

OF CRABS AND TALL POPPIES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF ATTITUDES
AND COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIORS TOWARD WOMEN PERCEIVED AS
SUCCESSFUL

by
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Abstract of Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory, qualitative study will examine female attitudes and communication behaviors generated in response to women who are perceived as advantaged or “successful”. The current study used the Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS) as a framework for this investigation. Tall Poppy Syndrome, an Australian cultural expression, describes a “disease” that feeds on the notion that anyone who appears to represent high ability or admirable qualities (also known as ‘tall poppies’) must be attacked, demeaned, and brought down to the common level. Individuals with TPS, (known as “poppy clippers”) believe others’ perceived advantages to be an affront--an unbearable reminder of their own shortcomings (Peeters, 2004). This study investigates the characteristics of and underlying contributors to TPS within the context of American, Caucasian intrafemale relationships. Being a “tall poppy” or a “poppy clipper” could potentially cause women to experience relational conflict in social and organizational contexts leading to outcomes such as interpersonal clashing, indirect aggression, covert maliciousness, unfulfilled potential and organizational “brain drain.” The research appears to indicate that a talented “tall poppy” is in a conundrum: if she is successful, she risks exclusion by her female peers. If she “plays small”, she risks her own personal and professional fulfillment. This study examines a perplexing concern for many females: It sometimes appears that when talented, successful women try to flourish, there are frequently nearby females ready to pull them down. Does the successful, confident woman feel “pulled down” or “clipped” by members of the “sisterhood” who see her as a threat? Are these talented women the target of other women’s envy?

What role might some women play in holding other women back? To gain insight on these questions and on the TPS phenomenon, focus group data from 40 adult, Caucasian women in a midwestern area was collected and analyzed using the grounded research methodology (Glaser & Straus, 1967). Using the Tall Poppy Syndrome construct, this study explains how women respond and assign meaning to a perceived tall poppy, as well as how the 'tall poppy' responds to the envious rival. Generally, findings focused on the perceived characteristics of tall poppies and poppy clippers, the negative communication behaviors poppy clippers use and finally, strategies the tall poppy uses in response to the poppy clipper. This research will add to the existing knowledge base on organizational, gender and interpersonal communication and may be a determining force in the effectiveness and stability of female relationships within society. With more information on this subject, organizations can provide awareness, open-dialogue opportunities, and appropriate training to minimize TPS's negative outcomes.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Our society needs exceptional women to lead organizations, solve problems, create ideas and positively impact the next generation. Until recently, the majority of recognized “exceptional” individuals were men, which had more to do with tradition and sexism than with a woman’s talents. As a result, many women are denied the pleasure that can come from expressing their abilities in the public sphere, and as such, society suffers in that it does not benefit from full use of all its human resources (Noble, Subotnik & Arnold, 1999). Most literature that examines this issue focuses on gender inequity and the glass ceiling. Though important, this thesis argues that one of the most significant obstacles to success for women is other women.

Statement of Problem and Purpose of Study

Too many successful, talented adult women, “play small” in order to avoid social exclusion and to survive shared space with invidious women (Reis, 1991). Around competitive, envious females, women who are perceived as successful often feel uncomfortable letting their “light shine” or allowing themselves to “bloom.” When talented, successful women try to flourish, there are frequently other nearby females ready to pull them down (1991). This phenomenon operates much like the nature of a blue crab. If you place one crab in a bucket, you must put a lid on the bucket to keep the crab from climbing out; but if you place two or more crabs in a bucket, you do not need a lid because none of the crabs will let another crab escape. The crabs will hold on to each other until they pull the more successful “escapee” back down (Shepler, 2006). Is this the experience of talented, high achieving American women today? *Does the talented or*

advantaged woman feel “pulled down” by other women who may perceive her as a threat? If so, what is the communicative outcome? The purpose of this research is to study female attitudes and communication behaviors that may occur in response to women who are perceived as advantaged or “successful”.

Conceptual Framework

The current study used the Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS) as a framework for this investigation. Tall Poppy Syndrome, an Australian cultural expression, describes a “disease” that feeds on the belief that anyone who appears to represent “success”, high ability or admirable qualities must be attacked, demeaned, and cut down to the common level. Individuals with TPS, (who are referred to as “poppy clippers”) believe others’ perceived advantages to be an affront--an unbearable reminder of their own shortcomings (Peeters, 2004). This study investigates the characteristics of and underlying contributors to TPS within the context of American, Caucasian intra-female relationships

Being perceived as a tall poppy or a “poppy clipper” could potentially cause women to experience relational conflict in social and organizational contexts which could lead to negative outcomes such as indirect aggression, covert maliciousness and unfulfilled potential. This study sought to investigate Tall Poppy Syndrome using female participants in focus groups who shared their experiences of being the tall poppy or the poppy clipper. Exploring how women respond and assign meaning to a tall poppy, as well as how the perceived tall poppy responds to the clipper, adds to the existing knowledge base on organizational, gender and interpersonal communication. A comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon could positively affect the

development of more effective and stable female relationships within society. With better information on this subject, organizations and social venues can provide awareness, open-dialogue opportunities, and appropriate training to minimize TPS's negative outcomes.

As mentioned, the current study uses the Tall Poppy Syndrome construct to scrutinize American women's communicative behavior with each other. Because research on the Tall Poppy Syndrome construct is sparse, and limited to Australian research studies, related American phenomenon and theory that may broaden our understanding of TPS will be reviewed.

CHAPTER TWO: DEFINITION OF TERMS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Terms

Though this research attempts to further define the characteristics of a tall poppy, a poppy clipper and of Tall Poppy Syndrome, for the purposes of introduction, the research briefly qualifies the existing definition(s) as such:

Tall Poppy: There is no universal definition of a tall poppy; therefore, "tall poppy" will be used interchangeably with a perceived "high-achiever," and at times with a perceived "successful individual," as is done in previous TPS literature (Peeters, 2003). "Tall Poppy" will further be understood as someone who is perceived by another as *above average or more talented than the perceiver* in any arena: sports, beauty, wealth, skills, etc... and is "a person who

is...successful and...as one whose distinction, rank, or wealth attracts envious notice or hostility” (Ramson, 1988, p. 494).

Success: This study defines success as, “*the attainment of wealth, favor, or eminence*” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2006).

Poppy Clipper: The researcher of this study created this expression as a way to refer to any individual who seeks to cut down or diminish the tall poppy.

Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS): This syndrome refers to cutting down successful people when others think they are “getting too tall” (Mitchell, 1984).

Literature Review

Tall Poppy Syndrome Construct

Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS) is a well-known “phenomenon” in Australia. TPS is an expression and a “philosophy” that is said to have originated hundreds of years ago, though was first recorded in the Australian National Dictionary in 1902 (Peeters, 2003).

According to Tracinski (2002), a person who has TPS is overly critical or envious of someone’s actual or perceived status, and socially compares herself with the successful other. Tracinski further asserts that individuals with TPS believe others’ successes to be an affront--an agonizing reminder of their own inadequacies (2002). Lastly, TPS describes a “disease” that feeds on the notion that anyone who appears to represent high ability must be attacked, demeaned, and brought down to the common level.

According to Ceramalus (1994), TPS is another way of saying you are in favor of ‘anti-talent’ for selfish reasons. Ceramalus notes, “TPS is “comprised of envy, covetousness and jealousy” (p. 75). Peeters (2003) states that to “tall poppy” someone is

done by making an adverse comment with a communicative goal of lowering a person's status (p. 3). According to Mouly and Sankardin (2002), "to *tall poppy* is to cut an apparently successful person down to size...TPS refers to the tall poppying of tall poppies" (p. 37).

Why *poppies* as opposed to any other flower, or anything else that stands out above the crowd? Peeters (2003) argues that the answer is in the following story, which is believed to be the root of the Tall Poppy reference in Australia:

The original story is from Livy. Tarquinius Superbus was the last of the Roman tyrants of the old order. Tarquinius's son Sextus sought to displace his father, and sent a message to this end. The king made no reply, but walked into his garden: 'There, walking up and down without a word, he is said to have struck off the heads of the tallest poppies with his stick' (p. 389). This was taken to mean that all competitors or rivals were to be killed.

Smith, Goldberg and Lang (1984) believe that the metaphor implies a power struggle in which tyrants seek to increase their power by destroying their rivals. The modern-day equivalent may be an envious circumstance in which a competitive individual seeks riddance of direct rivals (Peeters, 2003).

Though scholarly research on TPS is limited, and most has been done outside of the United States, one of the first known references to TPS in the U.S. was in a 2002 article that appeared on the Ayn Rand Institute website. The article's author, Tracinski, states:

Why do so many people hate Martha Stewart? Does a home-decorating expert with a wholesome public persona come to be portrayed as a major cultural villain...there can only be one explanation for this tone of vicious glee. Martha is hated because she's **a tall poppy**...the lifestyle she promotes...[and] projects [shows] 'unattainable' perfection...[this] makes everyone else feel inadequate because they can't measure up (Tracinski, 2002).

Since 2002, the expression ‘tall poppy’ has only been used sparingly in America, but the phenomenon and behavior of “tall poppyism”, or TPS, certainly appears to lurk in our society.

TPS in the Workplace

The workplace is one such area in American culture where TPS might prove to be a ruinous “disease”. High achievers within organizations who are “cut down to size” and/or who choose to underplay their talents in order to stave off envy can represent a loss of valuable human resources for the organization, as well as an unrealized fulfillment for the individual. (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Ely (1984) suggests that TPS within organizations is a “mediocrity-maintaining-mechanism” (p. 109), designed to keep shooting stars from shining (Peeters, 2003). Rather than appreciating the talents tall poppies exhibit, coworkers may feel envious and threatened.

In fact, victims of TPS may select to underachieve as a coping strategy in order to adapt to a hostile, anti-intellectual environment (Cross, 1997). Rathvon (1996) found that employee perceptions of their environment play an important role in their achievement motivation. If a high achiever views her environment as friendly and supportive she may be more likely to demonstrate high achievement behaviors (1996). It is not unrealistic to believe the opposite: that an unfriendly, unsupportive work environment, fraught with TPS, may lessen achievement.

TPS and Global Self-Esteem

As well as exploring TPS in corporate environments, researchers have considered the role that TPS plays in collectivist versus individualistic culture. Feather and McKee (1993) used the Tall Poppy Scale (Feather, 1989) to survey Australian and Japanese university students on their attitude toward tall poppies and on the relationship between this attitude and global self-esteem. Japanese students (who traditionally value group conformity over individual pursuits) who scored lower on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), were more in favor of seeing tall poppies cut down. Feather and McKee's (1993) research compared two samples of Australian and Japanese university students regarding global self-esteem and their attitudes toward high achievers, or "tall poppies." The researchers predicted that Japanese students would demonstrate lower levels of global self-esteem than the Australian students and would be more likely to enjoy seeing high achievers fall. Their prediction was based on the assumption that perceptions of self tend to be more interdependent and less independent in the Japanese culture than in the Australian culture. The findings supported this prediction, and "indicated a negative correlation between global self-esteem and the 'favor fall' variable in the Australian sample, which was consistent with theoretical expectation and with previous findings" (p. 1). Further, results showed that the Japanese and the Australian students were alike in the extent to which they believed that high achievers should be rewarded.

In another study of Australian attitudes toward tall poppies, Feather (1991), surveyed 11th grade students and found that individuals with low-global self-esteem and

low perceived self-competence were more likely to favor the fall of tall poppies than those with high global self-esteem and high-perceived self-competence (Feather, 1991).

Related TPS Phenomenon

In an effort to broaden the perspective on TPS, scholarly literature from related phenomenon was reviewed. One such researched occurrence is *horizontal violence*, which in Funk's (2002) article, explains the harm that females do to other females. Funk reported that such a phenomenon exists when women who attain success are sabotaged through indirect aggression by other women with whom they interact. Funk's article bases this TPS-type behavior on the work of Paulo Friere (1970) who served the oppressed in South America and who coined the Horizontal Violence construct. According to Friere, horizontal violence is said to indicate a behavior whereby the members of oppressed groups show aggression toward their peers in response to felt oppression, *rather* than attack their oppressors. Friere contends that the behavior is due to the powerlessness of the oppressed, who know they would be punished if they actually lashed out at the individuals who controlled their lives. Friere's premise provides one possible reason why some women may attack other women rather than men.

Another related concept is *Queen Bee Syndrome*. The 'queen bee' is a woman who works very hard at keeping her queenly status by keeping other women down (Ginn, 1989). Queen Bee Syndrome also describes women who are individually successful in male-dominated environments and who are likely to be critical of other women who may be seen as competing for their token spot. Because of Queen Bee Syndrome, women

may experience sexism or envious conflict inflicted by other women rather than by men (Ellemer, 2004).

As indicated, some related research suggests that American women experience behaviors and feelings similar to TPS. The problem is, many United States studies in the last decade reveal *conflicting and competing* stereotypes about women. According Briles (1999), women in the workplace are said to be unsure of themselves, over-controlling and unable to engage in team play; therefore, their relationships are competitive, complex, difficult and sabotage-filled. Other research, however, argues that women are nurturing, relationship-oriented, nonhierarchical, and willing to share power and information (Ely, 1994), and that the “real” problem is *men*. Because of these conflicting stereotypes, the analysis of TPS in women is muddled by inconsistencies. Further, no universal source of scholarly literature exists that outlines the possible contributors to this potentially perilous phenomenon.

Thus, the aim of this next section is to review the literature on the theories and constructs that may inform the dimensions of TPS in American women.

Envy

One such related construct is envy. Envy implies a perceived rival who threatens to take away something that is self-esteem relevant, whether that is an advantage, social-attention, or material possessions (Salovey, 1991). Envy also requires a simultaneous feeling: the recognition of another person’s advantage and the recognition of your own inadequacies. Feelings of envy can motivate derogating behaviors toward others. Wert & Salovey (2004) confirm the general notion that envy is perceived as unflattering to the

self and socially unacceptable. Therefore, envy typically is not delivered directly; instead, it comes cloaked in gossip, passive-aggressiveness and backstabbing.

Envy-prone individuals tend to perceive life as unfair and are apt to experience their reality with more adversity. According to Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen (2002) envy is spurred by our winner-take-all, entitlement-based culture. Thome (1992) notes that envious individuals are prone to feel that others deserve *less* than they do and they wish to protect their own status by distorting others' successes.

Most researchers believe that envy is normal human behavior, though certain people may have the potential for more envy than others (McCrae & Costa, 1987). Excessive envy, intense feelings of inferiority and feelings of low self-worth are often linked with "*inordinate envy*", which is considered one of several negative personality traits central to neuroticism (McCrae & Costa, 1987, p. 86-87). Neuroticism has been linked to various coping mechanisms such as open hostility, rancor, backbiting and defamation.

According to Foster (1972), individuals can be completely unaware of their envious feelings. People who are not in tune with their emotions and who have a weak self-concept can be oblivious to the fact that envy is motivating their actions.

Besides being experienced at the subconscious level, envy can be driven by different types of desires. Foster (1972) contends that in more affluent societies, envy is not motivated so much by material possessions, but by the desire to be the best, to excel and to competitively be "top dog." For example, an individual in a wealthy society may not desire a high salary for its survival value, but instead for its symbolic representation

of success in a competitive atmosphere (Foster, 1972). Similarly, in academic or science settings, recognition and fame may come in the form of receiving a grant, being accepted in a scholarly publication, or getting an appointment to a high office. These acclaimed roles are not as necessary for job survival as they are proof of high achievement and merit (Bedeian, 1995).

Within the workplace, envious individuals may use “predatory tactics” to “professionally ambush” higher-achieving colleagues (p. 30). Additionally, Judge, et. al (2002) blame some reports of corporate mediocrity and in-fighting on envious workers. Envy in many workplaces can be evoked when colleagues receive a professional honor or are recruited into a more prestigious position. In these situations, the “discrepancy between one employee’s success and the other’s shortcomings can be transparent, causing psychological consequences including job dissatisfaction and decreased productivity” (1995, p. 4). Vecchio (2001) claims that it has been part of managerial tradition to ignore emotions such as envy. This partially stems from the presumption that business relationships and interactions should be based on rational, economically driven decision-making. Therefore, envy, as an irrational feeling, is believed to have no place in organizational settings or in business interactions. It is not a common practice for managers to view performance issues in light of envy, though envious employees can tarnish relationships and destroy moral (2001).

Research indicates that some individuals can form an envious attitude toward achievement when they compare themselves to others and come up short. An envious attitude may ignite other negative emotions such as *schadenfreude* (satisfaction and/or

joy derived from the misfortunes of others), contempt, and anger (Hareli & Weiner, 2002). “Envy hurts; it breeds distrust, stirs up gruesome fantasies of revenge, and creates distance...” (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1987, p. 92). Most importantly, Feather’s (1994) study on Tall Poppy Syndrome found envy to be the most common emotional experience felt toward a tall poppy.

Self-Evaluation Maintenance Theory

Besides the construct of envy, self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) theory (Tesser, 1988) can also be considered a component of TPS. SEM claims that individuals are motivated to maintain a positive self-evaluation; they accomplish this by comparing their strengths, accomplishments and abilities with others. In order to keep their self-evaluations positive, individuals may also adopt attitudes or behaviors that work toward this goal. According to the SEM theory, one’s self-evaluation would decrease when comparing self to a better performing other, especially if the other possesses a relevant quality or attribute (Tesser & Collins, 1988). A positive self-evaluation might be restored if the individual attempts to raise his/her own performance or attempts to lower the other’s performance. Therefore, it is possible, according to this theory, that a high-performing colleague may threaten the self-concept of a lower-performing colleague, resulting in negative behaviors such as “cutting down the poppy”.

Negative self-evaluations and feelings of envy can elicit destructive emotional behavior. In some reported cases, the desire to reduce the rival can be so great that even if the negative behavior will have destructive consequences for the perpetrator herself, she is still willing to “destroy” the target (Smith, 1991). In an experiment by Smith

(1991), envious individuals were willing to give up valuable rewards in order to deprive the targeted individual. This result was most likely to happen when the decision-to-destroy was made privately. In a similar experiment, Zizzo and Oswald (2002), surmised that we not only envy winners, we frequently punish them—even at our own expense. In Zizzo and Oswald’s study, participants were tested to see how willing they were to burn away others’ wealth, even when they had to give up some of their own money to do so. Participants played an anonymous “betting” game; any winnings were theirs to keep. As the participants played, they were able to see just how much the other players were winning. Players could secretly burn away other people’s winnings, but only if they burned 25% of their own money, too. Nearly two-thirds chose to burn others’ winnings, despite the high cost of losing their own money. The study found that losers punish winners. “Losers” appear to be motivated by resentment as well as by the desire to preserve their own status (Zizzo & Oswald, 2002). This study supports the notion that individuals who outperform others (the tall poppy) are likely to be cut down.

SEM theory also postulates that if a person feels that her standing is less than another person’s in a domain important to her self-concept, specific communicative behaviors, such as negative gossip, may be used to maintain self-esteem (Tesser, 1988). Fein and Spencer (1997) argue that derogation and prejudice toward others comes from the motivation to maintain feelings of self-integrity. Their findings report that negatively judging and diminishing another person does increase a perpetrator’s self-esteem.

Social Comparison Theory

Besides envy and self-evaluation maintenance theory, social comparison theory (SCT), conceptualized by Festinger (1954), also appears to contribute to the TPS mentality. SCT articulates the basic desire to evaluate oneself against others in order to assess where one stands in relationship. Social comparison is motivated by the need for self-evaluation, self-improvement, self-enhancement and social identity (Wood, 1989). The social comparison process is said to be central to “achievement motivation, feelings of injustice, depression, jealousy, and the willingness to remain in relationships or jobs (Buunk & Gibbons, 1997; Suls & Wheeler, 2000). Upward social comparison can evoke negative emotional reactions such as disparaging talk and/or gossip about the superior (Wert & Salovey, 2004). White, Langer, Yariv & Welch (2004) found that individuals who make and rely on frequent social comparisons are more likely to experience destructive emotions and behaviors, such as envy, blaming and lying—and perhaps, tall poppy clipping.

Looking-Glass Theory

Cooley’s Looking Glass Theory may also contribute to the TPS construct. It appears that what drives some women to feel a sense of inadequacy or envy when in the presence of a tall poppy is not just the mechanical reflection of themselves, but an imputed feeling, the imagined effect of this reflection on another woman's mind (Klein, 2004). According to Cooley, a person's self emerges out their exchanges with others. Cooley states, “...the social origin of...life comes by the pathway of intercourse with other persons” (p. 185). In other words, the self is not first individual and then social, it

instead grows dialectically through communication. Cooley would argue that there is no sense of 'I' without its related sense of you, or [s]he, or they. With Cooley's argument in mind, perhaps a woman's consciousness of herself is a reflection of the ideas about herself that she attributes to other women. To show how another person can be considered a reflection of the self, Cooley used the image of a looking-glass (mirror):

*"Each to each a looking-glass
Reflects the other that doth pass."*

As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be; so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it" (Cooley, 1902, p. 184).

As Cooley (1902) says, "this is evident from the fact that the character and weight of that other, in whose mind we see ourselves, makes all the difference with our feeling. We are ashamed to seem evasive in the presence of a brave one, gross in the eyes of a refined one, and so on. We always imagine, and in imagining, share the judgments of the other mind" (p. 184). A woman enters her own experience not as a subject (to herself) but insofar as she becomes an object to herself. She does this, according to Mead (1913), by taking in the attitudes of others towards herself, as if someone else were responding to her. In the case of the poppy clipper, perhaps the presence of a tall poppy creates a feeling in the mind of the clipper; the feeling is just an imagined effect of how the clipper thinks the tall poppy perceives her. The clipper may then act on a faulty perception.

Cooley (1902) contends that the looking-glass self is composed of three primary parts: the imagination of our appearance to the other woman, the imagination of her judgment of that appearance, and a sort of "self-feeling" such as pride, degradation,

and/or mortification and envy. The self emerges in a social context of communicative interaction and is reflected in the woman's consciousness.

To demonstrate these abstract ideas, Cooley presents a possible scenario of the parts of looking-glass self. Here he illustrates a social situation between Alice, who has a new hat, and Angela, who just purchased a new dress. There is...

1) The *real* Alice, known only to her maker. 2) Her *idea* of herself; e.g. 'I [Alice] look great in this hat.' 3) Her *idea* of Angela's idea of her; e.g. 'Angela thinks I look great in this hat.' 4) Her *idea* of what Angela thinks she thinks of herself; e.g., 'Angela thinks I am proud of my looks in this hat.' 5) Angela's idea of what Alice thinks of herself; e.g., 'Alice thinks she is stunning in that hat.' And of course six corresponding phases of Angela and her dress (pp. 183-185).

Applying Cooley and Mead's ideas to an exchange between a poppy clipper (or one who has TPS) and a tall poppy, an encounter might go like this: Two neighbors each made a dessert to share at the neighborhood potluck. As they set out their contributions on the food table, each woman tacitly notices what the other has brought. Ellen brings a batch of brownies on a paper plate, purchased from the grocery store. Sara brings a homemade chocolate truffle cheesecake on an antique, etched glass cake plate. Ellen makes a social comparison and Tall Poppy Syndrome emerges. She clips Sara to another female neighbor as soon as she gets the chance. Below is the application of Cooley's looking glass theory to the situation:

There is...

1) The real Ellen, known only to her maker. 2) Her idea of herself; e.g. "I [Ellen] feel inadequate that I brought brownies to the potluck", 3) Her idea of Sara's idea of her; e.g., 'Sara thinks I can't cook and that I am lazy', 4) Her idea of what Sara thinks she thinks of herself; e.g. 'Sara thinks I'm not sophisticated nor do I have any cooking abilities' and 5) Sara's idea of what Ellen thinks of herself; e.g. 'Ellen is easy-going, not fussy, and casual; everyone loves brownies!'

This example shows Ellen's newly formed view of herself based on the reflection and social interchange she had with Sara within this particular social context. This new "self" slips into Ellen's consciousness and creates the TPS communicative behaviors (e.g., Ellen clipping Sara to a neighbor). Cooley's "looking-glass theory" may be a way of considering the cognitive state of those who "suffer" from Tall Poppy Syndrome.

Female Competition

In addition to the other constructs mentioned, gender literature on competition also seems to parallel the symptoms and outcomes of TPS. Individualistic Americans have a tendency to constantly compete against others to show their superiority, achieve high status, develop their potential, and to differentiate themselves from others (Hirschman, 2003). Competition is so pervasive in our culture that it is unavoidable in relationships (Kohn, 1987).

Chesler's work on female competition suggests reasons for why these behaviors toward a perceived tall poppy may exist. In examining women's struggles with other women within an assumed context of patriarchy, Chesler contends that only a certain number of slots are available for women in society. When a woman is perceived as being on the fast track to success, other women feel as though she is "breaking rank," or deviating from the "norm." Not only that, the high achieving woman (tall poppy) is often perceived as "raising the bar" and increasing expectations for other female coworkers. An Oxygen Media study reported in *U.S. News & World Report* found that 65% of women believe that other women resent or are jealous of powerful women. The study

found that women find fault in certain abilities of women that they would praise in men (Kelly, 2002).

According to Chesler's research, girls learn from early on that being "nice" and polite is expected; being competitive is not. Girls learn that relationships and connectedness are more important than being successful or being right (2001). In order to maintain relationships and be perceived as "nice", covert communicative behaviors can result, such as the 'silent treatment', gossip, sabotage and even the formation of cliques. Since women are socialized to maintain a harmonious atmosphere, women may not strive to perform at high levels for fear that their female peers may exclude them (2001). In addition, because of how women are socialized, they consciously or unconsciously "expect" other women to provide a certain level of nurturance and support; if they are perceived as not supplying this, women can feel snubbed or betrayed. Though it may be true that women **do** look to other women for emotional support, Kelly (2002) argues that it is just as likely they will back-stab, punish nonconformity with abandonment, compete against each other (but not against men), and undermine their peers, community and even family. Chesler also notes that women judge other women much more harshly and more frequently than men judge women! She believes that this is because women's expectations of other women are unrealistically high (2001).

Juxtaposed with women's propensity toward competition is the need and ability to nurture other women and to create sisterly bonds. Eichenbaum and Orbach (1987) explain that women's competitive feelings are based on the need to be seen as a separate identity from other women and at the same time the longing for "a merged attachment"

and relationships with other women (p. 118). Mounteer-Hawker (2005) suggests that women's relationships are defined by the ability to support and nurture each other in times of hardship or disappointment; however, many women do not show solidarity when some women are thriving. As Chesler (2003) believes, since a limited amount of slots are open to women, merely noticing the superior achievements of another may result in envious social comparisons and competitive behaviors. If another woman is perceived as successful, some women, (perhaps those with TPS) can feel abandoned or insignificant, which may lead to negative behaviors such as withholding compliments and praise (Tesser & Campbell, 1990) .

A woman's desire for approval can also spur competitive behavior. Historically, women have sought each other's approval, and approval from men, and competed against each other to attain it. Eichenbaum and Orbach argue that when women feel under appreciated, ignored, or isolated, feelings of competition emerge, which represents a fight for selfhood (1987). In Eichenbaum and Orbach's (1987) research, they comment, "tragically, as they [the envious women in their study] held themselves back, they unconsciously felt driven to hold back another woman" (p. 98). The researchers concluded that the participants' feelings were a psychological reflection of a "competitive and divisive culture that has one believing in emotional scarcity, i.e., if one has, there isn't enough for the other to have as well" (p. 111).

Oakes-Ash's (2003) research on female competition found that high-achieving, intelligent women are still too reticent to discuss envy and competitiveness among other women for fear of being perceived as aggressive, self-centered and overly ambitious.

Like Chesler's beliefs, Oakes-Ash contends, "we've been told and convinced ourselves for far too long that there are only limited positions and limited voices in the world for women...that we can't share this limited resource lest it disappear" (2003, p. 5).

It appears that for a woman to be ambitious, to be openly proud of her successes and to assert herself confidently, she risks being viewed as cold, bitchy, masculine, and a braggart. If she is perceived to be a tall poppy, she risks having her head lopped off by another woman. Therefore, to be liked and accepted, many women have practiced faux humility, taken subordinate roles in the office and cheated themselves out of deserved accolades (Fels, 2005).

Tall Poppy Conundrum

The research appears to indicate that a perceived "tall poppy" is in a conundrum: if she is successful, she may experience exclusion and resentment by her female peers. If she "plays small" or underplays her abilities, she sacrifices her own personal and professional fulfillment. Perhaps this is why Horner (1972) argued that some women have fear of success, or possibly the fear of men's reactions to their success. Fear of success, as explained by Person (1982, see also Kets de Vries, 1992), may involve Oedipal dimensions, and success may actually be equated with "outdoing" the mother, arousing envy and creating a potential of retaliatory action. Person suggests that high achieving women do not have enough female role models who have been successful and who have kept their relationships and femininity intact (1982). This fear may also be because successful women have been described as stoic, overly aggressive, and absent

mothers (Heim, Murphy & Golant, 2001). Perhaps the dread of this perception can keep some potential tall poppies immobilized.

Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS) and its related negative communicative behaviors may be responsible in holding women back from achieving their goals and enjoying their own successes. It is important for communication scholars to investigate and to understand why some women are often reluctant to be more than “mediocre” and hesitant to exhibit their talents, and/or why/how some women seek to tear down other women who are perceived as having an advantageous position.

If the possibility exists that some women may not be able to achieve their full potential because of other, envious women, then a call for research is imperative. In an effort to do this and to expand the understanding of TPS, I have chosen to conduct a qualitative study to explore whether or not Tall Poppy Syndrome *is* a part of American women’s lived experience and if it may be an obstacle to a woman’s flourishing. To the best of my knowledge, no qualitative study involving Tall Poppy Syndrome and American women exists. All previous TPS research has been done in Australia using an exclusively quantitative methodology with mixed gender samples. Given the lack of systematic research that provides detailed accounts of American women’s experiences with TPS, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: Do American women experience the phenomenon of the “tall poppy.”

RQ2: Do American women experience the phenomenon of being a “poppy clipper?”

RQ3: What communication behaviors do poppy clippers use in response to the tall poppy?

RQ4: What communication behaviors do tall poppies use in response to being clipped?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to investigate the phenomenon of TPS among adult, American women by drawing personal accounts to see if TPS has been experienced in their own lives. Because this study is exploratory and very few researchers have investigated the TPS phenomenon, the qualitative method was considered most appropriate.

A qualitative design aided in addressing the abstract and subjective dimensions of TPS. Uncovering the nuances of TPS, as well as the specific communicative behaviors and impact of TPS, is best understood through the study of individually constructed feelings. A qualitative study allowed participants to interact with and give meaning to elements of TPS. Rich, descriptive data as opposed to statistical data provides a dimensional understanding of the presence and communicative management of TPS among women.

The exploratory nature of this study is also important. Exploratory research design allows for flexibility, which is important in unearthing broad ideas in the initial stage of research. Adams and Schvaneveldt (1991) also note that exploratory research does not require the researcher to be bogged down by existing theory; rather, the researcher may simply use existing theory as a guide which can be used to serendipitously explore a phenomenon.

Since one of the goals of this study was to discover social factors and attitudes that contribute to and influence human behavior, focus groups that included open-ended questions relating to these factors were used. The use of focus groups was a good “fit”

for the study of TPS because they allowed the researcher to learn and confirm information and get at the meaning *behind* the information. Also, use of focus groups allowed participants to “tag” off one another and co-construct new meanings for ideas that would not have been arrived at through a one-on-one interview. Since a focus group is considered naturalistic, it can provide data “that tend to be holistic and its outcome often is greater than the sum of its participants” (Hocking, Stacks & McDermott, 2003, p. 208).

Procedures for Data Collection

Description of Sample

Due to the personal meanings and experiences associated with Tall Poppy Syndrome, and the related “taboo” research areas, such as envy (Foster, 1972), this researcher felt that the responses from participants might be more insightful if there was an existing relationship between either one or more subjects or between the subject and the researcher. Therefore, female participants known by the researcher or by another study participant were contacted. The researcher knew many of the women through previous job experiences, community and social organizations.

The sampling process began by questioning a target group member known to the researcher in order to get referrals to invite other target group members. Referrals were sent a personal letter of invitation until a sample size of 32 was achieved. Snowball sampling was selected in order to learn the identities and/or locations of women of a given network through contact with an initial, invited, target group member. Snowball sampling relies on referrals from initial subjects to generate additional subjects. An

important limitation of snowball sampling is that the initial target group members are likely to provide information only on other target group members who are in their own social and/or economic network.

Procedure

Participation in this study was on a voluntary basis. In order to maximize participant response, those who responded to the letter of invitation were given a choice of four different focus group dates. Groups of six to eleven women were developed over the course of two weeks. The average age of the participants was 37. Twenty-seven of the participants were married, four were single and one was divorced. All but three had a college degree or higher. Twenty-six of the participants worked outside of the home in a professional capacity. Three of the focus groups were held at a public library in Wisconsin, and one was held at the home of the researcher's family member in Arlington Heights, Illinois. The demographics for the sample are in APPENDIX G.

A confirmation note and a brief overview of the Tall Poppy construct were sent to participants one week before the scheduled focus group time.

Upon arrival at the focus group location, I arranged a place setting for each participant consisting of, 1) a participant consent form, 2) name tag and name table-tent 3) demographics questionnaire, and 4) the list of research questions. When participants arrived, they briefly chatted with the other members while enjoying hor d'euvres and beverages. Participants were invited to sit down at an oval "board room" table. After a brief welcome, focus group members were asked to select a pseudonym to ensure their anonymity and to read and sign the informed consent. The participants were briefed on

the nature of the study and given ample opportunity to ask questions for clarification. They were reminded that the discussion would be audio taped.

All focus groups were conducted over a 90 minute period with the exception of focus group #4 which voluntarily ran for an additional 90 minutes. The data consisted of conversation led by this researcher. At the end of each session, each participant was given a small gift and her name was entered for a door prize. Within a week following the focus group session, the audio-tapes were delivered to a transcriptionist. The tapes were transcribed in full to allow for greatest accuracy and exploration in data analysis. The copies of the transcripts are currently kept at the researcher's property in a protected file. Access to these transcripts is limited to the thesis committee.

Instrument

A focus group protocol guide (APPENDIX F) and list of focus group questions (APPENDIX A) was used to guide data collection. The focus group questions were loosely structured in order to give the participants the freedom to respond from a variety of angles. The questions permitted flexibility and allowed conversation to proceed fluidly; yet, having a pre-established list of core questions to initiate the focus group discussion provided a base for consistent data collection among participants.

Kreuger (1988) asserts that focus group questions should include no more than 10 questions with five or six being ideal; further, Kreuger also suggests that "why" questions should rarely be used in a focus group. Because of this, the focus group questions did not begin with "why" and were limited to five questions.

The focus group questions were generated in response to: a) the research questions, b) the researcher's previous experiences that resemble Tall Poppy Syndrome, c) previous research that stemmed from scholarly articles retrieved from communication, psychology and healthcare journals through EBSCO host, JSTOR, EMERALD, and WILSON WEB, and d) thesis committee advice.

Ethical Considerations

As anticipated, no participants were at risk for taking part in the focus groups. No deception was used. The participants were told they could withdraw from the study at any point. The women signed an informed consent form before they participated. Subjects were assured of confidentiality and informed that the transcriptionist for the study would not be from the same community as the participants. This research had University of Wisconsin-Whitewater IRB approval. While this study seemingly showed no instantaneous, direct benefit to the participants, it was rewarding to learn that many of the women who participated felt the study had a positive and beneficial impact on their relationships with others.

Analysis of Data

Data were analyzed using a combination of open and selective coding techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding creates appropriate terms that are applicable to the data and that attempt to emphasize their true meaning. Selective coding extracts unnecessary data and acknowledges emerging themes. Using the detailed transcription of the focus groups, I sought to identify patterns/categories from the data. I noted repetitive

words used to describe perceived tall poppies and poppy clippers. I marked specific areas of text that demonstrated ideas related to the research questions and applied a term that best described the overall meaning.

Constant comparative analysis was also used (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method involves coding the data and categorizing it into themes. The data is then revisited after the initial coding until it is clear that no new themes are present. In the present study, coded sections were compared with other similarly coded areas to confirm consistency. The data were used to generate common patterns and over-arching themes within the participants' experience. Coded data were then placed in categories. When additions to the key categories were discovered, they were incorporated by expanding the initial categories.

The data were coded into two broad communication categories: nonverbal and verbal, however; many of the stories that the participants shared demonstrated nonverbal and verbal behaviors that overlapped in the same interaction; therefore, quotes from participants may appear in two different categories. Specific components of nonverbal and verbal communication were identified in order to create subcategories. Poppy clipper behaviors were placed into the following subcategories: a) 'no words, just feelings', b) passive-aggressive nonverbals, c) eye behavior, d) objects and artifacts, e) ostracism, f) personal space, g) chronemics, h) physical appearance, i) gossip and backbiting, j) sabotage, k) evaluative behavior and belittling remarks. Tall Poppy responses to clipper behavior were placed in the following categories, 1) self-talk/self-

reflection 2) avoidance and boundary-setting, 3) self-deprecation, 4) decision not to take personally, 5) diplomatic confrontation, and 6) evaluation of social network.

Several scholarly experts from UW-Whitewater, as well as the UWW-IRB, advised on research-related decisions in order to help with the reliability of the analysis. Validity was ascertained by relaying back to ten of the focus group participants the testimonial they had shared—verifying that its meaning had been captured. Additionally, these ten participants were asked basic clarification questions related to their testimony. According to Guba & Lincoln (1989), this process is known as “member checking” and is a way of obtaining feedback from study participants about the data and research conclusions. Miles and Huberman (1994) assert that this feedback can be solicited in a multitude of ways and at different points during the study. In this study, for example, member checking was done after the data was transcribed but before the data was analyzed. The researcher followed this process in order to verify participants’ meanings and experiences (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Though the participants were not given a copy of their respective testimonies, the member checking was informally accomplished by asking ten of the participants to listen as I summarized the main points from their testimony. The respondents reported that the summary appeared to be a correct depiction of their experience. Several also clarified some information and added minimal, supplemental information.

The following chapter provides an explanation and discussion of the themes identified during data analysis. Examples of focus group participants’ responses are included as they relate to the selected conceptual categories.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter addresses the four research questions developed for this study and provides related research data. Additionally, interpretation and some relevant summations are made. Communication conceptual categories are listed along with related participant excerpts. Each category represents a communication attitude or behavior that emerged from the data analysis. Participants are identified by their pseudonym and by the focus group they were in; for example, “Grace (FG3)”. The “FG” stands for ‘focus group’ and the ‘3’ indicates that the participant is in the third focus group session. As before, “TPS” is used instead of “Tall Poppy Syndrome”.

Research questions 1 and 2 are addressed by presenting a description based on participants’ descriptions of 1) a tall poppy and 2) a poppy clipper. Research question 3 and 4 are addressed by delineating specific communicative categories and illustrating these categories with relevant focus group excerpts.

Research Question: 1: Do American women experience the phenomenon of the “tall poppy”?

Profile of the American Female Tall Poppy

The analysis of data from all four focus groups revealed a lengthy and multi-dimensional description of a woman perceived as a Tall Poppy. The interpretation of a ‘tall poppy’ was similar among the four focus groups. The definition of a tall poppy was shaped by the experiences that took place within certain contexts of the *individual* perceiver. That is to say, **who is considered a tall poppy is relative to the individual perceiver**; one person’s profile of a tall poppy may be very different from someone

else's perspective of a tall poppy; yet, there are general attributes that a "typical" tall poppy possesses.

According to the focus group participants, for example, a female tall poppy can handle anything and never appear frazzled. She does not have neurotic tendencies (irrational fears, anxiety, depression, etc.) and is not a narcissist. Nothing she does is second-rate—"everything is 100%". A tall poppy is intelligent, both emotionally and cognitively. She can manage a high career, raise beautiful children and own a nice home. She is stable in most areas of her life. A tall poppy finds time to fit exercise into her schedule and as a result, has a slim, toned body. She is a size 4 or 6 with perfect breasts, long, and a smile on her face. She lights up a room with her vivacity and clearly has the respect and admiration of others, though is the object of envy as well. A tall poppy does not imitate others and does not have the communicative goal of intimidating others. She does not take advantage of other women by using them for her own gain. She exudes happiness and confidence; she is assertive and focused--without being a "bitch". Tall poppies are clear communicators with no "hidden agendas" or malicious undertones.

A tall poppy gets along well with men; *"she knows how to joke around with men without being a slut"* (Catherine, FG1). A tall poppy has a close-knit family, many female friends and a doting, supportive, attractive husband. A female tall poppy is ethical. She sticks up for others and is thoughtful, kind and generous. A tall poppy is humble; she appropriately self-deprecates to not make others feel uncomfortable. She is internally secure and operates from the understanding that a rising tide floats all boats. A true tall poppy sees the good and the potential in others; she wants to help other women

grow. Kat's (FG4) description of an envied, yet admired tall poppy supports this conviction: *"...she's [the perceived tall poppy] a fantastic person...she's so smart it makes me sick, but also really involved with helping me develop and passing on her knowledge to me and helping me grow... I wish I was her, but I don't feel threatened by her...I feel like she's sort of a mentor."*

Summation of the data from the focus groups also revealed that most tall poppies are resilient and will remain tall poppies even after having been noticeably clipped. Other tall poppies; however, are clipped so low they are unable to reach that height again. Because a previous clipping shattered their confidence, or because the support (fertilizer) was not there, some potential tall poppies, or "seedlings," (consciously or subconsciously) only grew so high and some were diminished so severely, that they adopted clipper behavior themselves (see p. 35 for full description of clipper behavior) as in Coco's story:

COCO (FG): I am sure I was the one they wanted to cut down the most ... There was a leader... a ring leader. And she would decide who we were talking to that day. After I'd been clipped so low, I started doing it to other women... I became really aggressive and wanted to be mean to other women to get back at women in general.

MODERATOR: How did you get that way though? What made you decide?

COCO: I had enough and I was sick and tired of being pushed around and treated like a loser when I realized that I wasn't...

Some tall poppies or poppy seedlings are destroyed to the point of no return—their paths are changed in a way that they never expected. This situation is described by

Nico (FG 4):

NICO: I was the girl who excelled in things... I was in gymnastics... I thought everything was cool... I thought I had friends.... and I had the most popular boyfriend at the time. I had it all going on... I lived in a small, small town in Iowa and my parents had a big business ... and so they perceived my family as rich. [When] I got really sick and I was out of school for half a year and I came

back... all of my friends decided to drop me... I ended up being in the principal's office every day because they tormented me. Then, I went "Goth" and then I shaved my head...started having sex. OK, maybe I was a taller poppy, whatever, but they completely cut me down.

As you will see from future Nico stories, this "could-have-been" tall poppy never fully recovered from this incident; she admits to having a difficult time today developing and keeping relationships and her confidence is minimal. Unfortunately, she blames many of her adult issues and poor self-concept on the severity of the clipping in her youth.

As noted in Appendix D, tall poppies are often perceived as "having had it easy in life". In previous research (Feather, 1989), tall poppies can *appear* to have had more luck, more breaks, or more connections. Kat (FG 4) confers with her statement describing a tall poppy as, "...people who are somehow "lucky". Like things just fall into place for them. They get the perfect job offered to them, then they meet the perfect guy..."

Despite this "fact," tall poppies do not boast about what they have, and do not expect to be treated any differently if they do have "more" of something. Importantly, real tall poppies probably do not know they are tall poppies. The following dialogue between some of the FG1 participants (all of whom have been considered a tall poppy at points in their lives) demonstrate this conviction:

JILL: Sometimes when people *make* themselves out to be a tall poppy, they're really just self-delusional.

CHRISTIE: If you had sent out a general letter of 'Sign up if you think you're a tall poppy'...there's no way in hell I'd be on that list.

CATHERINE: I mean, hell no.

CHRISTIE: Well, the irony of it is, the tall poppies are people who wouldn't call themselves a tall poppy. They're voted 'tall poppy'.

CAMILLA: It's a matter of perception.

JILL: Real tall poppies are humble.

CHRISTIE: And that's what makes them a good...

JILL: and then, the ones that we catch trying to ACT like a tall poppy, the ones we are tearing down, are usually just --

CHRISTIE: Delusional!

RACHEL: I do think a person that thinks they're a tall poppy is really selfish.

JILL: Only if THEY think of themselves as one...

RACHEL: They are in some poppy bubble--

CATHERINE: A narcissist.

Research participants were careful to note that it IS a good thing to BE a tall poppy and that many are admired and do serve as positive role models for others. However, most of the study participants agreed that tall poppies are *definitely* envied, hated or targeted for who they are and/or what they possess. Importantly, participants felt that tall poppy wanna-a-bees also exist. As this previous dialogue demonstrates, people can clip both "real" tall poppies AND those who "claim" to be tall poppies. Generally, respondents felt less remorse or guilt after clipping a perceived "pseudo" tall poppy than a perceived "real" tall poppy.

The following section will address the nature of the poppy clipper as experienced by the focus group participants. Poppy clippers were easier for the women to describe because they have all (100% of all four focus groups) experienced the phenomenon of having *been* clipped, *and* the experience of clipping others. The next segment describes the consensus among the study participants of what defines a clipper. Interestingly, it is not the direct opposite of what defines a tall poppy.

Research Question 2: Do American women experience the phenomenon of being the “poppy clipper”?

Profile of the American Female Poppy Clipper

As discussed earlier in this paper, the poppy clipper seeks to reduce the status of a perceived tall poppy and “clip her down to size”. All focus group participants in this study felt that they have, at different points in their life, experienced being “clipped down to size” by another woman. While the majority of the study participants felt that *some* women may never have been and/or never will be a tall poppy, they did concur that *all* women have been, at one time or another, a *poppy clipper*. Participants readily shared stories of being attacked by a poppy clipper, and more reluctantly shared examples of having clipped someone else.

Several study participants said that they perceive a poppy clipper as having “a chip on her shoulder” or an “attitude” problem. Clippers were also described as *lacking* in some area of their lives, i.e., lacking happiness, power, beauty, etc...). Participants in FG2 agreed that sometimes what a perceived clipper lacks is obvious to others around her. However, when the study participants mentioned being in the role of the clipper themselves, they felt that they didn’t always know specifically what was being envied; there just seemed to be a “sense” of lacking, just a “feeling” of mixed emotions with no clear and description of what specifically was lacking in their lives.

Respondents concurred that a poppy clipper is competitive with the targeted tall poppy and sees her as a rival and an impediment to her own success or goals. Clippers were also described by focus group participants as envious, catty, bitchy, fake, bullying, manipulative, hoity-toity, insecure, passive-aggressive, narcissistic, belittling, two-faced,

gossipers, hoarders and pessimists. Participants also described clippers as intimidating, overly critical, sarcastic, easily threatened and grudge-holders. Clippers may have only one of these attributes or all of them.

Study respondents also discussed and agreed that a perceived tall poppy who has been targeted by a clipper may initially have no clue why a clipper is acting and communicating in a disdainful manner. Generally, it was felt that tall poppies are more likely to self-blame, self-denigrate and modify their own behavior before realizing that it may be a clipper at work. Data from the focus groups indicate that a tall poppy—in her purest form—is probably not a clipper; though that is not to say she’s never been one or doesn’t have the potential to be one in the future.

Several participants agreed that if you want to know what a clipper is like consider the relationship between young girls and their “Barbie” dolls. As Nancy (FG2) explains, “just think of how “perfect” she was and how much you hated her for that...for her beautiful smile and her fabulous figure...and her hair...some friends I had would mark up her face with pen and cut her hair”. (Also see Coco’s [FG4] related “Barbie” comments below.)

Coco (FG4) mentioned that clipper behavior is seen in the fairy tales that so many of us grew up with, and examples are evident in today’s Disney movies. Young girls form impressions and model behaviors by learning about female fairy tale characters, such as the evil stepsister or the malicious Queen (who communicates in conniving and wicked ways); girls see these vicious women targeting and clipping female rivals. They also see women competing for that one glass slipper. Participants discussed

that women, as young girls, become socially programmed by Barbie, Snow White, Cinderella's step-sisters and Cruella de Ville. The following dialogue reveals this opinion:

COCO (FG 4) Barbie is everything you want but can't be or can't get--small waist, blue eyes, has the guys, great butt, Ken, constant smile, dream house, happy—you are almost set up to hate her. Everyone wanted to play with Barbie--no one wanted to play with her sister Skipper because she had no guys, no boobs, nothing.

DOMINO (FG4): That's why I don't want my four year old playing with Barbie dolls or reading Cinderella shit...Cinderella's step-sisters were poppy clippers; total choppers...and they were ugly...their problem with Cinderella [was her] beauty and her perfect prince and how perfect her life was going to be.

It was evident after the summation of clipper descriptors that a clipper is what you *don't want to be, don't always know you are being, and what all women do at some point in their lives in response to what they feel is lacking in their own life.*

Generally, being a clipper can be both an internal and external communication problem for female relationships; however, some women felt that they have learned a lot from having been clipped or from being a clipper themselves. Being the victim of clipping behavior can help increase a woman's self-awareness. Increased self-awareness may help the tall poppy victim to re-evaluate current social relationships and to make a decision on how to respond to the clipping and how the clipping influences her life. A carefully considered response may have the potential for improved communication.

The next part of this paper explores the dialectical tension and communication behaviors that originate from a tall poppy—poppy clipper dyad, in accordance with the data from this study. The subsequent research questions address the communicative behaviors of both clippers and perceived tall poppies. The behaviors are separated into two broad communication categories of nonverbal and verbal communication; however,

the excerpts often contain communication components that are both verbal and nonverbal. The researcher is aware of the interdependent nature of verbal and nonverbal behavior. Though both behaviors are part of a complete and undividable process, separating these two communicative systems can be useful when discussing specifics of each system (Knapp & Hall, 1992).

Research Question 3: *What communication behaviors do poppy clippers use in response to the tall poppy?*

Participants from each focus group recalled times when they responded negatively to a tall poppy. They also shared situations when they felt they were the target of clipper behavior. Some participants felt challenged to adequately describe the clipper-tall poppy interchange, mainly because clipper's verbals and nonverbals were so tightly enmeshed within each experience.

Nonverbal Messages

According to Wood (2003), nonverbal communication is the way the subconscious mind communicates. Despite attempts to direct and control it, nonverbal behavior gives clues to a person's true feelings. Nonverbal cues are undeniable and, according to participants, can be the most obvious behavior when examining a perceived clipper, though they agreed that the motivation as well as the interpretation can vary.

“Negative Energy”

Many of the focus group participants who at one time or another felt targeted, commented that they remembered the clipper's general “nature” or their temperament; it wasn't the *words* the clipper used so much as it was the way the behaviors of the clipper

made them *feel*—possibly because the words were said “behind their backs”. The women often reported that being around a clipper felt like negative energy; in some cases being around a clipper made respondents feel physically sick. The most specific expressions used to describe the way some Clippers made them feel was “getting the cold shoulder” or “getting snubbed”. The following is an example of one participant struggling to find a word to clearly match the feeling:

The women are talking about a mutual female acquaintance, a ‘clipper’ known as “Maggie”.

LOLA (FG4): ...She [Maggie] *was* very good to me at first. She was a very good friend to Lola. She was a very good friend to Kat. . . It seems like she pulled the wool over all of our eyes. Like she was very . . . I don’t know, I can’t describe her way...

KAT: Manipulative?

LOLA: Manipulative maybe...but more than that...I can’t tell you why, but I can tell you how it felt...

One participant referred to clipper behavior as “purposely mysterious” and as “...giving off the silent impression that ‘you will need to figure me out—I am so complex, or “like, ‘look at me, I am a big corporate professional so I am going to throw my power around’” (Trixie, FG4). Still other focus group participants described clipper nonverbal behavior in general terms like, cold, distant, arrogant, unpredictable and unnecessarily anal.

Because some clipper behavior was perceived by the participants to be elusive and vague, tall poppy targets felt confused by it and/or needed to see the behavior used against them numerous times before it became obvious. Many participants reported that the clipper behavior seemed to come out of nowhere, and at first blush, have no apparent reason behind it. Bridget (FG3) shared a story that typifies this:

...then she [the clipper] turned on me...she had a jewelry party everyone got invited, I didn't....then she [the clipper] had a Christmas party, everyone got invited, we didn't ...it hurts your feelings because you're being excluded...and there's no rhyme or reason to it.

Lola (FG4) shared similar feelings:

... [clippers] are so covert—so difficult to read...some of their mean behaviors are so subtle that it can take you a while to realize what is happening to you. It's hard to describe the clipper behavior; it's like a bunch of stuff at once: the 'not paying attention, not listening, not respecting you, but looking and judging-in-a-split-second-type-thing'.

Many times during the focus group sessions, a story that began with an attempt to describe a clipper's nonverbals turned into the realization that we [women] **all** can be clippers at times.

LOLA: "A clipper is a woman being a bitch, which would be either putting someone down or disrespecting another woman, like interrupting her when she's trying to talk, or putting her down behind her back, or it could mean a gazillion things that I can't even quantify because it's just something that happens in the moment...It's just the way that they treat all the women around them and the way that they talk about other women, especially when they are not there. It's like when you hear gossiping and saying nasty things about a woman....

SADIE: All women do that though.

LOLA: ...That's when you can tell a true cat though is when she's like talking about somebody that's not there and—

SADIE: But you also do that though.

LOLA: Well, I am not **totally** tearing them down.

SADIE: You just did that though. You said that Michelle girl was a bitch...you *just* talked bad about Michelle.

LOLA: Oh, well, that's different . . . but you'll understand what I'm saying when you hear about what a true bitch Michelle is.

SADIE: I think every woman does that...., you'll hear her say, '*Oh, God, that girl always talks about other women*' --every girl does that...girls just don't realize that they're doing it because we all do it; and I think it's OK when you're doing it with your girlfriends.

LOLA: Well, there are certain contexts where it is okay... anyway, I hold women up to certain standards and I'm just a finicky person and there's certain things that some women do that fucking rake me the wrong way. I just have little tolerance for the way some women can act so dumb when they are with a guy! It's just one of those things that just rakes my nerves...[pause] but I guess you're right... I'm clipping now as I speak!

As this testimony demonstrates, it can be *extremely* difficult for some women to see elements of clipper behavior within themselves. This was true for the majority of the study participants. Admitting their own clipper behavior did not emerge until at least 30 minutes in the focus group discussions.

Participants who felt the negative energy of a clipper concurred that the experience did not seem generalized amongst others in their social circle or organization, nor did the clipper behavior appear to be a trait of personality. Instead, participants perceived the clipper behavior to be deliberately meant for the targets (tall poppies).

Simultaneous Nonverbals Messages

Another problem with adequately describing the clipper's nonverbals was the fact that many of the subjects experienced several negative nonverbals simultaneously, such as one participant explained, "*She [the clipper] was giving me instructions in a seemingly pleasant way, but with a condescending tone and without respectful eye contact...I could tell she was being demeaning, but I can't say exactly all the behaviors she used*" (Grace FG3). Marla (FG2), who felt she had been "targeted", described a coworker clipper who used nonverbal distracting and attention-seeking behaviors—all with an upbeat, positive, but fake tone: "*She'd intentionally overact in front of me...her body language was unusually animated; it was like saying to me, 'look how much better my life is than yours.'*" Betty (FG3), a teacher, also had a similar experience with a colleague:

She [the clipper and colleague] would organize these get-togethers. . . and then do extreme (exaggerated) behaviors in front of me-- like "*I'm having just a good 'ol time with all my friends, and you're not*" kind of thing...she'll like play practical jokes on the teacher next door to me and get everybody's hooting and hollering...like she wanted them to be thinking, "Oh, she's **sooo** much fun."

Underneath these “pleasant” façades and upbeat demeanors were several derogatory nonverbal messages indirectly delivered to the perceived tall poppy. Because several nonverbals were sent by the clipper at the same time, the target had difficulty discerning the true message.

By taking a “survey” of the mutual acquaintances in her social network, this tall poppy realized that she alone was the target.

Passive-Aggressive Nonverbals

Passive-aggressive behaviors is an indirect way of communicating and is said to be a concealed way of expressing aggression that may be a result of resentment, envy, rejection and/or injustice (McIllduff & Coghlan, 2000). Passive-aggressive behavior can become embedded in the belief systems and behaviors of some individuals so much so that they become unaware of just how their behavior is affecting other people (2000). Or, in this study, how their behavior may be impacting a perceived tall poppy.

In this study, the focus group participants described clippers as using different passive-aggressive behaviors to reduce the status of a perceived tall poppy, frustrate the tall poppy and sandbag a perceived tall poppy’s ideas. It was generally agreed by respondents that superficially, a woman may appear passive and satiated, and show no outward signs of aggression, but actually, the woman’s negative feelings may be festering below the surface. Focus group subjects provided several examples of passive-aggressive behaviors that they have experienced in the workplace or in relationships AND that they have used themselves. I have paraphrased them into the following list: 1) stonewalling, procrastinating, sandbagging; 2) pouting and sighing hoping that someone will notice,

only to reply "nothing," when someone asks what is wrong, 3) feigned helplessness, or 'playing dumb', 4) masking non-compliance with politeness and smiles, and, 5) obstructing progress or success by not doing her fair share of the work.

In the next several excerpts, participants share why a clipper might use passive-aggressive communication rather than direct, assertive behavior. It appears that most of the testimonies describe the need for clippers to put on a front that they are nice, nurturing, sensitive, caring, amiable, etc...

SADIE (FG4): We (women) choose to be passive-aggressive just to appear to be nice; just to be nice—because nobody wants to look like a bitch. You have to put on a show.

Despite the fact that Sadie is a woman herself, she speaks very negatively about the nature of women. She concludes, "I think all this is just a normal trait of women".

Domino also felt that this is part of the game that women *have* to play.

DOMINO (FG4): Women analyze everything and are very manipulative; I think they go hand in hand; which is a deadly combo. You don't always know that a woman is envious. I mean, there are different signs and you have to figure it out—it's not obvious. Women have too much knowledge about other women in some areas and use it against other women... I think all this is just a normal trait of women; I think passive-aggressive is the norm—covert and passive-aggressive. I think we were raised to be that way.

Foxy agreed with Domino, but felt that women are passive-aggressive because there are too many societal expectations that women need to uphold, such as, 1) we don't want to appear bitchy, 2) we are supposed to be "peaceful" and non-confrontational, and 3) we don't have the option to be direct with other women because too often directness is misinterpreted and the fall out can be destruction of the relationship. Research supports much of Foxy's opinions. Studies have found that women are typically nurturing and caring (Gilligan, 1993), passive and dependent, (Sherman, 1976), and inclusive and

collaborative (Rosener, 1990). This next exchange between Foxy and Kat show how women can be passive-aggressively caught between a rock and a hard place:

FOXY (FG4): But we [women] have emotions and we still react to things that irritate us...we want to be honest about situations, but we don't want to appear bitchy...and sometimes we hold it in until...until we get aggressive. You can't hold it in forever. So then you end up exploding in strange ways and that's where we end up being passive-aggressive.

KAT (FG4): Well you *have* to be that way [passive-aggressive]...you don't want to appear to be 'the emotional woman'...You don't want to be pegged...You want to be assertive but you don't want to be *aggressive*. You don't want to be a bitch either, but there is a fine line you can't always see.

Still other passive-aggressive clipper communication behaviors summed from the data included, 1) pretending not to pay attention or feigning interest when the target's engaging other listeners, 2) flirtatious behavior with target's spouse or boyfriend, 3) "stealing" friends from the target, 4) displaying discourteous actions, such as *"not taking sunglasses off when speaking to me in my home,"* 5) taking an "unnecessary" cell phone call during a personal conversation, 6) hording information from the target, 7) noticeably withholding compliments, 8) purposely staying just out of range from the target, but close enough to eavesdrop, 9) "losing" important information or "not being able to find" something the target needs, and 10) not giving credit or stealing the credit from the target.

Another nonverbal behavior of clippers that was noted by the focus group participants was eye behavior. From eye-rolling to avoidance of eye contact, participants felt that often, through eye behaviors, clippers communicate their disdain of and/or desire to chop down tall poppies.

Eye Behavior

A large body of research indicates that emotions are expressed most visibly in the face and eyes. For example, animals can communicate an approach or withdrawal orientation by the way they stare or by how they include or exclude other animals using their eyes. (Russell & Fernandez-Dols, 1997). Reports from participants indicated that eye behavior is a definite clue to what another woman is thinking. Participants shared several examples of eye behavior that they have experienced from clippers: the ‘once over’ or “the sideways glance,” “the evil eye,” “the glare,” the “critiquing judgmental squint”--“*as if to say, ‘whatever you are talking about isn’t valid, intelligent or important’*” Lola (FG4). The general lack of eye contact was discussed as a way women show disrespect, and the mean, nasty ‘stare down’ was also mentioned as a way of being threatening or intimidating. As Betty (FG3) explains, “*I don’t know how to put it but [her{the clipper’s} behavior was] just kind of like sassy, kind of arms folded across...like, no eye contact when I’m around...*” Christie (FG1) felt particularity clipped by the eye roll, as in this example:

...I used to be a teacher at Meadow High School where I really saw it [the eye roll from other teachers]. I have run into women who have given me the eye roll—who see me walk into a room and turn their back. Who made it very non-verbally clear they don’t want to talk to me, and I just know what they’re thinking, ‘Here’s that loud, obnoxious, brassy lady coming in. Look out.’ And have made it very clear to the point that now, you know, I kind of return the favor.

Several participants also noted the way that some women “can look at you as if inspecting you to see if you look or act “better” than they do” (Coco FG4). Claudia (FG2) felt that the slightly-longer-than-average “look” is one method a clipper uses to get information to compare and rate herself with the tall poppy. Oakes-Ash (2003) refers to this eye behavior as the “Compare and Despair Stare” (p. 27).

Objects, Artifacts

Other negative nonverbals that participants described had to do with one-up-'(wo)manship' by using objects or artifacts. Molly (FG2) described a competitive and envious female neighbor "clipper" who paid careful attention to whatever large material items Molly and her husband purchased:

"We'd no sooner get a boat and she'd have to have a boat; we'd build a porch onto the front of our house, she'd have to have a new porch, we bought a piano and she goes and buys a piano a few weeks later—it goes on and on...talk about keeping up with the Joneses."

Other participants concurred that they had also experienced "clipper" behavior in the competition for number of material possessions. For instance, Chris (FG2), described a female acquaintance/clipper that constantly seemed to compete with Chris and attempt to even the score:

I got a white Prada purse and all of a sudden she had a white Prada purse; I had our countertops changed to granite; then she did the exact same thing with the exact same granite!. I understand that 'imitation is a form of flattery' but this was different, it was as if she was trying to say, 'see, you don't get to have more than me or be better than me in any way! It was sad....It didn't seem flattering to me; it just seemed like she was competing with me and it makes me feel very uncomfortable.

This "keeping up with the Joneses" was definitely a hot topic for the participants. Many of the women who are "Jones-ing it" are seen to be women who try to "steal the thunder" from another woman in the neighborhood. Take, for instance, Suzie's (FG2) comments:

You should see my street--a silent competition is always going on...and it's one WOMAN who is the problem...it's always like who can have the best backyard bbq, who can have the biggest porch geraniums, or the most expensive wreath on the front door or the newest Christmas yard displays and even who can be the best Kool-aid mom...whatever *you have*, she'll top it.

The interesting part of this testimony was that another woman in the same focus group (Claudia) also lives on that street. Both women are similar in personality, appearance and economic status. Until the night of the focus group, she never knew that Suzie felt

the same way as she did. Both had perceived themselves as targeted by the clipper. Claudia added to Suzie's comments by mentioning that all the competition that she witnesses with this neighbor is done as if it's not happening; "she'll be sugary sweet, give fake compliments, but you know it's insincere and then next thing you know, she'll out do you."

Ostracism

Betty (FG3) discussed how avoidance and ostracism were some of the ways she felt "clipped" by a coworker. Betty explains,

...after she [the clipper] decided that I was her rival, I was deliberately left out of things, like not being invited to social gatherings at work, not getting emails...she made sure everyone around knew about things that were going on—except for me.

Within the same FG3 conversation, Helga remarks that being excluded doesn't upset her because of her "internal locus of control", while the vast majority of other women felt strongly that being excluded was emotionally painful. Most of the women felt that social exclusion was a significant form of clipping behavior. Note this brief example:

HELGA: I can't think of a time when not being invited to something would have bothered me.
BRIDGET: It would bring me to tears.
NINA: I'd obsess over it for a week
ZOEY: Yeah. Me, too.

The women in the other focus groups felt the same way. For example, Nico (FG4) had earlier reported that having been excluded by other females (see page 32) had profoundly impacted her. As a result, her adult female friendships are few, and building trust with women has taken years. In the following dialogue between two participants,

Nico adds to her previously shared testimony by explaining the outcome of her social exclusion experience—from which she still hasn't completely recovered.

NICO: I'm going to add a bit extra to what happened to me after I came back to school from being out sick for so many months..., since the A group dumped me, I went to the C group. They accepted me. They were the low poppies anyway ...then all of a sudden the A group sees that, 'Oh, Nico, she's happy again. She's doing well.

LOLA: They wanted you back?

NICO: Yes. Out of the blue the A group was like, "Nico, come on, be our friends again..." So I completely dumped the C group because the A group was asking me back. It was a ploy. I dumped the C group, went back with the A group...as soon as the A group saw that the C group hated me and thought I was a bitch—*then the A group dumped me*. That was their plan.

Personal Space or Territory

Several participants shared stories about clippers overstepping bounds and using physical space as a way to intimidate, frustrate or diminish the target. Marla (FG2), described a situation with a neighbor clipper who constantly "allowed" her dog to defecate on Marla's lawn and let the waste remain. According to Marla, the clipper did not behave this way in her relationships with other neighbors. Marla felt that the neighbor was deliberately trying to treat her with disrespect. She shares her brief story about the clipper,

[she] would walk into our yard whenever she felt like it and 'borrow' our stuff, stuff like kids' toys, a hoe and one time she actually came over and took our picnic table to her yard for a party when we were out of town. We had to ask for it back. I wouldn't have cared if she'd only asked...and she was so nonchalant about it too.

Because Marla observed the clipper behavior used deliberately against her, she understood it as the desire for this neighbor to communicate contempt towards Marla. In a follow up member check with Marla, I asked her how she knew that the clipper was specifically targeting her. Marla commented,

I feel she had it out for me because it seemed that I had the things she wanted....too many material things... and she was jealous that my parents were still alive. I know that sounds ridiculous, but she'd lost both of hers and whenever my parents were over, she'd be especially obnoxious in her backyard, just to bug us...like she'd play really loud music, mow her lawn, let her dog bark incessantly...She didn't want us happy. My parents felt it was most obvious. I do think she thought it was unfair that I had so many positive things going for me in my life and she apparently didn't. And, she also knew how much time we put into our landscaping...so to let her dog sh_it on it and to take our garden tools without asking only made it more clear to me that I was the problem. She didn't do those kinds of things to the other neighbors.

Another participant, Laura (FG2), described a disorganized and sloppy female co-worker who felt that Laura's neatness and organizational skills were somehow an affront, probably because Laura's work habits made the clipper coworker pale in comparison. Laura states, ...she had this belief that 'what is yours is mine' and she'd take my desk supplies, 'borrow' my whiteboard markers, use my computer and leave her crap all over my desk. I think she **knew** it bothered me, and that is why she did it..."

Claudia (FG2) spoke about a perceived co-worker clipper, Trish, who would literally get in her face when speaking to her, just try and intimidate or appear powerful. "She was like a close talker, but only when she was pissed at me for something, otherwise she'd just avoid me completely... She'd come so close to me that I felt like I had to move back to avoid having her breath in my face—I think she thought I'd melt with fear."

Chronemics

Molly, (FG2), described an apparently envious female teammate that used **time** as a way to exert power over the team and to indirectly clip Molly.

...She thrived on being late for every meeting; she knew it pissed me off because it meant I had to start the meeting late because of her; but she liked how it threw me off in front of my colleagues.

Arriving significantly late to a social function—with no forewarning—is another way that participants felt that clippers show disrespect. As Suzie (FG2) explains, “...showing up way late is like a clipper saying to me, ‘you are NOT as important as you think, or, you aren’t worth my time.’” In another party example, Grace (FG2), describes a so-called friend, and the odd way this “friend” used time to clip.

She’d come to my parties and leave after like only 30 minutes! She seemed to like to give me the impression that she was ‘bored’ or having a bad time at my party. She’d never give me any compliments on the food or my house or anything. For the rest of the party I’d analyze why she acted this way and why she left early instead of truly enjoying myself—strange though, I keep inviting her—she’s tied in with my network of friends so NOT inviting would look really bad.

Physical Appearance

One important nonverbal that the study participants seemed to be obsessed by was physical appearance, specifically thinness and breast size. Physical appearance is definitely an area that ignites envy, social-comparison and self-evaluation maintenance in clippers, though it was agreed by participants that there was very little a clipper could do behaviorally to reduce the physical beauty of a tall poppy. Parrot and Smith (1993) note that envy does not always refer to a norm of fair exchange (e.g. a clipper deep down knows she can’t be or doesn’t possess the physical qualities to be as attractive as the perceived TP), but instead can refer to a *feeling of displeasure* with what a woman perceives to be the advantages of another. Parrot and Smith’s comments correspond to what the focus group participants felt. Tanenbaum (2002) argues that women tend to compete over things they think men value, such as appearing sexy and thin. Tanenbaum concludes, ...“the most dangerous outcome of this is self-hatred; girls and women

disparage themselves and dissociate from other females” (p. 47).

The subjects all had had experiences where they envied the appearance of another woman, especially a *thin* woman. The participants felt that most of this envy stayed within the the *mind* of the clipper, though many clippers said that they had, at one point or another, deliberately, outwardly, snubbed a woman—simply because she was attractive. The snubbing was done deliberately by avoiding compliments to the physically beautiful tall poppy, or by finding some negative aspect of the tall poppy’s physical self and mentioning that to another woman; e.g., (she may have the boobs that guys love, but her ass is huge!). Most of the study participants shared the understanding that the envy felt toward a perceived physically beautiful tall poppy was generally a result of comparing one’s self to the tall poppy (and coming up short), and the desire to be seen as *equally* attractive.

Further, clippers can use a tall poppy’s physical appearance as a way to drag the TP through the mud and attempt to ruin her reputation. For instance, Claudia (FG 2) shared a story about a woman she overheard talking at a mutual friend’s party, “...this woman [the clipper] was so obviously jealous of Katie’s body, that she started a rumor that Katie’s breasts were fake, and that Katie had also undergone lipo...none of it was true, but I’ll bet some woman left the party believing that it was true.”

It was generally agreed that clippers would use their physical appearance and sexuality to try and “out do” a physically attractive tall poppy, however. As one participant said, “men may fall for this, but other women don’t.” Several of the study participants spoke about competitive women who tried to purposely dress more

provocatively in the workplace to try to pull the attention away from the perceived tall poppy.

A woman who is attractive—who may have her pick of men—signals to a less attractive woman that she is not in the running for a top choice man. This can heighten the feelings of competitiveness between women. Throughout our evolutionary history, women have competed for limited male resources (Campbell, 2004). Many agree that this competition is exacerbated by massive media images. Jarry, Kossert & Ip note, “...the pervasiveness of thin models in the media, linking thinness to beauty and a desirable lifestyle, offers thinness and beauty as a desirable and seemingly easier-to-achieve route [for women] to self-esteem than mastery in other self-esteem domains, such as professional or interpersonal competence” (p. 2). According to a study commissioned by Unilever, only approximately twenty eight percent of women are comfortable describing themselves as attractive, good-looking, pretty, beautiful, stunning or gorgeous (Etcoff, Orbach, Scott, & Agostino, 2004). With only 28% of women comfortable with their beauty, it is no wonder the physically attractive tall poppy is often clipped.

With this in mind, the focus group participants discussed how low self-concept due to a perceived negative body image could spark competitiveness and envy toward a physically attractive tall poppy, which in turn leads to clipping—either clipping of yourself because you feel inadequate—or the clipping of others. The following excerpts from different focus groups demonstrate how concern over physical appearance communicates to clippers and how clippers use aspects of physical appearance to communicate:

JILL(FG3): I've found this to be true: Women dress for other women...the ones who dress with their boobs out, or really slutty-- that's for the guys... because men have *no sense* of clothes or taste in fashion, only women do... men don't really care what women wear...when you're wanting to be fashionable, you're dressing for other women. And so that comes into play because—who really is clipping who?

In this report, Christie admits to clipping other women and explains why the physical appearance of another woman motivated the clipping.

CHRISTIE(FG1): Sometimes you see in social situations one woman who is perceived to “have it all” and there are men all around her...women *hate* when a woman has men around her. .

My mom's 70 years old and she'll still talks about, “Oh yeah, *she's* one of the boys' club. The men love her...She can feed 'em and lure 'em right in . . .” I think how women act goes back to the caveman days. Women have a need to attract a man...so if some woman is doing that and pulling it off, it ticks you off! It's frustrating because she's using her sexuality...she's working it! And so we're [women] ready to get at her and eat her alive... we want to say, “Damn it! What about your *brain*?” But the truth is sometimes it's about the boobs so... I have learned how to do whatever worked. This is what I've been fed to believe. So if I see someone, a woman, you know, sort of (sigh) working it and I don't think I'm working it enough, then the clipping tends to start. Again, it tends to be physical because that's what I've always strived for—and since I couldn't always achieve it, I clip.

Verbal Messages

To find out a girl's faults, praise her to her girlfriends. ~Benjamin Franklin

Gossip and Backbiting

Gossip and backbiting were two popular—and often overlapping—communicative behaviors that study participants could identify with. Some of the women knew first hand the difficulties they have endured that were generated by being the target of another woman's gossip. Christie (FG1) admitted to being part of the gossip and backbiting problem. Through her testimony she realizes why she might be engaging in these behaviors against tall poppies. In this excerpt, Christie (FG1) shares what she

has done when other women seem to be discussing positive aspects of a tall poppy in her presence:

...I mean, they're pumping this person [the tall poppy] up and I just like WHACK! I just want them to know that this person ain't "all that." I should just keep my mouth shut because it's got nothing to do with anything. It's just that when some women build up another woman to seem like she IS IT, then I feel I have to say, "well, yeah, except they . . ." and I unload *dirt* about that woman...and I don't do it to the general public, just about women I know. But it's gossiping...that's what it is. Down and dirty. It's gossiping and then I have to look at myself and say, What ticked you off? I say to myself, 'why is it that you couldn't keep your mouth shut'?—instead you had to clip.

In this next dialogue, Camilla (FG1) discusses her proclivity to gossip and searches for meaning behind why she does it:

CAMILLA: ...for me it can be totally shallow at times. . . it's always some sort of cattiness that really doesn't make any sense at all. It can be something completely insignificant...that nobody really needs to know about...

MODERATOR: But why do you do it?

CAMILLA: So that somebody else makes fun of them. It's more a teen thing. I want them to laugh at that woman...

CHRISTIE: So why?

CAMILLA: It's a totally spiteful thing. I don't know why I do it.

It is interesting to note that Camilla knows that her clipping behavior “doesn't make sense at all” and she has no reason to justify it. So, what motivates Camilla to select her victim and clip her? Through member checking with Camilla (October 7, 2006) it was confirmed that she doesn't operate in this fashion with all women—just with women who she thinks act “too big for their britches” or “who act like the cheerleader, homecoming queen-type”. By making other women laugh at the target, it creates a bond with other clippers and confirms Camilla's negative judgment of the perceived tall poppy. Camilla notes, “some say ‘if you can't beat ‘em, join ‘em’, in my case, sad to say, if you can't beat ‘em (the perceived tall poppy), find others who'll beat ‘em with you...I know it's rude, but that's how it works”.

Anya (FG1) on the other hand, admits to gossiping and talking about other women behind their back, but puts a “positive” spin on the reason why; it seems paradoxical that a woman would clip another woman to make someone else feel better:

ANYA: [I’ll clip] especially if [I] want to make somebody else feel better...if there’s a friend who looks up to another woman and thinks, ‘I can’t even live up to what she is.’ Then I cut the *other* woman down on purpose to make my friend feel better...

CAMILLA: Anya, that is a very good point.

JILL: ... to make someone feel better I probably would do that too. I’d definitely clip that woman to make my friend feel better. I’d say something bad about her because she’s offended my friend...

In the same focus group, several participants discuss the ways in which some women exercise their clipping behaviors through gossip:

CAMILLA: The [gossip] queen feeds the others. They get some information and they go spread that around and that’s what starts the fire...and that shows that you are “in the know”.

CATHERINE: ...I have a good story that goes with that...I was 23 and at my first job. Looking back I did “have it all”, probably to the girls that I worked with. The office was split with the restrooms in the middle and then all the uneducated people that did the \$5.00 an hour jobs were on one side and all the salesmen were on the other. I was the very first female hire. There was this adorable black guy that was hot as can be and we just clicked. He adored me and we had a fabulous relationship. We would go for drinks and it was great. I got along with the all the guys beautifully ... but those girls on the other side of the restroom...they hated me. One day I walked in to the lunch room and they were talking about me. Rod, the black guy came out and said to me, ‘in the lunchroom they’re talking about you’. I said, “Really.” I walked right in and they shut right up. And they were saying I was sleeping with these guys...I mean, I’m 23! You know, this dude’s 42...and ... they thought I slept with all these guys and I’m thinking, “You know what? I don’t have to sleep with men to get them to like me.”

CAMILLA: Women like that who clip all the time...it seems that part of it is that sexual tension...that competition for a man...It’s because they perceive that because men like you, you must be giving them something as opposed to just being a likable person. Because they, for some reason, they don’t get along with men the same way that successful women do.

In this excerpt, Camilla is responding to another participant, Christie, and her story about a negative gossip experience:

CAMILLA (FG1): ...many times you *just know* women are talking about you behind your back...

CHRISTIE: Oh yeah. I had someone come up to me and say, "I heard from so and so who told so and so that you did such and such." (Sigh) So clearly, and this person didn't have a thing in her brain—she should have just said, 'I confess, we gossiped about you.

In the next example of gossip, Christie (FG1) explains a situation between a tall poppy and a clipper that occurred at her husband's workplace. He shared this story with Christie after having read the invitation materials about this study. Christie's husband felt that he'd lost a talented employee because of the way she was clipped.

CHRISTIE: He [Christie's husband] had one of his female employees say to him that she thought he was having an affair with this *other woman* because he gave her too much attention. He was like, "What?!" You know this **other woman** was a good worker. This was a woman who **did** appear to "have it all". She **did** her job well. She didn't get caught up in all the gossip like the other women that worked there, but what did they do? Clip, clip, clip; they clipped her in the worse way...they accused her of having an affair with the boss behind her back. It was ugly.

In the next lengthy dialogue, several of the FG4 participants discuss a mutual female acquaintance, "Maggie" who appears to be the "clipper of all clippers."

SADIE: Maggie was very good of making sure that everybody saw her in a very, very good light because that was how she validated herself...but she used that as ammunition, too...

LOLA: ...she'd go around to the rest of the girls and try to round them up and say, "You know what *she* did?

KAT: When I first met her she was a different person because I was not happy in my life. I was overweight. I was in a shitty marriage. I was unhappy, and she thrives on other people's misery. And then as soon as I lost weight...got divorced...met this great guy, was happy--

LOLA: Then you became a problem for her.

KAT: Then it was chop, chop, chop. That's what she did to me. She did it in such a manipulative way... behind my back to my other girlfriends.

SADIE: I remember you guys would always be emailing, bickering, bickering back and forth with each other and that totally went away when Maggie left...

MODERATOR: Why do you think she chose you as the victim?

LOLA: I know why, because she [Kat] was the tall poppy.

KAT: It took me a long time to even be able to say it out loud because... I feel weird saying it, but she was absolutely, horrendously jealous of me.

Not only does Kat's story discuss the damage that a clipper caused to a friendship,

but also effectively demonstrates the essence of clipper-tall poppy interaction. In this *one* narrative, components suspected to be part of TPS, envy, social comparison, SEM, female competition, and nearly all of the main clipper communication behaviors are captured: gossip, belittling remarks, and backbiting. Kat's situation reflects elements of Eichenbaum and Orbach's (1987) study on female competition. In their work, women described feeling abandoned and deserted when a female "moves up" or experiences success—this causes competitive feelings to emerge. Other women in the study noted that when a female friend became more successful (a perceived tall poppy) it was if she is "turning her back, leaving [me] to stay stuck in the space [we] once shared" (p. 95). The participants said that a woman's high achievement only raised their desire for recognition but at the same time, they felt "inadequate, depressed and resentful" (p. 98).

Sabotage Communication

A 1997 study by Briles (1999) found that 71% of women (who were predominantly in the healthcare field) reported being sabotaged by another woman, and, if given a choice, one third of these women would never work for a woman again. The GenderTraps (Briles, 1996) study rated sabotage between females as the third largest problem facing women in the workplace. In this study, respondents also reported that sabotage is a problem and definitely a "part" of a clipper's communication. As you will see in the following excerpts, many clippers unconsciously or consciously used their words to jeopardize other women's careers, undermine credibility, destroy trust, and directly or indirectly damage integrity and self-worth *—and* they can strike when you least expect it. According to Briles (1999), saboteurs can use words with veiled messages and

engage a target in conversations that have a hidden, destructive agenda. Many of the respondents agreed that this clipping behavior can be ambiguous—a target may not be aware of *why* the clipper behaviors were generated and what the motives are behind the behaviors. Coco's (FG4) story is a strong example:

I had a situation at work where a woman . . . didn't *quite* stab me in the back but she almost did. The first time it happened I was really irritated and I called her on the phone and left her a voicemail. I said, 'I'd appreciate if you let me know before you make a phone call to my boss about something...' And then it turned out that she did the same type of thing to a counterpart of mine...now, I keep watch of her. I'm...not going to let the same dog bite twice...you get one chance.

MODERATOR: Did you see it [the clipper behavior] coming or was it out of the dark?

COCO: I had no clue. It all of a sudden. I got a call from my boss in the middle of the day...he said, 'Coco, we need to talk' ...I just about crapped my pants because he had this serious tone in his voice and I was fairly new. He said he was bringing somebody out of another [sales] territory into my territory to see if she could give me some "pin pointers" on how to help grow the business." Before we were to go out on the road, she called me and tried to tell how to do my business and told me that the boss sends out "spies" to check on sales reps.. I said to her, "Well, I don't understand this because . . ." . . . So here I am freaking out because my boss is sending her out to watch me and then she starts telling me what to do. Then she called my boss and basically told him that I was being very negative, argumentative and combative, and I was resisting her help. He called me up and said, "This is a problem; I'm sending her out to help you and you're saying no." And I said, "No, no, no, no. That's not how it went." And he said, "You know what? I understand because I know her." And he's like, "I, I get it. I wanted to hear it from the horse's mouth though." So he knew what was going on all along—luckily. Luckily she had a bad history with him too, because I could have been fired just like that.

KAT: She tried to ruin your credibility and she tried to sabotage some of your success.

COCO: She wanted to get herself out of the heat...out from under his, [the boss'] radar...she turned his radar on someone else. She really tried to threaten me and ruin me.

Coco's testimony about her female coworker resembles Heim & Murphy's (2001) research on women working with women. Their study elicited the following questions about women in the corporate world that also address some of the same questions the focus group participants had:

Did they [women] offer advice or mentor their up and-coming female colleagues?
Did they praise other women on successful projects? Did they band together for strength in a male-dominated atmosphere or did they help each other move up the organizational ranks? Some did, but, unfortunately, most did not. In fact, we noticed

that many women in this large corporation often did the opposite.
They actively sabotaged one another (p. 2).

Heim & Murphy found the tactics that women use to undermine each other take forms such as spreading rumors, speaking disparagingly about a person behind her back and trying to get others to dislike a person. Their research affirms Coco's experience.

In the next example, Camilla felt that her job was jeopardized and her work environment poisoned by the gossiping and sabotaging behavior of her coworkers. Her story explains:

CAMILLA (FG1) When I was working full time as an editor in a college...the secretaries would always clip me for some reason...probably because I was just one level above them. And not that there is anything wrong with secretaries, but it seemed like it was a self-esteem issue because there had never been an editor in this college. The secretaries had done the work up until the time they decided to hire an editor. I was the only woman in that professional position. So then I came in and had...more responsibility-- that they just constantly would find one teeny thing and just report it to every supervisor or say things like that I would only use the back door and I wouldn't use the front door because I wouldn't go through them to get to . . . because I was part of the administrative team, so I didn't really have to go through them; but they perceived that as me not wanting to associate with them. It was very uncomfortable...I can honestly say that maybe two out of 40 secretaries would even give me the time of day...they didn't give me a chance. I think I am really approachable; I'm not a pretentious type of person.

Camilla's situation resembles some of Mizrah's (2004) scholarly work. For example, Mizrah asserts that because certain work environments have been male-dominated for so long, when a woman gains some authority, it taints the communication that women have with her, which is often interpreted as cattiness and envy. Mizrah notes that when subordinates fail to recognize a woman's authority, they are less likely to follow her directives or trust her judgment and more likely to cut her down and undermine her reputation. Subordinates instead may doubt their female leader and question the deservingness of her power and only begrudgingly follow orders. Chesler (2003) observes the same woman who would willingly works for a man with a mammoth ego

may turn and sabotage his female counterpart. A lower-ranking woman can sabotage her female boss by undermining her reputation.

Grace (FG3) also described her experience with sabotage. Grace is a new teacher and mentioned several times during our focus group session that she has been targeted by other teachers in her building. Grace thinks it *could* be because she has the respect and admiration of her students. Despite her best efforts, Grace feels that some of the other teachers are envious and seen “out to get her.” Here is an example of one of the teachers sabotaging Grace’s credibility in front of Grace’s students:

GRACE (FG3) ...I have been really strict with my students but they respect me and they respond to me well. One day we had this huge fight at school and it was *my* homeroom kid, so I reamed my whole homeroom out. I said to them, ‘You know by not being part of the solution, by not stopping it, you are part of the problem.’ Then this other teacher came in and said, ‘That was inappropriate. You can’t make everyone feel guilty for one person’s mistakes.’ She’s always undermining what I do in front of the kids and saying, “You did that wrong. You shouldn’t do this. You shouldn’t do that.” ...and she’s jealous because the kids don’t like her and they like me.

Betty is also a teacher and had been clipped by another teacher in her building for over four years. The clipper not only tried to ruin Betty’s professional life, but her personal life as well. Luckily, Betty had established strong enough personal relationships that the clipper wasn’t completely successful in her sabotage attempt:

BETTY (FG3): Well, [after having been clipped by her] my drive wasn’t to keep being friends with that person but just to maintain what I have with others. I didn’t want to have her undo all my relationships...which she didn’t completely, but almost. . . , not only are you trying to stick up for yourself against this one person [the clipper] but, [as a public school teacher] now you have whole community of people that you’re trying to defend yourself against as well.

Evaluative Behavior and Belittling Remarks

Several participants acknowledged that they had experienced clipping by receiving belittling and judgmental comments by other women. From mothers and sisters

to neighbors and colleagues, each of the focus group participants agreed that women used these communicative behaviors to demean tall poppies. Some discussed this negative communication behavior as unwarranted, confusing and emotionally scarring. Many of the women commented that often the judgmental and nasty comments came without warning and “kick you right where it counts...it’s like they [clippers] know your weak spots and target those” (Marla FG2). The following example describes Bridget’s experience with judgmental and belittling remarks:

BRIDGET (FG3)...I was at a party one time and [the clipper] knew I was pregnant at the time so she said something to me about, “Oh, Bridget, you’re such a bitch, you didn’t gain any weight during the pregnancy but then like 15 times during the night she called me a bitch, you know. She was drunk and I was sober and she kind of took it upon herself to...well, there was no reason for it...”

In this example from Camilla (FG1), the belittling remarks came from a significant and influential female clipper—her own mother:

CAMILLA:...I was about five or six, and she said, “Oh, go get my cup,” So I went and got a teacup. And she looked at it and said, ‘You are the dumbest kid I’ve ever had.’ And all I could think of in my little brain was, “I’m the only kid here there’s nobody else-- what is this all about?” I mean just because I got a teacup but she said a cup . . . so . . . she always said things like, ‘You can’t wear a eye shadow and mascara because your eyes are too small’...and things like that...on a constant basis, and so I was like, “Fuck women”. I have no need for that in my life.” I have always had trouble with women...

As one can see, the family itself can even serve as a context for the development of poppy clipping behaviors.

As this section has demonstrated, many different nonverbal and verbal messages are used individually or jointly to clip perceived tall poppies. Some of the participants in the study debated whether or not a clipper’s communicative behavior was “consciously intentional”. Several of the study participants felt that they had been deliberately clipped

through a premeditated “plan”. Other participants noted that the experienced clipper communicative behavior seemed impulsive and even instinctual.

Interestingly, three participants expressed pity for clippers, stating how difficult it is to be a woman today. One participant noted that she felt that women are in a double-bind—and that’s what causes the communication problems. Scholarly literature echoes this opinion. Oaks-Ash (2003) expresses how the many contradictions women experience in our culture lead to competitive and defensive behaviors. For instance, regarding physical appearance, women have learned that it is valued to be thin and pretty, but they have also been told that inner beauty is what counts. Women have learned that they need to compete like men to get ahead in the workplace but women are also expected to be kind, nurturing and cooperative—or risk being perceived as a bitch (Chesler, 2001). Women have learned that being a “good” mother and wife is valued; however, some women are not interested in playing those roles. As a result, of this “double-bind”, women experience internal struggles about how to behave. In order to justify certain decisions, women feel they must defend themselves against the evaluations of other women (2003). Oaks-Ash further notes that the constant contradictions and pressures of being a woman and doing the “right” thing by perceived societal standards, can spur resentment toward other women who seem to have an easier time of it. With few accepted avenues for channeling resentment and aggression, it was generally agreed by participants that clippers resort to masked, demeaning and manipulative verbal and nonverbal communicative behaviors.

Research Question 4: What communication behaviors do tall poppies use in response to being clipped?

Researchers note that an individual's *self*-concept is integrally linked to their communication choices, both interpersonally and intrapersonally (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989; Honeycutt, Zagacki, & Edwards, 1989; Vocate, 1994). Research also suggests that a person's self-awareness and self-talk impacts the selection of certain communication strategies chosen in interaction. These findings contribute to the results of RQ 4. The data shared here represents the five communicative strategies that the participants perceived tall poppies to use when in the midst of a clipper. These strategies, *self-talk, avoidance/boundary setting, self-deprecation, diplomatic confrontation and evaluation of social networks*, will be explained in the following section.

Self-Talk/Self-Reflection

The participants who felt they had been targeted by a clipper seemed initially to respond to the experience by relying on their inner dialogue for support and feedback. Through self-talk they tested and questioned the input they were receiving from the clipper. Targets appeared to give themselves a "reality check" and ask themselves, *is what I'm telling myself about this "clipper experience" accurate?* The data indicated that through the use of realistic and positive self-talk, tall poppies appeared to increase self-correcting behaviors and developed strategies that maintained their own self-esteem, without deliberately diminishing the esteem of another woman.

The term *internal dialogue* as described by Meichenbaum (1977) is referred to as "attributions, appraisals, interpretations, self-reinforcements, beliefs, defense

mechanisms, and many other constructs” (p. 12). This term is often interchanged with the “self-talk”. Morin (1993) states that self-talk is a cognitive tool used for self-reflection.

Research claims that self-talk is a useful psychological resource for women who are attempting to deal with and to counteract the harmful effects of verbal and nonverbal abuse. In a study of women by Campbell, Rose, Kub, & Nedd (1998), self-talk was used as a strategy when trying to effectively manage various aspects of difficult interactions. It was also used when the women sought to maintain their self-concept during and after the difficult interactions.

Additional research has examined the role self-talk may have in self-esteem and self-concept development as well as in maintaining overall well-being (Philpot, Holliman, & Madonna, 1995). Researchers found that the frequency of positive self-statements made by a person does affect overall well-being but suggests that “absence of negative self-talk is more important than the presence of positive self-talk to the overall well-being of the individual” (Philpot et al. 1995, p. 1008). Other researchers have theorized that a person *can learn* self-talk that affirms and nurtures, just as she may have learned to use destructive self-talk (Frey and Carlock, 1989). This research suggests that education in the use of self-affirmations may be effective in responding to a clipper.

In the next example of a clipper incident, the “tall poppy” was bothered and upset, but her first response to the clipper’s behavior was not direct conflict or escalation of conflict; rather, she turned to self-talk.

BETTY (FG3): [the experience of being clipped]...it bothered me a lot. *A lot*...I think it probably made me question things about myself like . . . made me look at things more deeply whereas normally these things weren’t anything I thought about much.

Catherine (FG1), too, reaffirms her self-confidence and restores her feeling of well-being through the use of self-talk:

CATHERINE (FG1): ...And so I just, I laughed it [the clipping behavior] off...I was pissed that they were in there talking about me for things that I didn't do, but then I realized I'm *not* doing those things and it'll pass. And, you know, big deal. You know, if they're jealous of me...great.

In this example, Bridget uses internal dialogue to work through a difficult interaction. Talking herself through the situation helped her to better understand herself and the clipper.

BRIDGET (FG3): If you're...a nice person and there's one person or two people that seem to give you problems, I think to myself, "How could she not like me . . . you know, I have friends and I live a good life, you know...why is this one person...why doesn't she like me? I feel like, "I'm going to make that person like me."

In this excerpt, Domino also uses self-talk to work her way through problematic interactions with a female "clipper" boss.

DOMINO (FG4): I have to think to myself, what are all her [the clipper's] moods, you know? Is, is this because she's not feeling good about herself, or where she's at or whatever have you... she's trying to chop me off...because she knows how smart other women are and they are going to figure out where THEY stand... I think all this is just a normal trait of women...

Nina's commentary is most demonstrative of the positive effects of internal dialogue and of how a tall poppy seeks to maintain a favorable self-concept.

NINA: ...that's the hardest part...when you feel that way [that you've been clipped] is to be patient and to turn to yourself. You know you need to find your self-confidence and say, those are not the friends I want and so to be patient...it will resolve itself. You have to say to yourself, 'you'll be fine...you need to sit back and just pull from within.

BETTY: I had to talk myself through that quite a few times. Exactly. Because I was being portrayed as somebody I wasn't . . . by her.

MODERATOR: So to protect your own reputation, even socially

BETTY: Yeah, right. But I kept my mouth shut through it all and just relied on myself.

In summary, when a clipper targets a “tall poppy” and negative behavior ensues, many “tall poppies” effectively use self-talk as a way to maintain a positive self-concept, which reflects much of Tesser’s (1988) self-evaluation maintenance theory.

Self-Clipping within Self-Talk

Self-talk appeared to serve a dual purpose for the study participants. When used as a constructive coping strategy for the tall poppy, self-talk had a positive outcome. However, when study participants were self-admittedly in the role of a clipper, self-talk was a negative and self-defeating experience. The women in this study called this process, “self-clipping”. When discussing self-clipping, participants said that the envy, competitiveness and social comparisons felt toward a perceived tall poppy were experienced in their ONLY in their head and involved self-clipping—self-talk. In other words, the clipping of a perceived tall poppy target happened in the mind of a clipper, but the tall poppy never was aware of it (note Zoey’s [FG3] testimony, p. 77). In the case of Zoey (FG3) she both clips a perceived tall poppy she sees at McDonalds, and she self-clips in the process.

During this same dialogue on self-clipping, participants discussed how the “tall poppy—poppy clipper” dyadic relationship can take place concurrently within one women’s mind, but operates differently than what is described above. One person described it as “having an angel on one of your shoulders, and a devil on the other...you are both your friend and your enemy at the same time”. It works like this: a woman can be both a tall poppy and a clipper simultaneously. She cognitively holds herself to a high

standard and a self-imposed “ideal” (this is the tall poppy part of the self) and at the same time, she compares her present self to this ideal, and comes up “short”; therefore, she clips herself. Instead of perceiving herself as possessing the positive characteristics of her “perceived” tall poppy ideal, she turns these characteristics into qualities that become “clipped”—saying to herself that these qualities aren’t really “true”, deserved, obtainable, or accurate. This internal process *can* happen in the intrapersonal communication experience of a woman. Hybels & Weaver (2003) define intrapersonal communication as communicating with oneself—communication that involves thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of yourself (self concept). In the experience of ‘self-clipping,’ the woman’s brain is both the sender and receiver, and perceives and processes ideas that are constructing her reality. Through a woman’s negative self-concept and self-talk, comparisons with others, and skewed perceptions, a woman can be her own worst enemy; she can work against *her own* success and growth by self-clipping. The following quotes are representative of intrapersonal self-clipping behavior.

CHRISTIE (FG1): I’m a self cutter. I rip on myself...Okay, so, I might be assertive but at the same time I’m hacking at myself.

Bridget also exercises self-clipping by intrapersonally evaluating herself and scoring her own behavior.

BRIDGET (FG3): Every day I find that I *give myself a score*...I can’t just say, ‘oh, you had a good day’. A lot of that scoring is related to body image stuff. I judge myself everyday...it’s so hard for me to get an “A”-- ...for me, it’s like a competition with myself...

Avoidance/Boundary-Setting

Another strategy used in response to a clipper’s behavior is avoidance or boundary setting. Avoiding a clipper and/or establishing clear boundaries around a

clipper helped put the negative behaviors out of direct view. Staying out of the clipper's range allowed the tall poppy to focus her energy on positive tasks rather than on retaliatory behaviors. In some cases, however, creating boundaries and practicing avoidance did, temporarily, fuel the clipper's negative behavior.

This short excerpt simply supports the assertion that tall poppies do, at times, give clippers space:

NANCY(FG2): When I feel someone is out to get me, I give that person a wide berth; I let the clipper have her space.

In this next example, Betty chose to create boundaries to separate herself from the clipper. Interestingly, Betty's boundaries were nonverbal; she just avoided the clipper's space as much as possible. Temporarily, this fueled the conflict, but, in the long run, it ended up being a useful strategy.

BETTY(FG1): ...I would say in my situation I kind of saw it [the clipping] happening...so I tried to scale back the relationship because I didn't want to be around that person and that's when it got ugly. So I, I created boundaries and that's when she really tried to, you know, clip me. The more I avoided her, the worse it got...but now she's not in my life anymore, so avoiding her was the right thing to do...

In FG4, Kat discusses a time when she used a tremendous amount of self-talk before realizing that she needed to create extremely strong boundaries in the relationship with the clipper. Kat decided to completely end the relationship through a verbal method: she wrote a letter to the clipper.

KAT (FG4): I had come to this realization that she was just this really negative person in my life. She had really honed in on me as her victim. So after months and months of this abuse I finally... wrote her a letter. I just said, 'We're at different places in our lives. I love you. I wish you peace but we obviously cannot be friends...we need to separate this relationship because it's not good for me anymore.'

Lastly, Suzie notes that pulling back and avoiding a clipper is actually an opportunity for the clipper to sort through her own issues, while giving one space to decide that maybe they shouldn't be friends.

SUZIE (FG2): I really think that most of the time the problem that the clipper has with me isn't really *about me*. I think it's more about the clipper and the issues that she has to sort through. So I just pull back on the relationship and give the person time to maybe sort out what it is they're having problems with.

Self-Deprecation

The data indicated that perceived tall poppies also may use self-degradation and purposeful modesty as the most prominent verbal “strategy” when dealing with potential poppy clippers. According to research, a self-depreciative woman tends to see herself as an ordinary person, not outstanding or superior. She identifies with the common woman and is modest, not wanting to show herself above others. Self-depreciative people are not afraid to exhibit their vulnerability—in fact they like to display humbleness. They have no qualms about admitting their imperfections (Owens, 1993).

According to the data, self-depreciative women tend to give others praise, and work to build them up—mainly because it feels more comfortable to the tall poppy to put themselves in the “weaker” position. Owens (1993) notes, however, that a self-depreciative woman is not always one to fully use her potential, because she can underestimate her ability and competence or give away her power, just to be liked by other women. A self-depreciative woman would almost prefer not to excel because it may make her stand out from others and the risks of “standing out” are too high.

According to Heatherington (1993), using self-depreciative statements and presenting oneself as modest is motivated by the desire to be liked by others and not to be

judged as a braggart. Presenting oneself as modest may also be done to enhance the self-concept of others. If another woman's self-esteem is seemingly threatened by a particularly successful woman through the social comparison process, a tall poppy may be driven to downplay herself because of relational concerns (1993).

Self-deprecation research supports much of the testimonies given by the focus group participants. In this next example, Nico uses self-deprecation as a standard practice in her interactions with adult women after having been "burned" by women friends in the past.

Nico (FG4)...Because of how I was treated, I now have to cut myself down so that people will like me; I totally cut myself down and...I try to be so careful in a group of women.

Christie (FG1) felt that women who are *most* liked and respected are those who self-deprecate.

Christie felt strongly that true tall poppies act in a humble, modest way. Catherine (FG1), too felt self-deprecation was important:

CHRISTIE (FG1):...the people you like are the people who are the ones who... self-deprecate. You should try to be humble...because we like somebody who is humble—people who put themselves down.

CATHERINE: Well, it's appreciated.

I thought Catherine's choice of words was intriguing "it's appreciated", versus "yes, I agree with what you're saying, Christie". Why would a woman's use of self-deprecation be *appreciated*? Is it because it makes others feel less intimidated or threatened?

Marie (FG2) also feels that self-deprecation is not only important, but a benevolent way to help out another woman who is showing signs of low self-esteem. For a tall poppy, self-deprecation doesn't truly reduce her status; in fact, some of the

participants felt that in the long run, the tall poppy will obtain greater status by deliberately “playing small” in “small” doses. Note Marie’s comments:

MARIE (FG2) A little bit of self-deprecation is good—like sometimes it’s just for the benefit of somebody else and it makes them feel good at the moment. Nobody gets hurt. Or playing dumb at work—you level yourself off... I want to make someone else feel better, so they know they are not alone.

In a different focus group, Tina (FG4) expressed her reasons for using self-deprecation. For her, self-deprecation heads off potential conflict and creates a more peaceful atmosphere. It’s worth it to her to “play small” to avoid problems with coworkers. Her proclivity toward self-deprecation is based on fear, as this following excerpt explains:

TINA(FG4): I do it [self-deprecate] because I’m terrified of jealousy. I don’t like that feeling...I don’t want somebody feeling that way about me or anyone really. For me it’s just a fear of an uncomfortable place; I’d rather try to create an environment where no one is in the spotlight.

In the following dialogue between some of the women in FG1, Anya and Camilla echo the sad “benefits” of using self-deprecation. It was interesting to learn from some of the participants that tall poppies don’t necessarily have to “give up” confidence or pride when they behave humbly. Inside the mind of many tall poppies, they are confident, competent, etc.... so playing small around another woman does not reduce their own self-concept. In fact, according to Anya and Camilla, if a tall poppy becomes aware that another woman needs help with confidence or esteem, the tall poppy will rise above her own ego to boost the other woman.

ANYA (FG1): That’s part of the defense mechanism too by making *YOURSELF* look stupid so that somebody else doesn’t feel so bad about themselves...when they lack confidence.

MODERATOR: You purposely self-deprecate...so that you don’t appear to BE a tall poppy?

JILL: Absolutely

CAMILLA: [I'd say something negative about myself too] you know, something to make them feel better. And part of it is that . . . you don't want to be the first one done, you don't want to be the smartest one in the class, you don't want to be the **best** at something. You just want to be that even-level poppy.

Catherine (FG1), on the other hand, feels the frustration of having to play small around potential clippers. In her case, she is proud of what she has accomplished and of how hard she has worked. When friends from a different socio-economic level come to visit, Catherine feels that she has to find something wrong just to make her friends feel better. In fact, the disparity between the lifestyles of Catherine and her friends caused Catherine to want to dissolve the friendships—all because she feels she has to defend the way she lives and avoid sharing anything about the success she's earned. Not being able to share this part of herself makes Catherine feel that these friends don't truly know her. After Catherine shared a story explaining her feelings, Rachel responds with her own frustration about why women feel the need to have to apologize for what they have. Rachel doesn't understand why the 'tall poppy' that always has to lower herself or self-deprecate—why doesn't the 'average poppy' just *grow*, instead?

CATHERINE (FG1): [My girlfriends] didn't go on to college so their idea of "having it all" are completely different than probably mine...I almost feel guilty when I call them about things that are going on in my life. I will cut myself down to their level...but we live like completely different lives because they grew up in a very small town and are working completely different jobs than I am...One time they came to my house when I first moved in and they said, "Oh, my God, this is your *house*???" And I'm thinking, "Are you serious?" It's just a house...they think I'm living life large and I'm embarrassed and I feel like, "No really, it's not a big deal." But they say, "Oh, it must be *nice* to have a brand new house." What I do is ...I'm cutting myself in front of them... I'm trying to find something wrong with it... I find myself cutting my OWN life down to show that I'm not a big deal when...actually, I'm very proud of what I have.

CAMILLA: But I think you should be proud of it. I don't think there's anything wrong with being proud of something you have worked to accomplish.

MODERATOR: I would agree, Catherine.

RACHEL: ...Why did you [Catherine] feel the need to share all that? Why is it that women feel the need to have to apologize for what we have?

Rachel's comments came at the very end of FG1 and left the participants anxious for more discussion and information. Rachel's final question drove some women to further frustration at why it is that some women believe they cannot freely and comfortably share their achievements without feeling the need to apologize and/or minimize their successes. Sadly, the group agreed that it is better to feel as though you "belong" or "fit in" with your friends than to share or show any talents or achievements. The group felt that affirmation and acceptance from a group of women would only come if a certain degree of humbleness and self-deprecation infiltrated any discussion of successes.

Decision Not to Take It Personally

Earlier in this paper, participants described tall poppies as being self-aware and confident. Perhaps these two qualities are what empower TPs to place negative clipper comments in proper perspective and to not take those comments personally. The data shows that the decision to "not take it personally" is yet another coping mechanism that some tall poppies use in response to clipper behaviors. In the following example, the participants from FG4 discuss the importance of not taking nasty behavior from clippers so personally.

LOLA: I've learned over a long period of time that you have to learn not to take everything so personally. Taking comments from another woman personally can become this big huge conflict in your own mind when it may have nothing to do with you. It's this other person with their own issues...they might just be having a bad day...

KAT: The problem is that not taking things personally shows you are *confident*...and you either have people who are accepting of that confidence and enjoy being around you because of that or you have these people that are poppy choppers because of it...

Nancy (FG2) also responded that she used this same coping mechanism in her response to a clipper:

I finally decided not to take her [the clipper's] cut downs personally. I think I showed her that I was the 'bigger person' in the situation and what she said wasn't going to cause me to lose sleep. I think it was clear after a while that I was letting her behavior roll right off me...I kept my emotions out of it. After a couple months, [she]...just left me alone.

Evaluating Social Network

In addition to 'not taking it personally', some participants report that they evaluate their social network when faced with a perceived clipper problem and possibly "weed out" clipper-type friends. Respondents mentioned that when they felt targeted by a clipper, they "checked in" with other friends to see if the clipper's behavior is apparent and occurring to others as well. "Checking-in" explains the tendency of a TP to "survey" other women in the same social circle to see if a clipper's behavior is consistent across the circle. A perceived tall poppy wants to evaluate whether or not the clipper is specifically targeting *her*; perhaps if the clipper behavior is happening "across the board", then the behavior may be a personality trait, or possibly reflective of a different problem. If the TP realizes that she is the *only* target, the clipper's behavior is reevaluated and a new response toward the clipper is selected. The following example supports this assertion. This excerpt tells of a clipper who typically arrives late to meetings run by an assumed "tall poppy". This clipper appears to target only *one* woman, Molly, within her social network. Molly (FG2) (member checked October 7, 2006) explains...

...She thrived on being late for every meeting; she knew it pissed me off because it meant I had to start the meeting late because of her; but she liked how it threw me off in front of my colleagues. At first I thought it was just a function of her

lax nature, but then when I mentioned it to other coworkers, they said she was always punctual for them—then I knew it was some problem she had with me...

Checking in with other co-workers allowed Molly better assess the clipper situation and helped her conclude that this clipper behavior was meant for *her* and was not a general personality trait.

A second, more extreme aspect of this evaluation strategy is called “weeding out”.

Weeding out refers to pulling back on or letting go of the clipper relationship—despite the disruptive impact it may have on others in the same social network.

Camilla (FG2) (October 7, 2006), asserts that she...

... would choose this [weeding out] response based on the severity of the clipping, the support of the social network and/ or the number of times the clipping has occurred. She'd (the target) would eliminate this “friend” out of respect for herself and a need to stay emotional balanced.

Lola (FG4) demonstrates the weeding out response to a clipper in the following excerpt:

Letting her (the clipper) go has taken so much drama out of my life...it was hard to do because I don't like hurting someone's feelings but it's just something I had to do...there are other friends out there. I needed to be true to my needs and to respect myself.

In this example, Bridget (FG3) and Helga (FG3) also support the “weeding” response:

BRIDGET: I had a friend actually that said a couple years ago that she was ready to weed out her friends...the first time she said it I was like, ‘what a horrible thing to say.’ But now I understand. You have to get rid of friends who just bring you down.

HELGA: Yes, you only have so much time...and what are your priorities? You have to start to concentrate your energies on people who just like you for who you are.

In conclusion, the study participants felt that evaluation of their social network would be one of the first things they would do when experiencing perceived clipper behavior. The “weeding out” response would be a “last resort”. Most respondents said the weeding out process would depend on the level of investment they had in the relationship with the

clipper, the number of supportive friends they have, and the frequency in which the perceived tall poppy would have to interact with the clipper on future occasions.

Diplomatic Confrontation

Several of the study participants indicated that they would “confront” a clipper directly. However, respondents felt that the word “confront” was too severe and that it implied aggressive behavior. Participants were more comfortable using terms such as “diplomatically confront” or “tactfully confront”. These words correspond the description of a tall poppy discussed in RQ 1: “*a tall poppy is diplomatic...a woman who can speak her mind but not show aggression or cattiness*”. The following examples demonstrate the Tall Poppy’s capacity to tactfully confront situations with clippers.

COCO (FG4): ...and the first time (the clipping) happened I was irritated and I called her on the phone and left her a voicemail. I said, “I’d appreciate if you let me know before you make a phone call to my boss about something like this. It was a complete misunderstanding.”

CHRISTIE (FG1): ...I had someone...come up to me and say, “I heard from so and so who told so and so that you did such and such...and I went, ‘Oh, well that’s interesting...’ and I just confronted it.

The next example describes one participant’s experience of clipper behavior. Her testimony ends with a comment about an unknown but confident woman who assertively confronts the situation and puts an end to the clipper conduct.

JILL: This is what I find with a pack of women....one women is queen, or assumes that title, and she rules by intimidation. No one necessarily agrees with her until someone is assertive enough to ...say something...to stand up for others.

In summary, participants felt that a diplomatic confrontation with a clipper strongly demonstrates the confidence and assertiveness, which is a general characteristic of a perceived tall poppy.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The previous chapters described the central problem of TPS, the related literature, and the methodology used to investigate the research questions. Results and interpretation from the research were outlined in order to understand plausible answers to these questions. In this chapter, brief summations that respond to the research questions are presented. The bulk of the data summation was derived from the participants' responses and the literature and is incorporated into the results and interpretation chapter.

While the researcher suspected that TPS exists among American women, it was uncertain if the data would refute this notion or support it. Grounded theory guided the creation of communication categories and the outcome of the study. The following questions were addressed by this thesis:

- RQ1: Do American women experience the phenomenon of the "tall poppy"?
- RQ2: Do American women experience the phenomenon of being a "poppy clipper"?
- RQ3: What communication behaviors do poppy clippers use in response to the tall poppy?
- RQ4: What communication behaviors do tall poppies use in response to being clipped?

Regarding RQ 1 and 2, the data revealed that indeed, American women *do* experience the phenomenon of TPS both as a tall poppy and a poppy clipper. The participants readily shared stories that focused on themselves or others who had been a "tall poppy" and had been clipped.

Since participants were able to share experiences of being a tall poppy or a poppy clipper, I was able to develop a basic profile of a tall poppy and of a clipper, as she "appears" within our culture today. As stated previously, however, a tall poppy is a matter of individual perception. Nevertheless, many generalizations were found to be

consistent among the four focus groups. Furthermore, the words participants used to describe the experiences regarding the tall poppy or poppy clipper were echoed in the scholarly literature that first identified the Australian tall poppy.

After considering the data, it became clear that the envy and competitiveness were the main components of the TPS experience. Ceramalus (1994) argues that TPS is “comprised of envy, covetousness and jealousy” (p. 75). Other data were backed by the research as well. Tracinski (2002) notes that an individual with TPS (a clipper) is envious of someone’s actual or perceived status, and socially compares herself with the perceived successful other. This envied person must be demeaned. An individual with TPS feels others’ successes are an affront, a reminder of her inadequacies. Like Tracinski’s (2002) comments, most of clipper behaviors, according to the study participants, were felt to be driven by feelings of inadequacy, envy and frustration brought on by comparing oneself to others. Whether a clipper’s actions were conscious or not, the communicative outcome either undermined, obstructed or deflated another woman’s success. This research certainly corresponds to the focus group participants’ experiences.

RQ 3 was addressed by extracting and sorting the negative communication behaviors illuminated by the data. Clippers’ communicative behaviors were considered by the participants to be subtle and indirect, and reflected in nonverbal and verbal forms such as eye rolling, ostracizing, gossiping, judging, belittling remarks and sabotaging. The participant’s experiences of clipper communicative behavior resemble the research done by Wert & Salovy (2004). According to these researchers, competitiveness and envy are often manifested in indirect ways, such as through gossip, passive-

aggressiveness and backstabbing. This affirms the continued suspicion that competitiveness and envy are components of TPS.

RQ 4 elicited much less data, which I believe is because the participants were less willing to admit to or are unaware of being a tall poppy themselves; therefore, they weren't as fluent on how a tall poppy would respond to being clipped. In summary, most of the participants felt that self-deprecation was one way tall poppies prevent being clipped. Self-deprecation was generally viewed as a positive communication method to use with clippers, but it was also considered sad and unfair that it needed to be used at all. This ambivalent feeling about self-deprecation suggests that tall poppies do not feel free to fully experience their successes; they know it "works" to self-deprecate, but in some cases, it denies a woman her own sense of personal power and worth.

Self-talk and Avoidance/Boundaries were clearly methods that many participants used in response to clipper behavior. The data does show that the participants who used self-talk as a strategy generally felt it helped them to gain perspective on the situation and to "let go" of seemingly volatile behaviors that are communicated by clippers. Jill (FG1) explained that "letting go" helped maintain her feelings of self-worth. "Perspective gaining" about the clipper helped in considering the circumstances of the clipper, and finding reasons to "justify" or better understand the reasons behind the clipper's behavior. This, in turn, aided in deciding a communicative response to the clipper. Self-talk also influenced the boundaries established by the tall poppy in the presence of a clipper. According to participants, deciding to weed out a clipper from their social network or instead to *avoid* the clipper temporarily, is accomplished through self-talk.

Setting up personal boundaries to cope with clipper behavior is also said to be accomplished through self-talk. The only dangerous aspect of self-talk is the tendency for some women to self-clip.

In summary, the data showed that TPS is part of women's lived experience. Though it is an unfortunate and destructive dimension within women's lives, it seems as though Tall Poppy Syndrome is just a "normal" part of women's lives—something women in our independent and competitive culture have to live with. Participants generally felt that experiencing TPS, whether being a victim of it, or possessing the symptoms of it, "is a cross we bear as women" (Claudia, FG2). The participants blamed the evolutionary or biological make-up of the female, society, the media, and their personal upbringing for the role TPS plays in their lives. However, Mizrahi (2004) claims evolutionary and socialization-based explanations for female aggression only steer women to faulty "solutions" that undermine rather than empower women. Suggesting that TPS behaviors are based on "what it means to be a woman" only enables women to think that they must continue to tiptoe around other women and minimize their skills and talents, because that is "how you have to be if you are a woman". This research begs the question, how will a woman flourish fully when she feels she must "play small" and hide her "special talent/ability" and "promotability" just to keep harmony in the workplace or within certain social networks?

Whether it be cultural bounds, social programming, social contexts or other influences, women are extremely vulnerable to experiencing the symptoms of or being the victim of TPS. Because our culture is in flux concerning women's roles, and because

society still finds ways to perpetuate the perception that women's roles are somehow *less valuable* than men's (Orenstein, 2001), women have no congruent basis for comparing their lives to anyone other than to another woman. Therefore, women constantly compare their attributes, successes and individual characteristics to those of other women.

Although women have more opportunities than ever before, they are still challenged by gender role expectations. Most women in this study claimed to be “terrified” of appearing bitchy or mean. Also, many women believe they have to “prove” themselves to other women in ways such as who can be prettiest, who has the most money, who is the best mom, who has the corner office, etc... Because of the need to prove ourselves as “worthy” and because most women in our society are raised to play “nice”, to be polite and to be nurturing (Chesler, 2001), some do not know how to effectively communicate when conflict emerges—they feel caught in a contradictory dilemma; which may create frustration and lead to the symptoms of TPS. The data in this study report that clippers tend to use evasive and insidious ways of handling conflict with other women, strategies such as, gossiping, sabotaging and belittling. In these indirect ways, women can communicate feelings of inadequacy, competitiveness and envy to other women—without appearing “mean”.

One important conclusion that can be drawn from the data is that while envy and competitiveness make up the largest component of TPS, snap judgments and misperceptions may be at the core of how TPS is initially enacted. Many of the women in the study who admitted to *being* a clipper, for example, appeared to use “early closure” (Goffman, 1959) which, in this study, refers to erroneous impressions of other women

(tall poppies) built on faulty perceptions. Because of these perceptions, communication lines became closed *too early* for many positive relationships to form. According to seminal work by sociologist pioneer, Goffman (1959), when people are unsure of themselves, lack confidence, or lack relevant information about others, the perception of others typically comes out as biased or distorted. Clippers seem to close out new, important information and substitute what is known from a previous encounter or what is convenient. Various factors such as self-esteem, age, gender and personal background can influence these perceptions, which in turn, lead to expectations and judgments—some of which may be false. The understanding of any constructive dimensions of the tall poppy is closed, shutting off positive communication.

Interestingly, many of the participants in this study only began to understand this early closure phenomenon and its relationship to clipping *during* the sharing of their comments and stories. When they realized that they (when in the role of a clipper) had negatively “communicated” with tall poppies before having a wider, more accurate perspective, participants commented that their future interactions with tall poppies would certainly be more sensitive. The following excerpts show early closure as the participant is realizing it. In this example, Chris became aware of how she had been treating her (tall poppy) sister-in-law:

CHRIS (FG2): I guess we really *can't* know all that's behind a woman. We don't always have the whole story, but we behave based on what we perceive the truth to be—even if it's wrong.

In this interaction between Nico and Foxy (FG4), both women come to realize how “off the mark” their initial perceptions of some women can be:

NICO: Sometimes when you do get to know someone and see the “real picture”... I think they (other woman) can seem better . . . we know somebody, we'll call her Jillian--She initially really

intimidated me ...because she has the kind of life I thought I wanted...It actually turns out she doesn't because her and her husband are all like cheating on each other and shit. Once I got to know her... and I was never vindictive towards her but I did always feel a little inadequate...like she had the perfect husband....

she's beautiful...she lives right on Rush Street downtown...and then I got to know her and I realized, 'You know, she's not happy either.'

FOXY: And once that you got to know her you're less likely to bash.

NICO: Yeah, yeah, yeah! I'm like, 'Oh my gosh she's got her own set of problems...'

FOXY: The *problem* is that our perceptions can be so off the mark; we could be trying to figure her out and realize that it's not true at all—maybe it's not *about you* at all; it's about something else."

Unlike the previous testimonies, Christie (FG1) shares how it felt to be on the *receiving* end of a snap judgment. This is why she now tries to remember that we don't always have the whole picture before we clip:

CHRISTIE (FG1) ...when you talk about to "have it all" and clipping, I try to keep in mind that you don't know what goes on behind the curtain. I remember people used to look at me and I was gorgeous. Really --120 pounds, great looks, a beautiful young lady whose self esteem was down to nothing—who got down to 117 and spent a month in an eating disorder hospital because I couldn't stop losing it. I went to a clinic to weigh in and one woman was like, 'What are you doing here?' Thinking I came in as 120 pounds looking to lose weight. And I said, 'I've lost 40 pounds. I've worked to get here'... but it was an attempt to look at me and judge me as is. And that's what I try to keep in mind . . . like I think of someone now who I know has had work done [plastic surgery] and I think my first instinct might be to rip on her...but the other side of me is thinking, "OK, is there something going on here that she feels the need to give the impression that she has it all. Why to "have it all", does she feel the need to surgically alter one's self? I try now to put myself in her shoes, whereas 15 years ago I wouldn't have. I'm a different person now.

Like Christie, Kat (FG4) explains in this next segment how she was initially misperceived—and clipped—by her female coworkers:

KAT (FG4): Well, they're [the women coworkers—perceived as clippers] are better now that they know me more--but it wouldn't surprise me if there was still underlying stuff going on...but generally people are Ok with me now. Which makes me think . . .do we get past issues with another woman once we get to know her?

In a different focus group (FG4), a related experience happened to Foxy:

There was this girl in college who used to work in food service...She was so beautiful – perfect cheek bones, skinny, blond...I find out this guy was totally in love with her and at first I was like, why?" ...because I saw her as stuck up...but because of him I got to know her and to this day she's one of my closest friends and she is the person in my life I've had the least amount of

conflict with-- but I had that initial negative perception....our perceptions can be so completely off the mark, it's unbelievable.

In the proceeding story, shared by Zoey (FG3), (which happened the day of focus group session), she admits to being a clipper and to making snap judgments without even knowing the targeted tall poppy. Note that her clipping behavior targets her own self and the tall poppy, though the entire clipping experience remains only in Zoey's inner dialogue. As with Foxy's testimony above, the following narrative also illustrates the clipper's tendency to misperceive and criticize using faulty information.

ZOEY (FG3): ... today I'm driving in the car with my kids. We're having a crazy morning and I decided to take them to McDonalds...and I'm feeling bad about the fact that I took them to McDonalds because I don't believe in that kind of thing...as I'm driving, I see this woman in this fancy black car and the license plate is **TOO CHIC**, and she has cool sunglasses and her hair is perfect and she has two children in the back seat and their hair is golden curls...and her car's immaculate and I look in mine and there's crap everywhere in the car...I look back and the boys have snot coming out of their nose and I hate that woman. And I don't know her...and I have no reason to hate her and I'm thinking, "I'm not **chic** at all!...I just think, "God, I don't know this person." And I'm thinking, "I hope she can't see my McDonalds in the car if we're stop at the stoplight because she'll look at me and say to herself, "No wonder that woman's plump, she's eating McDonalds." This is what goes on in my mind and I'm rating this woman that I've never met and I think I'll never see again...then I pull into the lot ...and she pulls in right next to me and I think, "Oh, no, now I've got to eat my McDonalds with the kids and look at this woman that's a size 4, not eating McDonalds...so I automatically decided that she's a terrible woman. She's at the table next to me where this other woman is more like me, normal, who's got three kids who's yelling at her kids and obviously extremely religious...and they know each other and they're having this conversation while I'm trying to sneakily eat my McDonalds and say kind things to my children. And I see that she's obviously an extremely nice woman—and then I'm like, "You are a terrible person because she's nice and you passed all this judgment... You know it **was me** driving down the road not feeling good about a choice that I made and then seeing someone else that is leading a different lifestyle and that started my tirade that she is a terrible person.

Several women noted that misperceptions and clipping occurred when the study participants, in the role of a clipper, admitted to having a preconceived perceptions of how other women *should* behave, mainly consistent with societal norms. If a tall poppy's behavior is something other than what is "expected", clipping can begin. Chesler notes if women are perceived as not behaving in the way other women expect them to they may

feel betrayed. It is no wonder women tend to be hard on other women, and on themselves: they are socialized to live up to these stereotypical roles and expectations of perfection everyday. The following comment by Jill (FG1) is an example of this argument:

JILL: I tend to...clip women that I don't understand...women who don't nurture relationships with other women. I probably am guilty of clipping them because I don't get that...and I don't mean that poor woman being pushed aside because she's beautiful, which I agree happens....what about women that are *so unlikable* because they don't nurture other women.

A woman's low self-concept and her tendency to compete with rather than understand and appreciate another woman make clipping more likely. Early closure and snap judgment contribute as well. Note the following example of this cyclic process that demonstrates this:

Jenny has a perception of her new female coworker "She is too skinny". Jenny's self concept about body image is poor because of being called "fat" as an adolescent. Jenny's communicative behavior toward her new coworker is cold and terse. Jenny's coworker responds by deciding not to befriend Jenny and proceeds to find other coworkers with which to form relationships.

This next example shows a similar scenario but here Jenny has a good self-concept and chooses to understand the new coworker rather than compete with her. As a result, positive communication occurs:

Jenny has a perception of her new female coworker, "She is thin. She must be healthy and take good care of herself; I admire that—I'll bet she'd motivate me to take better care of myself; I'd like to be friends with her". Jenny's self-concept is one of confidence, and she knows herself well to respect others who follow a healthy lifestyle, even though Jenny isn't so thin herself. As a result, Jenny's communicative behavior is welcoming and positive and she offers to help the new coworker in her new position. Her new coworker responds enthusiastically and makes conversation to get to know Jenny better.

From these two scenarios, it is clear that women have a choice in how they decide to behave toward another woman, but this choice can only be realized and considered when women understand themselves—their own talents, goals, dreams and vision—and

become aware of the state of their own self-concept. It is crucial for a woman to grasp the cyclic process of self-concept and communication to know how her behaviors affect others, and how others' behaviors affect her.

LIMITATIONS, PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has many unique features that account for its strengths; however, these features may also contribute to its weaknesses. Grounded theory allows for flexibility but it can also permit greater personal involvement by the researcher—which may lead to researcher bias. Nevertheless, subjective deductions are a component of grounded theory—especially in the development of this study's conclusion. Further, topics within this research pose social desirability issues; envy has a reputation of being a taboo subject. Smith et al. (1999) suggests that some individuals have developed psychological defenses that serve to prevent self-acknowledgement of envious thoughts. Another limitation to this methodology is that envy may be below conscious awareness and therefore participants may simply not be cognizant of their envious tendencies or motivations.

Yet another limitation to this study lies in the fact that the data were gathered through personal testimonies in the presence of other women who live in the same community. This may contribute to the desire to present oneself in a positive way, rather than reveal the “truth”; therefore, an exploration of the relationship between impression management (Goffman, 1959) and TPS would also be an area worth examining. Future research might consider focus groups involving individuals from different localities who

have no previous relationship. Further research might use one-on-one interviews to ascertain if the results from this study are indeed supported.

The homogeneity of the sample in this study is also a limitation. Future research should consider the perspectives and experiences of women from different ethnic groups, as well as from different classes, ages, and regions within the country. Cultural studies addressing Hispanic and Asian populations within the United States could provide additional understanding of TPS and benefit cross-cultural communication understanding. An investigation into family communication patterns as a possible contributor to adult poppy clipping behavior could merit noteworthy results. Subsequent studies could also include the data from men.

Practical Applications

This research suggests a need to educate women about the communication challenges and psychological components that exist in female relationships. Awareness is one important step in developing better communication methods. Awareness could improve some women's tendencies to envy and misperceive other women and serve to increase sensitivity levels.

Women need to be conscious of the factors that encourage them to compete with each other. Awareness of TPS can assist women in realizing that they can be a positive part of another woman's advancement, and that the success of one can lead to the success of another. Understanding healthy competition and positive communicative behaviors, women can motivate each other to do their best and support each other in areas that may have been previously dominated by TPS. In fact, TPS components such as

competitiveness and envy *are* considered “manageable” by “owning it, [and] working in the direction of gratitude toward the envied good object” (Mouly & Sankaran, 2002, p. 54), thus showing that increased awareness can be effective.

Self-awareness is perhaps most important. Understanding what motivates and drives our individual communication behaviors can help us create a stronger perceptual filter, which can prevent negative messages from being expressed. Additionally, education in self-awareness, self-reflection and self-monitoring could increase the ability for women to modify behavior before speaking. Education on TPS could also help women acknowledge their own gifts and strengths, rather than envying those of other women.

Further, helping women see that they have a choice in how they perceive and behave toward each other can help provide a positive model for future interactions. Many women could benefit from understanding how perceived tall poppies can serve as inspiration and motivation for their own self-improvement. Lola (FG4) summarizes this feeling for the participants in the conclusion of the FG4 discussion:

LOLA: Here's the thing. You have a choice. You meet somebody that's a tall poppy . . . a tall poppy to you . . . because it's all relative--because they represent what you don't have or what you define as excellence or whatever. And you have a choice. You can either look at her as a threat and be like, “They have. I don't. Bitch.” Or you can look at it like why not surround myself with amazing women—I can learn from them. I feed off of that. I totally do. Tall poppies make me a better person.

This research would be especially useful when applied to specific career areas that, at this time, appear to be dominated by women, nursing and teaching for example. Through publications, revised organizational structures (both hierarchical and physical),

recognition and social programs and special events, a more altruistic behavioral model of communicating with other women can be developed.

If TPS is formally addressed through women's studies courses, workshops, in personal development courses, perhaps women will demonstrate greater acceptance of their own selves as well as greater tolerance toward their "sisters". Through education, women can be encouraged to demonstrate directly or by example the positive impact of appreciating and encouraging each other. The outcome can cause recipients to grow in ways they never thought possible.

This study supported the assertion that TPS is an experienced phenomenon in our American culture among some women. It revealed specific communication behaviors that contribute to TPS and posed possible reasons why the behavior occurs. A by-product of the research was that the focus group participants gained awareness and clarity on previously misunderstood communication encounters with other women that had negatively affected their lives. Further, participants added words such as, "TPS", "Tall Poppy", and "Clipper", to their daily lexicon. Previous to this study, participants mentioned that no word existed to describe the behavior experienced in the clipper-tall poppy phenomenon.

This study encourages scholars to undertake additional research and to develop other practices that recognize TPS and its impact on organizational communication, gender communication and interpersonal communication. My conclusion calls for personal and professional education for women about the societal and behavioral impact that TPS can have on women's relationships. It is hoped that through more education,

women will eventually show greater tolerance for other women and come to understand their own motives and behaviors. As a result, their friendships and relationships would be more authentic and fulfilling, and their own lives would flourish.

END NOTE

The majority of the women in the study commented that they changed significantly regarding their plans for future interactions with envied females. Never before had they had the chance to discuss this topic with other women and to arrive at new conclusions together. Before this study, *Poppy Clipper* and *Tall Poppy* were not part of the lexicon for these participants. They were pleased to know that there are terms and concepts that describe some of the stressful, competitive, envious interactions they have experienced with women. The participants in the study now have new vocabulary words they use to describe their behaviors. The women said not only are they more aware of their own clipping behaviors, but that they are consciously giving more women a “break” and respecting them for the talents that they possess. Instead of envying other women, many of the participants said they will now focus their energy on their own self-improvement.

Since I began this research several years ago, new books related to this topic have emerged. Judging by the popularity of this literature, the volatile dynamics between women appears to be of rising importance to the general population. The recent publishing of books on this issue affirms its salience in popular culture:

Catfight: Women and Competition (Tanenbaum, 2002)
I Can't Believe She Did That! Why Women Betray Other Women at Work (Mooney, 2005)
Tripping the Prom Queen (Barash, 2006)
Necessary Dreams (Fels, 2004)
Mean Girls Grown Up: Adult Women Who Are Still Queen Bees, Middle Bees and Afraid-to-Bees
 (Dellasega, 2005).
Anything She Can Do I Can Do Better! (Oaks-Ash, 2003)

Further, other media continues to demonstrate the conflict between women in shows and movies such as: *Sex in the City*, *Desperate Housewives*, *The Apprentice*, *Wife Swap* and *The Bachelor* and *Mean Girls*, *The Devil Wears Prada*—just to name a few. A large American audience waits every week to view women demoralizing and belittling each other. Unfortunately, *solutions* to any conflict(s) between the women are rarely, if ever, presented; rather, the drama builds and the mud slings—and this is presented as entertainment. A recent Washington Post article (Hornaday, 2006) coined a new and related word: *Idolspize*, which is a combination of *idolize* and *despise*. *Idolspize* refers to close friends, colleagues, acquaintances or complete strangers who make our own lives pale in comparison. These are the envied; the people “who seem to have sprung fully formed from our ugliest competitive streaks, our egos at their most fragile, our deepest self-loathing. They are our own squandered potential, fully realized” (p. 2). The negative portrayals of women in the popular media only underscore the reality and reinforce the perception that women can be catty, competitive and envious.

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UK, Oxford University, Department of Economics.

APPENDIX A-G

APPENDIX A.

Research and Focus Group Questions**Research Questions**

1. Do American women experience the phenomenon of the “tall poppy”?
2. Do American women experience the phenomenon of being a “poppy clipper”?
3. What communication behaviors do poppy clippers use in response to the tall poppy?
4. What communication behaviors do tall poppies use in response to being clipped?

Focus Group Questions

1. *Describe a woman who seems to “have it all.”*
2. *What characteristics or attributes of women seem most threatening to other women?*
3. *What behaviors do envious females display to other women? In other words, what does an envious female “look” like; Do they behave? Do they communicate their envious or competitive feelings toward other women?*
4. *Describe a time when you felt that you were the subject of another woman’s envy—you were the “tall poppy”).*
Probes:
How did you feel?
What did the other woman/women say or do?
What did you do in response?
How did your relationship change?
5. *Describe a time when you were envious of another woman—you were the “tall poppy clipper.”*
Probes:
How did you feel?
What did you do/say in response?
How did your relationship change?

APPENDIX B.

Dear _____,

February 2006

You are invited to participate in a UW-Whitewater research study titled, *Of Crabs and Tall Poppies: Women's Communication Associated with High-Achieving Women*. This research is in partial fulfillment of my Master's Degree in Corporate Communication. My study explores the communication women have with *other* women who are perceived to be "above average" in one or more areas of their life. I am also seeking to discover why some amazing women do not feel comfortable maximizing their true potential or being completely "themselves" for fear of negative social consequences. The UW Institutional Review Board has approved this research.

You were selected and/or recommended for this focus group research because of your known perceptiveness and your ability to articulate ideas and to share your opinions.

If you are able to participate, you may choose which night works best for you from the list below. You only have to choose ONE night. The focus group will take from 60 to 90 minutes, during which I will ask a series of open-ended questions and facilitate a discussion of the topic. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions—I'm simply looking for your ideas, stories and opinions about the issue, whether positive or negative. Focus group participants are not expected to be experts in the questions discussed, and you do not need to respond to all questions. Only between four to eight women will participate in each focus group session.

If you choose to participate, sample questions will be given in advance so that you have time to consider any experiences/opinions you have related to the question(s). The focus group session will be audiotaped; however, *no participants will be publicly identified in the focus group report. All information will be kept confidential and will be used without reference to name or affiliation in any formal or informal presentations/publications.* Focus group participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time.

- Focus group 1: Mon., March 6th at 6:30 p.m. at the Stoughton Public Library Carnegie Meeting Room.
- Focus group 2: Wed., March 15 at 6:30 p.m. at the Stoughton Public Library Carnegie Meeting Room.
- Focus group 3: Thurs., March 30 at 6:30 p.m. at the Stoughton Public Library Carnegie Meeting Room.
- Focus group 4: Wed., April 12 at 6:30 p.m. at 217 Colfax, Palatine, Illinois, Laura Minard's home.

Food, desserts and beverages will be provided. There will be a drawing for a **fabulous** door prize, and each participant will receive a gift of appreciation.

Please email Anne Mancl at Mancl26@sbcglobal.net, or call at (608) 877-4080 if you can participate. I *truly appreciate* your consideration of this request, and look forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Anne Mancl, UWW Graduate Student

APPENDIX C.

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY

I, _____ (please print) agree to be a participant in this research study under the direction of Anne Mancl. I understand the purpose of this study is to explore attitudes toward female high-achievers, and uncover potential qualities of individuals whom seek to reduce the success of high-achievers. I have been told this research will last approximately 90 minutes. I also understand that this focus group will be recorded with an audio tape. Tapes will be destroyed after research analysis and thesis defense. I understand that my name and/or my personal information will not appear in any publication of this study. All the responses to questions will remain anonymous.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose to cease participation at any time, or skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. There are no known risks to participating in this study.

Completing this consent form indicates that I am at least 18 years of age.

If you have questions or concerns about this study, please contact Anne Mancl at 608-877-4080 or Mancl26@sbcglobal.net, or her faculty supervisor, Dr. Barbara Penington, at 262-472-1983, or Denise Ehlen, IRB administrator, at (262) 472-5212.

Thank you in advance for your time and contribution.

Anne Mancl
Graduate Student
UW-Whitewater 2006

Participant Signature: _____
Date: _____

APPENDIX D.

BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH STUDY FOR PARTICIPANTS

Several years ago, a friend and I were discussing why many women feel obligated to cut down or even avoid other women who are perfectly nice but who have distinguished themselves in such a way that they "stand out from the crowd". Perhaps they are more attractive, social or they have lots of money; maybe they are a "Martha Stewart" and make incredible cakes while heading up committees, raising intelligent kids and volunteering in the community, i.e., someone who seems to "have it all" or be able to "do it all." Months later, I learned of an Australian concept that nearly matches the phenomenon mentioned above. In Australia, high-achievers are known as '**Tall Poppies**'. It's believed that when you have a poppy field, it's most desirable for all of the poppies to be the same height. The entire field of poppies looks better when they appear to be all the same. So if one poppy grows taller than the other poppies around it, they just chop it down so that it doesn't make the rest of the poppies look bad. It seems to be this way with people. When someone achieves too much and 'grows too tall', it seems like some people are compelled to try to knock that person down, in other words, try to "clip the poppy".

Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS) is a term used in Australia for a social attitude that often manifests itself in negative communicative behavior—such as gossip, sabotage, defamation and social exclusion. Someone has *tall poppy syndrome* when they are envious or overly critical of someone because of their higher economic, social or political position and/or their higher level of education, attractiveness, and other positive attributes.

Is Tall Poppy Syndrome alive and well in America? Do 'poppy clippers' communicate their disdain toward the Tall Poppy? Do Tall Poppies behave in response?

APPENDIX E.

Focus Group Questions

1. *Describe a woman who seems to "have it all."*
2. *What characteristics or attributes of women seem most threatening to other women?*
3. *What behaviors do envious females display to other women? In other words, what does an envious female "look" like; Do they behave? Do they communicate their envious or competitive feelings toward other women?*
4. *Describe a time when you felt that you were the subject of another woman's envy—you were the "tall poppy").*
Probes:
How did you feel?
What did the other woman/women say or do?
What did you do in response?
How did your relationship change?
5. *Describe a time when you were envious of another woman—you were the "tall poppy clipper."*
Probes:
How did you feel?
What did you do/say in response?
How did your relationship change?

APPENDIX F.

Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group # _____

Date: _____

Location: _____

Materials Needed:

- Name tags/name placard (use first names only)
- Tape recorder and tapes
- Notebook paper and pencils
- Demographic Survey sheets
- Consent forms
- Background on Tall Poppy sheets
- Poppies in vase
- Food/drinks/napkins/cups
- Parting gifts
- Door prize
- Door prize sheets
- Kleenex

Procedure:

- Place all necessary materials at each person's sitting area (paper, pencil, background sheet, door prize slip).
- Greet women at the door
- Allow time for mingling and eating
- Open the group by introducing myself
- Briefly re-introduce the study topic—use script

Script:

Several years ago, a friend and I were discussing why many women feel obligated to cut down or even avoid other women who are perfectly nice but who have distinguished themselves in such a way that they "stand out from the crowd". Perhaps they are more attractive, social or they have lots of money; maybe they are a "Martha Stewart" and make incredible cakes while heading up committees, raising intelligent kids and volunteering in the community, i.e., someone who seems to "have it all" or be able to "do it all." Months later, I learned of an Australian concept that nearly matches the phenomenon mentioned above. In Australia, high-achievers are known as 'Tall Poppies'. It's believed that when you have a poppy field, it's most desirable for all of the poppies to be the same height. The entire field of poppies look better when they appear to be all the same. So if one poppy grows taller than the other poppies around it, they just chop it down so that it doesn't make the rest of the poppies look bad. It seems to be this way with people. When someone achieves too much and 'grows too tall', it seems like some people are compelled to try to knock that person down, in other words, try to "clip the poppy".

***Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS)** is a term used in Australia for a social attitude that often manifests itself in negative communicative behavior—such as gossip, sabotage, defamation and social exclusion. Someone has **tall poppy syndrome** when they are envious or overly critical of someone because of their higher economic, social or political position and/or their higher level of education, attractiveness, and other positive attributes.*

Is Tall Poppy Syndrome alive and well in America? Do 'poppy clippers' communicate their disdain toward the Tall Poppy? And, Do Tall Poppies behave in response? This is the basis of my research and the focus of our discussion.

- Handout informed consent forms and explain
- Collect forms.
- Introduction

Welcome and thank you for coming to tonight's focus group. I am very interested in listening to your opinions, experiences and comments. In sharing your views tonight you are contributing to new and important research, which will be used to help other women be more successful communicators.

My role is one of facilitator, so I will be asking rather than answering questions. I **can** answer some questions that you may have, but I primarily want you to honestly share your experiences—both good and not so good.

Before we begin I want to offer some ground rules. All information that is shared in this group stays here. By having this agreement honored in the group, you'll know that what you share can be kept private. Your names will NOT be used in any report coming from this research. The focus group will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Since we have a limited amount of time, I may have to interrupt from time to time in order to keep things moving and keep us on track.

Because tonight's discussion is so important, I will be taping the valuable information that is shared. This means it will be necessary to speak one person at a time so that each word will be clearly audible on the tape. We want to make sure everyone has a chance to talk. Some of you may disagree with each other and this is okay; I want to hear all sides of the topic.

Are we ready to begin? Let's start by going around and introducing ourselves—please only use your first name. After this we'll do one short icebreaker.

- Conduct a short icebreaker
- Start Tape
- Begin asking focus group questions
- Notice if all participants have had a chance to speak
- Thank participants
-

I would like to thank you for your participation. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or any other identifying information will be used in any reports or in any other publicly assessable media. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you may have about this research. Do you have any questions for me?

- Do drawing for Door Prize
- Give out the Parting Gifts

APPENDIX G.

PARTICIPATION DEMOGRAPHICS				FOCUS GROUP #1			MARCH 6, 2006		
NAME	AGE	HIGHEST DEGREE	OCCUPATION	MARITAL STATUS	CHILDREN	SIBLINGS	BIRTH ORDER	PLACE OF BIRTH	
CAMILLA	36	Graduate	Editor	Married	Yes	1	Oldest	Central Illinois	
JILL	36	2 yr College	Bank Teller	Married	Yes	3	Middle	Minnesota	
CHRISTIE	40	University	Teacher	Married	Yes	1	Oldest	Central Wisconsin	
SOPHIE	39	Graduate	Architect	Married	Yes	2	Middle	Central Wisconsin	
ANYA	36	University	Pharmacist	Married	Yes	1	Oldest	Urban Illinois	
RACHEL	38	University	Bank Vice Pres.	Married	Yes	3	Middle	Central Illinois	
CATHERINE	33	University	Sales/marketing	Married	Yes	1	Youngest	Northern Wisconsin	

PARTICIPATION DEMOGRAPHICS					FOCUS GROUP #2			MARCH 21, 2006	
NAME	AGE	HIGHEST DEGREE	OCCUPATION	MARITAL STATUS	CHILDREN	SIBLINGS	BIRTH ORDER	PLACE OF BIRTH	
MARLA	36	University	Spanish Teacher	Married	Yes	1	Oldest	Northern WI	
MOLLY	40	College	Occupational Therapist	Married	Yes	3	Middle	Minnesota	
CLAUDIA	40	University	HR Director	Married	Yes	1	Oldest	Madison, WI	
NANCY	45	University	Corporate CEO	Married	Yes	2	Middle	Central Wisconsin	
RUTHIE	36	University	Teacher	Married	Yes	1	Oldest	Iowa	
CHRIS	38	University	Sales Rep.	Married	Yes	3	Middle	Central Wisconsin	
MARIE	33	University	Sales/marketing	Married	Yes	1	Youngest	Northeast WI	
SUZIE	47	University	Registered Dietician	Married	Yes	3	Middle	Madison, WI	
LAURA	46	University	At-Home Mom	Married	Yes	3	Middle	Illinois	

PARTICIPATION DEMOGRAPHICS				FOCUS GROUP #3			MARCH 30, 2006	
NAME	AGE	HIGHEST DEGREE	OCCUPATION	MARITAL STATUS	CHILDREN	SIBLINGS	BIRTH ORDER	PLACE OF BIRTH
BETTY	37	Graduate	Teacher	Married	Yes	1	Youngest	Central Illinois
NINA	39	University	Directory of Senior Center	Married	Yes	3	Middle	Indiana
HELGA	65	Graduate	Retired Teacher	Married	Yes	1	Youngest	Central Wisconsin
GRACE	24	College	Teacher	Single	No	1	Youngest	Madison, WI
BRIDGET	34	University	Homemaker/pt financial advisor	Married	Yes	3	Oldest	Milwaukee, WI
ZOEY	33	University	Dietician	Married	Yes	3	Youngest	Mequon, WI

PARTICIPATION DEMOGRAPHICS					FOCUS GROUP #4			APRIL 12, 2006	
NAME	AGE	HIGHEST DEGREE	OCCUPATION	MARITAL STATUS	CHILDREN	SIBLINGS	BIRTH ORDER	PLACE OF BIRTH	
LOLA	38	College	Computer Programmer	Single	No	4	Middle	Arlington Hts., IL	
NICO	33	College	Business Owner	Married	No	2	Youngest	Iowa	
ROXIE	30	College	Teacher	Married	Yes	3	Middle	Illinois	
FOXY	40	College	Massage Therapist	Single	No	2	Youngest	Kenosha, WI	
TRIXIE	37	University	Teacher	Married	Yes	1	Oldest	Arlington Hts., IL	
KAT	30	High School	Sales	Divorced	No	1		England	
TINA	31	2 year College	IT Programmer	Single	Yes	1	Middle	Central Wisconsin	
DOMINIO	44	University	Sales	Single	Yes	1	Oldest	Urban Illinois	
SADIE	28	University	Veterinarian Assistant	Single	Yes	5	Middle	Prospect Heights, IL	
COCO	33	University	Sales/marketing	Married	Yes	4	Youngest	Arlington Heights, IL	