personal electronic devices such as cell phones. Traditional bullying and victimization is highly related to electronic bullying and

victimization which is important to keep in mind for interventions. In fact, 85% of electronic victims were also classified as victims of traditional bullying and 94% of electronic bullies were also traditional bullies (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007).

Cell phones were found to be the most common form of electronic bullying through text messages (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Among the adolescents surveyed, 65% had access to a cell phone that had the capabilities of text messaging. It is important to point out that cell phones are allowed in most schools, which may make it easier for this form of bullying to occur on school premises. Victims of electronic bullying indicated that they also engaged in other forms of victimization, which included being bullies at school (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). The physical detachment and anonymity creates a way for the aggressor of electronic bullying to feel less remorse afterward. The victims of this form of aggression reported feeling sad, embarrassed, lonely, hopeless, and powerless after being bullied via the internet or cell phone usage. This study found that electronic bullying negatively impacted social and emotional development of adolescents and it is time to be proactive in preventing this from becoming more and more widespread (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007).

In adolescence, peer groups become more distinct with hard drawn boundaries between them. According to Parker, Rubin, Price, and DeRosier, more time spent with peers in adolescence and the importance for support from friends may be an indicator as to why relational forms of aggression increase within this age period (cited in Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001). Physical aggression may be becoming replaced with relational forms of aggression because it is a safer way to avoid getting caught (Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001). Boundaries between peer groups (cliques) may tend to be

maintained by acts of relational aggression such as exclusion, ostracism, or character assassination. Parker, Rubin, Price, and DeRosier also revealed that self-disclosure in adolescence increases, therefore making opportunity for secrets being used as a weapon when they feel their friendships are in danger (cited in Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001). In this study, the most severely maladjusted adolescents were those who were victimized by overt aggressors and relational aggressors (Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001).

Girls and Relational Aggression

Historically, aggression has been studied as being direct and physical and studied mostly amongst males. It was not until the early 1990s that research began to study "the hidden culture of aggression in girls" as Simmons (2002) referred to it in her book *Odd Girl Out*. Adolescent girls and grown women were interviewed and studied across the U.S. Simmons (2002) had asked them to discuss their experiences with relational aggression, along with the damaging effects it continued to leave behind. Simmons illustrated how girls were trapped within the perils that relationships brought while growing up. Girls were not discovered to be avoidant of aggression, but they created other means to channel their anger besides directly showing it (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). Social norms and rules that society has created have outlined the demeanor for how a girl is supposed to look, behave, feel, and think. These norms and rules are against any form of overt aggression, which has led girls to act in other nondirective forms of aggression.

Girls have been socialized in today's society to be meek, reserved, polite, pleasant, and yet powerful all at the same time. Early in life, girls have different rules for expressing anger than boys do in a study by Cole, Zahn-Waxler, and Smith (1994) done

on at-risk girls compared to at-risk boys. This study suggested that there is higher prominence for girls in regulating and suppressing their negative emotions compared with boys. The researchers of this study also found that disguising their true emotions actually appeared to have negative mental health effects such as hyperactivity, restlessness, externalizing behaviors, and difficulty concentrating (Cole, Zahn-Waxler, & Smith, 1994).

In 1999, a study from the University of Michigan found that girls were told to be quiet or use a nicer voice about three times more than the boys were, even though the boys were noisier (Simmons, 2002). This demonstrates how society trains girls from a very young age about how to act lady-like in order to be accepted by those around them (Simmons, 2002). Aggression is not a word that is usually associated with being lady-like; therefore showing anger is perceived as socially unacceptable. Their nonphysical aggression is described as catty, crafty, and evil (Simmons, 2002). As soon as girls act out their aggression, they are defined as a bitch or another derogatory name attached to being outwardly assertive (Simmons, 2002).

In one of the first studies to look at relational aggression, Crick and Grotpeter (1995) found gender differences to be a significant factor. Girls were said to be more relationally aggressive, while boys were found to be overtly aggressive (such as physical aggression). It was pointed out by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) that the lack of research on girls aggression may be due in part to the complexity and subtleness of the characteristic behaviors involved. The study looked at several factors including the degree of aggression (both relationally and overtly), sociometric status, and social-psychological

adjustment through self-reports and peer nomination scales. Results indicated that girls were increasingly likely to be viewed as more prosocial by their peers than were boys.

In an ongoing study of preschool to elementary age children by Hastings, Zahn-Waxler, Usher, Robinson, and Bridges (2000), girls showed more concern for others in terms of time, risk, and measures than boys did. Concern for others was rated on a seven point Likert scale. In addition, relationally aggressive girls reported themselves to be lonelier than nonrelationally aggressive boys. Relationally aggressive girls viewed themselves to be less accepted by their peers and more isolated from others than nonaggressive girls and boys. In terms of sociometric status classification, controversial status children were more relationally aggressive than all other status groups including popular, average, neglected, and rejected. The controversial group is an interesting status group, meaning that these individuals received a high rating of both liked and disliked by their peers (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). This suggests that these children use relational aggression to try and maintain and create their social status (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

A study on the differences of moral development amongst genders had been transformed into the two cultures model, implying boys' and girls' experiences are in "separate worlds" and that girls are more prosocial than boys are (Goodwin, 2002). The two cultures model was first developed as a framework for understanding differences in speech between the two genders (Maltz & Borker, cited in Underwood et al., 2004). The model was broadened to help understand social development in 1998 by Maccoby, saying that distinctive play styles of boys and girls develop within the different cultures of gender as they grow older (cited in Underwood et al., 2004). Girls are more likely to

engage in social aggression than boys are according to the model (Underwood et al., 2004). Research also found that girls are more likely to be focused on relational issues such as establishing intimacy and closeness with others during social interactions (Underwood et al., 2004). From early childhood, relational aggression is highly prevalent in girls' social interactions and has been found repeatedly across studies in contrast with physical aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Males are more likely to harm others through physical and verbal aggression, with the goals of physical dominance and a heightened status to be used as intimidation (Block, cited in Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

It is important to note that in contrast with several findings, some studies are not entirely consistent with gender having a concrete pattern in relational aggression (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). In a study of dyadic relationships between genders, Benenson, Parnass, and Apostoleris (1997) indicated that although the frequency of interacting in dyadic relationships was highly similar between genders, the duration of interaction within dyadic relationships among girls was significantly higher than boys. This was a study done among four to six year olds, which implies that dyadic relationships can be formed before the age of 5 (Benenson, Parnass, & Apostoleris, 1997). Further research is needed for frequency measures in dyadic relationships among older children and adolescents.

Structural differences in boys' and girls' relationships have been found. Rose and Rudolph (2006) found that middle childhood and adolescent girls reported getting more affection, loyalty, trust, closeness, security, validation, acceptance, security, enhancement of nurturance and worth more than boys reported from same gender peer relationships. In addition, boys reported just as much satisfaction in their relationships with the same gender as did girls. Emotional and behavioral outcome differences were found between

genders. Rose and Rudolph (2006) also found that receiving these relationship provisions was linked to a decreased risk of behavioral problems and potentially a more positive emotional adjustment. In fact, Crick and Grotpeter (1995) found that relationally aggressive children exhibited more social-adjustment problems. It is also interesting to note that Parker and Seal (cited in Rose & Rudolph, 2006) conducted a study at a summer camp involving middle childhood and pre-adolescent groups of children looking at social network density from the beginning of the camp until the end. They found that friends of boys were more likely to be friends with one another than girls were by the end of camp, but no differences were found when they first got to camp.

In a study conducted by Crothers, Field, and Kolbert (2005), gender role identity and relational aggression were examined amongst adolescent girls. It was found that girls who identified themselves with a traditional feminine gender role were more likely to view themselves using relational aggression. As for the girls who associated themselves with a less feminine nontraditional gender role, they perceived themselves to use a more direct means of aggression. Crothers, Field, and Kolbert (2005) also raised attention stating that girls who follow more traditionally masculine forms of relating to others are at more of a risk for rejection from adults and abandonment by female peers. In this study nearly all of the girls regarded abandonment and rejection as being extremely negative (Crothers, Field, & Kolbert, 2005).

Linguistic anthropologists have studied the female language interactions and have found that girls are much more socialized to speak in a collaborative manner, while boys are socialized to speak in a more competitive manner (Goodwin, 2002). Holmes (cited in Goodwin, 2002), a linguistic anthropologist, found that competitive styles of speech

emphasize the importance of status and dominance, while collaborative styles focus more on politeness and intimacy. Talking itself is a valued activity frequently centered as the goal of what is taking place. Girls have been frequently observed making commentaries about other children inside and outside of their social group, talking about experiences they have had together, and planning future activities together (Goodwin, 2002). While studies (Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992; Underwood et al., 2004) have found males to develop and establish clear hierarchies within their social groups, females form alliances instead of establishing hierarchies against individuals within the group to delineate between members of their group (Goodwin, 2002). This type of delineation can create considerable conflict by forming coalitions against one another.

Social Exclusion

Relational aggression comes in various formations and social exclusion is one of the main characteristics of this behavior. Social exclusion is also linked with social aggression, whose main focus is on harming social relationships directly or indirectly. According to Underwood et al. (2004), social aggression involves both verbal and nonverbal forms of social exclusion. Girls tend to congregate in numbers through a means of excluding someone from their circle (Simmons, 2002). Security is a foundation of a friendship, making a clear path of destruction for exclusion or rejection as a weapon of choice of the aggressor. Making someone feel less adequate or socially rejected is a means to get others on board by strength in numbers. Taking away something that is highly valued can be detrimental to any human being.

The sole title, *Odd Girl Out,* along with its entirety explains exclusion as a never-ending cycle that is tied to close friendships (Simmons, 2002). It is also said that

exclusion does not always constitute bullying. Exclusion comes also with the perception of the victim in context. It is important to remember as parents and educators, that just because girls sometimes use relationships as a weapon does not mean that every time a child feels rejected or a relationship does not work out that the other girl is being aggressive (Simmons, 2002).

Due to the variations in definitions of social aggression, indirect aggression, and relational aggression, some researchers such as Feshback and Sones and also Bjorkqvist say that social exclusion is an attribute of indirect aggression because it can be done in such a way that is unobservable to outsiders (cited in Archer & Coyne, 2005), whereas Crick and Grotpeter (1995) say that social exclusion is a characteristic of relational aggression. Nonetheless, social exclusion is seen through all three lenses and it is used as one of the main goals for this type of aggression.

Social exclusion has not only been studied in humans, but in other animals as well. In some species, by losing an aggressive exchange, the animal is kicked out of the herd or pack (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Even though this is direct aggression through physical forces, social exclusion is still an ultimate consequence for defeat. We as humans long to be included in a social group or be a part of a community. By a sense of belonging and acceptance, we are provided with countless benefits (Twenge et al., 2007). No societies are known to have most of the people prefer to live in social isolation from the rest of the world (Twenge et al., 2007). In order to feel a belonging to a group, prosocial behavior can act as a ticket in or as a mutual understanding of helping one another. A study done by Twenge et al. (2007) looked at the link between social exclusion and prosocial behavior. The motive for prosocial behavior is to benefit others,

not oneself. It was stated by the researchers of this study that performing such behavior makes sense because it allows one to feel a part of the group or community which is what we strive for as humans. Twenge et al. (2007) stated that prosocial behavior depends on believing that one is a part of a group where people mutually support and help one another. However, when that sense of belonging is threatened or one feels excluded, then prosocial behavior decreases (Twenge et al., 2007). There is the idea that the feelings and hurt of being socially excluded may direct one to cope with threats rather than being kind to others (Twenge et al., 2007).

Including, helping, and cooperating in a group are crucial foundations for social harmony and healthy relationships. People use their emotions to connect with one another by arousing the other person's inner feelings, which in turn causes them to care about the person (Twenge et al., 2007). Twenge et al. (2007) tested four different forms of prosocial behavior and found that by manipulating the exclusion of participants in seven experiments, their prosocial behavior was drastically reduced through simulations of helping others in need. In addition to decreased empathy, trust was also reduced in their study. The participants were willing to help out or cooperate prior to the simulation of being excluded, however after feeling rejected, their motivation to cooperate or help out dropped off the charts. This study pointed out a few things about social exclusion and prosocial behavior. First, social exclusion, according to the study, leaves the prosocial tool to connect with others temporarily futile to protect oneself from the disdain and intense heartrending emotion. Second, when one is socially rejected, one still wants new friends, however unlike the researchers' hypothesis, prosocial behavior is not a strategy used by those who are rejected to find new friends. Weakened trust and decreased ability

to empathize with others hinders them from making new friends initially. Lastly, Twenge et al. (2007) pointed out through their study that emotion plays a vital role by not only allowing us to connect with others, but also to protect ourselves from hurt. Social exclusion is a powerful relationally aggressive tool to manipulate and hurt one another and also to protect the aggressor's feeling of threat intervening with his/her friendships.

The two cultures model was created by Maltz and Borker which infers that girls may be more likely to engage in social aggression than boys are (cited in Underwood et al., 2004). Therefore it can be assumed that girls may engage in social exclusion more often than boys do. From this model girls have been found to value close friendships more than boys do (who value status and dominance more); in turn, social exclusion is often used as a powerful tool to demolish or threaten these relationships (Underwood et al., 2004).

According to Simmons (2002), girls know they are expected to be sociable, nurturing beings, especially with other girls. Isolation and solitude undercuts what a girl's identity is all about. Desperation can set in when a girl feels the threat of isolation coming on and can make them do things that would seem despicable to outsiders. Simmons (2002) described social security as a luxury and a girl will do whatever it takes to get through each class of the school day. Acts of exclusion may reassure her that she is still a part of the group, just hoping she won't be the next victim.

As illustrated in *Odd Girl Out* by Simmons (2002), a woman and her mother reflected on the daughter's experience of being excluded and rejected from her best friend as a young girl. The mother had also been rejected and excluded from the popular group growing up and decided she did not want the same for her daughter when she was

born. During the interview by Simmons (2002), the mother and daughter exchanged raw painful memories of similar experiences of being socially excluded and scorned by girls growing up. The mother tried to make her daughter included and be like the popular girls, ignoring the pain her daughter was going through. This is evidence for just how much exclusion can leave a scar on a person due to the intense pain he/she goes through at such a crucial time in life for acceptance.

Forms of Social Exclusion

There is a variety of ways social exclusion is carried out by the aggressors. However, it is important to include that exclusion is unique case by case, child by child, and professionals and researchers must not forget to evaluate the situation separately from one to the next (Simmons, 2002). Simmons (2002) illustrated cases in which social exclusion broke friendships, weakened self-esteems, caused isolation, and depression. In one of her interviews, she met with a middle-aged woman who told of her hurtful experience as a school-age girl. She was close friends with a girl who lived on her block growing up. The woman described her childhood friend as being "cute and magnetic" (p. 212); however, the woman herself felt much like the opposite. Simmons (2002) went on to describe this woman's experience of being lied to by her friend, saying she couldn't play only to find her and another popular girl playing outside her house as the woman rode by on her bicycle. Later on in seventh grade her friend and another popular girl turned on her and would purposely not invite her over after school. The woman described her past friend as being sly and elusive by not outwardly saying a single mean thing. The interesting part of her experience was that this woman would go home crying every night, yet still long to be a part of the very group that was rejecting her.

Social exclusion works in a mysterious way that sometimes only the victim and the aggressor(s) can see. As an outsider such as a teacher, school counselor, or parent, it is not apparent when a child is being purposefully and brutally excluded from a peer-group activity (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). Nonverbal gesturing can be used within some forms of exclusion such as mean looks, turning one's back, the silent treatment (purposely not talking to someone for a period of time), as well as other forms of coded body language (Simmons, 2002). Exclusion can be loud or silent, but either way, the victim is deeply affected by the pain it causes. Simmons (2002) also talked about how some girls find that excluding others is a fact of life and it's what they have to do to survive. Exclusion comes with cruel and dangerous implications, but can be a wickedly good opportunity to secure companionship between friends (Simmons, 2002).

Affects on the Aggressor and Victim of Relational Aggression

Relational aggression leaves a path of destruction, not only in the lives of the victims, but also the aggressors. The stories told in *Odd Girl Out* by women who vividly remembered how they were brutally emotionally hurt or how they destroyed a former friendship, reveal just how powerful this type of aggression can be throughout life (Simmons, 2002). Relational aggression is a controlling force that seems to engulf those who stand in its path.

The affects on the victim are endless and are still continually being studied by researchers in the field. Victims experience higher levels of peer rejection, delinquency, depression, school avoidance, and frustration with school compared to nonvictimized children (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996). In a study done with kindergarteners, the researchers found that victims of peer victimization had more school and relationship

adjustment problems than children who did not feel targeted (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996). In this study, kindergarteners who perceived their friendships to have low exclusivity (meaning low perception of mutual one-on-one friendship) had lower academic achievement. This study showed that at a very young age children begin to assess friendship quality and are psychologically affected positively or negatively which in turn affect their academic development and adjustment (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996). Twenge et al. (2007) stated that the emotional system of a rejected individual may shut down in order to cope. In turn, one becomes impaired to have empathy for others as well as engage in any type of prosocial behavior.

Excluding others is a way to protect one's close relationships when the aggressor feels his/her friendships are threatened by outsiders (Underwood et al., 2004). Conway (2005) suggested through her research on emotion regulation in girls that due to the socialization of girls on how to suppress their negative emotions, females are actually led to relationally aggressive behaviors. Conway (2005) posed the question that if girls' relationally aggressive behavior is due to the fact that they have been socialized to hide their anger on the outside, then what should educators do to teach them differently? Mental health and the well-being of young girls needs to be given high importance and direct focus by educators, parents, counselors, psychologists, and other professionals in the field (Conway, 2005).

In a study conducted by Remillard and Lamb (2005) on how girls cope with relational aggression, they found that 40% of girls who experienced incidences of relational aggression remained friends with the aggressor. However, according to Crick (1996), relational aggression distinctively played a part in the prediction of future social

maladjustment. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) also found that relationally aggressive children may be at-risk for serious adjustment difficulties because they are more likely to blame themselves for the aggression. Relational aggression therefore has significant effects on the victim and the aggressor in regards to adjustment problems in the future.

A study conducted on girls' social adjustment and defense mechanisms in rejection incidences found that social maladjustment was negatively correlated with the use of defense mechanisms in experiences of being rejected (Sandstrom & Cramer, 2003). The researchers looked at four different status groups of popular, average, neglected, and rejected and found that the neglected and rejected girls had higher defense scores than the average and popular girls did. Sandstrom and Cramer (2003) suggested that girls who had daily experiences connected with being unnoticed or rejected by their peers had negative preconceived notions about social interactions. This implication also suggested that in turn, the victims of relational aggression tend to process social information defensively in expectation that it will be negative. The daily experiences of feeling rejected, excluded, and victimized may lead girls to anticipate negative social interactions, consequently they may process social information more defensively (Sandstrom & Cramer, 2003).

Children were surveyed about various forms of behavior related to when girls and boys are angry and also when girls and boys are intentionally being mean. Crick, Bigbee, and Howes (1996) found that relational aggression and verbal insults were the most frequently cited behavior for girls and physical aggression and verbal insults were the most frequently cited behavior for boys. This study also revealed that both genders viewed relational aggression as aggressive by associating it with anger and intent to harm

someone. Girls viewed relationally aggressive behaviors in their peer groups as one of the most normative forms of aggression (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996). Interestingly, verbal insults were the most frequently cited aggressive behavior across the board for both genders amongst same-gender interactions as well as opposite-gender interactions. The increase in knowledge and awareness that relational aggression is getting seems to make the frequency of its happenings more apparent to both children and adults as demonstrated in this particular study.

The social-psychological adjustment on both the aggressors and victims of relational aggression in adolescents was studied by Prinstein, Boergers, and Vernberg (2001). Results indicated that victimization was most closely associated with internalizing symptoms such as depressive signs, loneliness, and self-esteem issues. Peer aggression was most associated with symptoms of disruptive behavior disorder. Victims of more than one form of aggression were at a higher risk for adjustment problems than victims of one or no forms of aggression. This study was the first to examine both overt and relational forms of aggression with looking at victimization and aggression. They then used this data to try to predict adolescents' coexisting social-psychological adjustment.

Prinstein, Boergers, and Vernberg (2001) found in their study on girls, in particular relational aggression and victimization, predicted simultaneous and future social-psychological difficulties. Relational victimization in girls related significantly to internalizing outcomes such as depression, low self-esteem, and loneliness. Girls who used overt aggression had lower self-esteem and more symptoms of depression than boys who used overt aggression. Aggressive adolescents are often viewed as ostentatious

instead of the opposite. It is also important to keep in mind that relational victimization and relational aggression are two different concepts. Prinstein, Boergers, and Vernberg (2001) pointed out that the best support for victims is to find connections with close social relationships outside the context of the aggression. Relational aggression can be detrimental to the psychological and social health of adolescents and should be taken very seriously.

Simmons (2002) stated that through her interviews all over the country, she found one trait that several female bullies and victims shared. That trait was that both bullies and victims contract a great amount of power and security from close relationships in their lives. These girls were terrified of being alone and when relational aggression intruded in their daily lives, isolation lingered, haunting their inner sense of safety and belonging. As humans, we are wired to need a sense of belonging and a sense of acceptance and when that isn't met fear sinks in and we think of anything we can do to preserve that need. Simmons (2002) described how girls will do anything to get through each hour of the school day just to survive that threat of losing social security. Desperation can drive girls to do things an outsider would view as inexplicable, such as being cruel to others or copying what other members of the group are doing or saying.

Interestingly Simmons (2002) also found that some girls explained how excluding one of their own friends provided some sort of exhilaration which as the author pointed out, is disturbingly similar to the feeling of close friendship. Talking with so many victims of relational aggression, Simmons (2002) heard over and over that they recalled the awful and wrenching feeling of loneliness more than any other cruelties such as the vulgar emails, the dirty looks, the lies and rumors written on walls and desks around the

school, or the name calling and whispers around them. Loneliness was what scarred many of them the deepest as victims of relational aggression.

Chapter III: Summary, Critical Analysis, Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter will include a summary of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. It will also include a critical analysis of the literature that was studied through this review. Recommendations will be discussed for parents, professionals in the field, and for future research that is needed to fill in the gaps on what is currently known about relational aggression.

Summary of the Literature Review

The literature has shown that relational aggression is an issue that needs to be addressed, especially among adolescent girls. This type of aggression is highly complex, with harmful effects on those who have experienced it. Relational aggression itself is a new term, however over the past forty years, it has been studied through terms such as indirect and social aggression. This literature review looked at some studies that would argue that these terms have differences that are significant enough to keep them distinctly separate from one another (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Underwood et al., 2004). Through conducting this literature review, it was apparent that it is crucial not to get too focused on the terms in order to study relational aggression.

This literature review also looked at how relational aggression is primarily found in females as opposed to males who tend to be more physically aggressive (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Simmons, 2002). In addition, this literature review researched how girls tend to use more indirect forms of aggression due to various factors such as the stigma females have on them to suppress negative emotions and to appear innocent and nice mannered (Cole, Zahn-Waxler, & Smith, 1994;

Goodwin, 2002; Simmons, 2002). Various forms of relational aggression were also researched. Relational aggression can be carried out such as exclusion, gossip, behind-the-back behavior, rumor spreading, manipulation of friendship circles, and the very threat of taking a friendship away (Simmons, 2002).

Relational, Indirect, and Social Aggression

The literature strives to help readers understand the differences and similarities between these three concepts. Archer and Coyne (2005) conducted an integrated review on all three, pointing out key characteristics of each term. Highlights of relational, indirect, and social aggression revealed that a few key aspects separate them, such as intended endpoints on individuals and groups of people. They all indicated varying levels of risk for the aggressor to be known to the victim (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Indirect aggression has been found to have the lowest cost to the aggressor being able to go behind-the-back of the victim or deny the harmful intention overall (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

Archer and Coyne (2005) also pointed out that relational aggression can be overt or covert, with the intention to disrupt or manipulate friendships, unlike indirect aggression which is only covert in intent. Social aggression is the term that is more distinct from indirect and relational aggression because of its intended endpoint (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006). This form of aggression seeks to manipulate group acceptance and damage social standings of other members. Social exclusion is a main descriptor of social aggression, with verbal and nonverbal ways of manipulating others (Underwood et al., 2004). It is easy to get caught in the terminology of the concepts. However, researchers and professionals need to focus on what needs to

be done to understand, minimize, and ultimately prevent this type of aggression. Some researchers, including this literature review, chose to generalize the terms and solely use relational aggression (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006; Simmons, 2002). This tactic was for the purpose of diminishing any unnecessary confusion and to keep the research more concrete and comprehensive.

Girls and Relational Aggression

In the past, girls have been overlooked in studies on aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Primarily aggression was linked to males and shown physically (Crick, Grotpeter, & Bigbee, 2002). An ethnographic study by Goodwin (2002) looked at language differences and moral reasoning between genders among younger children. According to this study, the experiences of girls' and boys' relationships are different and in two separate worlds (Goodwin, 2002). In addition, according to the two cultures model, girls are more likely to engage in social aggression than boys (Underwood et al., 2004). Implications have been looked at concurrently with this model, indicating that girls value close relationships more than status or dominance, while boys have been reported to value status and dominance more than close relationships (Underwood et al., 2004).

It can be explained why social aggression would be successful in order to hurt one another because female friendships are found to be the most valued relationships amongst girls (Crothers, Field, & Kolbert, 2005). Girls interact and communicate differently than boys and have different moral reasoning for excluding others out of the group. Alliances are formed among girls' relationships that create status positions in groups instead of hierarchies that boys tend to use, especially in sports activities and discussions (Goodwin,

2002). It cannot be ignored that girls' friendships are structured differently than boys' friendships are in terms of dynamics, goals, and interactions.

Girls have been socialized much differently than boys. They are expected to be quieter, more reserved, more passive, and all around better-behaved than boys are. Zahn-Waxler looked at developmental evidence that suggested from early on, parents socialize girls to abstain from showing overt aggression and anger (cited in Underwood et al., 2004). They tend to place more importance on close intimate relationships than boys do, in turn creating more pressure to maintain and keep those friendships. The hidden culture of aggression in girls has created a heightened awareness and an increase in research. Girls are being recognized to be just as aggressive as boys, only typically in a different manner (Simmons, 2002).

Social Exclusion

Social exclusion is one of the dominant tools that relational aggression utilizes. Excluding from a peer group is a tactic used to gain power, control, a way to manipulate, and a way to harm victims of relational aggression. Underwood et al. (2004) conducted a study on social exclusion that found girls to use more nonverbal social exclusion tactics than boys. Social exclusion is a way to protect close relationships when one feels threatened by outsiders (Sandstrom & Cramer, 2003; Simmons, 2002; Underwood et al., 2004). This form of relational aggression is also found to be detrimental to the use of prosocial behavior because of the emotional distress it causes, which in turn decreases connectedness with friendships in one's life (Twenge et al., 2007).

Effects on the Aggressor and Victim of Relational Aggression

The effects relational aggression has is damaging, not only to the victim, but also to the aggressor (Crick, Grotpeter, & Bigbee, 2002). The literature illustrates how problematic relational aggression can be in the lives and relationships of adolescents. Relational aggression has created emotional scars on adolescent girls and has caused social, psychological, and emotional adjustments problems (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996; Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001; Simmons, 2002). Victims and aggressors, interestingly, carry similar traits such as internalizing depressive symptoms, drawing upon power and security from close relationships, and using desperate measures to keep those relationships as close as possible (Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001; Simmons, 2002).

Critical Analysis of the Literature Review

The available literature reviewed in Chapter Two provided strong evidence that aggression is a part of life. However, what has been found on relational aggression cannot necessarily be generalized to all children or adults. Research has also supported that relational aggression is a complex and harmful behavior that is found mostly in girls' same gender relationships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). However, as some research has shown, relational aggression is also found in boys' relationships (Underwood et al., 2004). Boys have been found to use physical aggression more to gain dominance or status (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). It must not be disregarded that when physical and relational aggression have been looked at in both genders, outcome research has indicated that boys and girls are almost equal in terms of frequency of aggression (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996).

Relational aggression is a newer term and many researchers have become too focused on which term to use for this covert form of aggression. Indirect and social aggressions have both been defined, with more similarities and fewer differences between the three terms. Some researchers, such as Simmons (2002) and Merrell, Buchanan, and Tran (2006), have conceptualized the term and used relational aggression to describe such behavior. This makes the research more concrete and easier to fully understand this type of aggression by professionals in the field. When terms that are very similar are used differently in the field, the implications from these studies can be difficult to interpret and recognize. As Underwood et al. (2004) pointed out, studying relational aggression and gender differences can be confusing, not only due to the methods and samples used, but also due to the overlapping, but not identical concepts of this form of aggression. For this reason, relational aggression was used as the general term for indirect, social, and relational aggressions within this literature review.

Unlike physical aggression, relational aggression is much more complex and difficult to observe within relationships (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). Methods of research have sought to find the best way to study relational aggression. However, it is difficult to decipher mean looks, rumors, and exclusion as opposed to hitting, punching, and kicking. As Young, Boye, and Nelson (2006) also pointed out, the little tangible evidence of the effects of relational aggression makes it difficult to identify and study in depth. As several studies (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Remillard & Lamb, 2005; Underwood et al., 2004) have tried to use various forms of instruments and methods to measure the effects and prevalence of relational aggression,

there are many variables that go into the accuracy of the perceived definition and effects of such behavior.

There have been few studies that have researched a large sample of solely adolescent girls, which limits the representation and inference to the general population. In this literature review, the study with the highest sample volume was by Crick, Grotpeter, and Bigbee (2002) with 825 participants including both males and females. The majority of the remaining studies from this literature review had sample sizes less than 500 subjects and most included both girls and boys as well. Like several other studies in this literature review on relational aggression (Benenson, Parnass, & Apostoleris, 1997; Crick, 1996; Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Cullerton-Sen & Crick, 2005) the participants in this study by Crick, Grotpeter, and Bigbee (2002) were also entirely elementary-age children. There are fewer studies that are focused on adolescents and adults pertaining to relational aggression; however more studies (Crothers, Field, & Kolbert, 2005; Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001; Werner & Nixon, 2005) are beginning to research these older age groups as awareness increases about this form of aggression.

Recommendations

School counselors should especially be educated and aware of relational aggression in the schools. Teachers, parents, and students should be able to come to counselors for assistance and to provide intervention services for these types of behaviors. As the literature pointed out in this review, relational aggression can be highly detrimental to the social, emotional, and psychological well-being of children and

adolescents. School counselors need to promote a safe environment by spreading awareness about specific behaviors, warning signs, and effects these have on students.

Many of the studies on relational aggression have looked primarily at younger age elementary children. Therefore, more research is needed specifically on adolescents and adults. Intervention strategies also need to be further researched on their effectiveness within the schools. The programs that have been created to prevent and intervene with relational aggression need to be utilized and put into practice. Training sessions should be run for school staff to attend to learn the signs, effects, and consequences of this damaging behavior on both aggressors and victims. By learning how to recognize the damage this aggression has on those involved, action can be taken to help decrease and prevent the large occurrence of this behavior, especially among girls' relationships. Also, by helping girls understand their own behavior within relational aggression, steps can be made to promote empathy and awareness in order to diminish the harmful effects of this sort of aggression. It is important as professionals working with this age group to be able to comprehend what some of them are often dealing with at school and know when to intervene and take action. Understanding students, daughters, and friends who encounter and experience relational aggression can help take a step in the right direction to diminish the damaging effects on the self-esteem, friendships, and well-being of these young people.

All school staff should be educated and trained for prevention and intervention with relational aggression in order to effectively decrease the prevalence in the schools. Raskauskas and Stoltz (2004) pointed out that school nurses are also often the ones confronted and dealing with victims of relational aggression in schools. Stomachaches,

headaches, and sleep disturbances are common physical complaints heard by school nurses that victims of relational aggression come into the health room to escape. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) states that schools need to be safe places for children to achieve their maximum potential (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2004). These authors also pointed out that when fear is experienced by a child who is being targeted, his/her learning is impaired. School personnel need to be aware of what is going on around them and as these authors pointed out, anyone can potentially be the one students run to for help.

In a study by Cullerton-Sen and Crick (2005), it was highlighted that teachers were crucial for reporting relational aggression in order to gather information on children's adjustment. Early intervention increases the chances on reducing the damage that can be done by this aggressiveness. Teachers are in the right position to make this happen. Peers, parents, and other school personnel are also vital to the prevention and intervention of this type of destructive behavior.

It would be highly advantageous for future research to explore relational aggression specifically in adolescent girls since this group has been found to experience the most relational aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). School is where children and adolescents spend the majority of their day. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers, counselors, parents, and adolescent girls be able to understand, identify, and learn ways to minimize and prevent relational aggression in schools.

Recommendations for intervention strategies were discussed by Raskauskas and Stoltz (2004) for schools to implement. The first step for intervention is policies on aggression or bullying should include relational aggression, along with descriptions of

various forms of this behavior. Students, staff, and parents should be educated and made aware of these types of aggressive behaviors. These authors also recommended that reports from victims of relational aggression need to be taken seriously and to let them know that counselors support them and are there to help. In addition to providing support, when reports are made, make sure to get all relevant information pertaining to the incident. Groups centered on friendships can be helpful for another support system for victims of relational aggression. The authors concluded their recommendations with making sure activities at school are adequately supervised, which includes passing time in the hallways, recess, and lunch periods.

A different perspective on intervention is held by Merrell, Buchanan, and Tran (2006). They recommended that interventions not be focused on relational aggression in specifics, but to create more of a broad focus within the realm of social emotional learning and positive behavior support interventions. Clearly the field contains various viewpoints on what should be done about relational aggression in schools. Interventions and programs do not always work for every setting or situation, so various approaches should be tried if one does not seem to fit.

What school counselors, school faculty, parents, and students can do is be aware of the effects this behavior causes, along with strategies to intervene. School is the place where students learn, develop emotionally, socially, and psychologically, and also where they can trust to be a safe place. It is important to remember that relational aggression cannot be entirely extinguished, but it can be reduced. By teaching children and adolescent girls how to be assertive, communicate effectively, develop healthy emotional relationships with themselves, learn how to express feelings both negative and positive,

and by teaching them how to endure healthy relationships, relational aggression will not have as large of a chance to break down girls' friendships and emotional well-being. Relational aggression will always be present in schools and within relationships; this cannot be stopped due to human nature. With that said, teach girls how to talk to one another, how to argue effectively, and how to resolve problems in a healthy manner. When girls can be able to learn how to express their emotions in a manner that allows them to effectively handle arguments, fights, and differences is when deep wounds from relational aggression can be prevented and the scars can begin fade.

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