

Relational Aggression and the Impact it has on Female Adolescents

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**Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements	3
Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Review of Literature	6
Method	37
Setting	37
Instruments	38
Sample of the Study	38
Procedures	39
Analysis Procedure	40
Results	40
Discussion	46
Interpretation of Findings	48
Limitations of the Current Study	49
Recommendations for Counseling Practice	50
References	53
Appendix A: Letter of Informed Consent	58
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter	60
Appendix C: Survey	61
Appendix D: Students Response to Survey Questions 43-45	66

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### **Abstract**

Recent research has been dedicated to understanding relational aggression and how it impacts females. In this paper the researcher created a survey. The survey focused on the aggressor, the victim, the impact of relational aggression toward friendships, school attendance and the most commonly used relational aggressive behaviors. The survey was administered to forty female students in a suburban High School. Overall, the results of this study suggested that relational aggression had no impact on the selected students friendships or school attendance. However, the students did report that they did not think their school had done everything they can to handle issues related to relational aggression. Results pointed to the need of school staff to address relational aggressive behaviors when students are in their freshman and sophomore year of high school. The students surveyed provided feedback for their teachers, school counselors and administrators on how they would like them to address relational aggression behaviors in their school. Training for the entire staff on relational aggression was also recommended.

### **Relational Aggression and the Impact it has on Female Adolescents**

As a middle school student, I had a selective group of females who harassed me daily. Spreading rumors, excluding me from an activity or a lunch table, teasing, and using hostile body language (eye rolling, smirking, and hand gestures) were just a few of the encounters I endured. When the harassment was occurring, I did not know how to respond to what was occurring. I did not tell my parents, my teachers, or the principals about the experiences I was facing while in school. I tried my best to ignore the selective group of females but sometimes their actions caused me to be tearful on a daily basis. I was scared to tell anyone about the negative experiences because I feared they would turn from verbal to physical. Once the selective group of girls' friendship with each other began to fall apart, the way they treated me and my peers began to decrease. Once this occurred the taunting decreased. I never understood why they chose to belittle me on a regular basis. I did not even know them. The friends I chose to spend time with informed me that they were jealous of me, and I began to believe that.

While interning at a suburban High school, I conducted mediations between female students on a regular basis. It was weird because a selected group of females were experiencing the same types of harassment I experienced while I was in middle school. The only difference was that they had the courage to eventually inform a staff member once they were tired of ignoring the negative treatment they were enduring. They were aware that they were being mistreated and wanted it to stop. During these mediations the aggressors were often unable to inform the victim why they were harassing them. Some of the reasons the aggressors provided included reasons to become popular; upset about their previous friend new friendship; angry because they were excluded from a party or just trying to maintain their popularity.

After doing the research, I learned that there was a term for the type of behavior

demonstrated toward me on a regular basis. The behavior is defined as relational aggression. Relational aggression is described as any behavior that is intended to harm someone by damaging or manipulating relationships with others (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). The purpose of this study was to determine if relational aggression has an impact on adolescent female friendship and school attendance as the research predicts.

### **Literature Review**

The literature review will provide an overview of literature related to relational aggression. Information about who developed the term relational aggression, a description of gender differences on how males and females express their aggression, and the influences of a parent/child relationship on the development of relational aggression. Friendship formation, formation of cliques, how to identify the aggressor, the victims and the bystander will be addressed. In addition the school environment, the parents, review of popular literature, intervention programs and prevention programs will also be reviewed.

### **Definition of Terms**

This paper contains many terms that are generally used to describe relational aggression.

The following terms are defined:

*Indirect aggression:* Indirect aggression allows the perpetrator to avoid confronting their target, by spreading rumors the perpetrator tries to convey a message that they had no intention of hurting anyone (Simmons, 2002). Indirect aggression can also be defined as hurtful behaviors that girls tend to use more frequently than physical fighting (Underwood, 2004).

*Relational aggression:* Relational aggression is defined as an act that harms others through damage (or the threat of damage) to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion (Simmons, 2002). Relational aggression is also described as any behavior that is intended to harm someone by damaging or manipulating relationships with others by

spreading rumors, ignoring, and excluding individuals (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

*Social aggression:* Social aggression is the manipulation of group acceptance through alienation, ostracism, or character defamation (Cairns et al, 1989).

### **Development of relational aggression**

The first term in this paper defined is indirect aggression. Indirect aggression was defined as hurtful behaviors that girls might use more frequently than physical fighting (Underwood, 2004). In 1969, Feshbach conducted early empirical investigations of indirect aggression in studies where she observed children interacting with a newcomer. “Implicit in her choice of method is the assumption that indirect aggression in studies where she observed these behaviors is to create a situation in which two children might exclude a newcomer” (Underwood, 2004, p. 19). The results from her study concluded that boys would show more direct aggression toward the newcomer and girls would engage in more indirect aggression.

In 1989, Cairns and a few of his colleagues proposed the term social aggression to describe aggression among girls. (Underwood, 2004). Cairns et al (1989) defined social aggression as “the manipulation of group acceptance through alienation, ostracism, or character defamation” (p. 323). Cairns and his colleagues conducted a longitudinal study in North Carolina focusing on students in grades fourth through tenth. During the study, students were asked to describe conflicts they were experiencing with their peers. The results from the study showed that girls mentioned very few conflicts involving physical aggression, however from fourth through seventh grade the number of disputes involving social manipulation increased (Underwood, 2004).

Crick and Grotpeter (1995) defined relational aggression as “harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationship” (p. 711). Crick and Grotpeter

interest in relational aggression caused them to develop studies to measure relational aggression, investigate gender differences, determine whether relational aggression was distinct from overt aggression, and whether relational aggression was related to psychological maladjustment (Underwood, 2004). Crick and Grotpeter (1995) were the first to argue that relational aggression is related to psychological maladjustment which could lead to possible physical aggression in the future.

Each researcher's research was important to provide an understanding of aggression among girls. Feshbach(1969) focused her attention on indirect aggression arguing that the behaviors hurt, they can be observed in the lab and coded reliably and are more common among girls (Underwood, 2004). The peer rating instrument developed by the Finnish research team to assess indirect aggression showed that indirect and direct aggression may be distinct, provided evidence that girls manipulate and boys fight (Lagerspetz, et al.,1988). Cairns (1989) provided developmental evidence that girls use social aggression behaviors in their peer conflicts during junior high school. Crick (1995) suggested that engaging in relational aggression may contribute to psychopathology. Each researcher provided information for readers to gain a clearer understanding of aggression however it is important to understand the early developmental origins of relational aggressive behaviors. For example, an aggressive response elicited by brain stimulation is in part dependent upon the organism's history of aggression in that environment as well as upon the particular area of the brain affected (Feshbach & Feshbach, 1986).

According to Burton (2009) hormones have a large affect on the female's brains and during their teen years those hormones, like estrogen and progesterone start rising. The amount of hormones that are released into the female's bodies and brains changes daily based on their menstrual cycle. Researchers believe these hormonal ebbs and flows affect an individual's behavior which makes them want to bond with their friends. Certain part of their cycle make them want to kill their friends sometimes (Burton, 2009). According to Burton

(2009), in the past, neuroscientist used to think the human brain finished developing by age six, however, now they are saying that there is another growth spurt from age eleven to twenty . During this time the brain is sending thirty thousand neural connections a minute in an effort to become more efficient (Burton, 2009). The growth is occurring in the prefrontal cortex which is the area of the brain that is used to make relational decisions. It is important to understand that hormones may have a large effect on the female brain but gender difference also has an impact on aggression.

### **Gender Differences**

Gender differences have been a huge concern in research pertaining to relational aggression. Males and females tend to express their aggressiveness differently. Males tend to use physical aggression while females tend to practice relational aggression (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004). When males become angry or emotional they are encouraged to let it out. However when a female becomes angry they are encouraged to hold it within themselves (Burton, 2009). Crick et al (1999) claimed that relational aggression is more characteristic of girls because the formation maintenance of close and intimate relationships tends to be more important to girls than it is to boys.

Males tend to harm others through physical and verbal aggression. Examples of this include hitting, pushing others, or threatening to fight someone. The listed examples are behaviors consistent with the types of goals that past research has shown to be important to boys within the group context, such as themes of instrumentality and physical dominance (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Although not kicking, punching, or threatening to physically hurt their victims, girls tend to practice relationship or more broadly indirect aggression against other girls (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004)

Gender information is highly salient in the lives of young children, driving not only their own behavior but also their notions of appropriate behavior for other children (Maccoby,

2002). Children's toys, games and clothing, as well as their patterns of social interaction, are differentiated along gender lines from an early age (Ruble & Martin, 1998). As early as preschool, boys are rated by their teachers as more likely to engage in physically aggressive behaviors, whereas girls are rated more likely to engage in relationally aggressive acts, such as excluding children from their peer group or threatening to revoke friendship (Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997).

Crick and Grotpeter (1995), hypothesized that girls' attempts to harm others would focus on relational issues and would include behaviors that are intended to significantly damage another child's friendship or feelings of inclusion by the peer group whereas boys would be most likely to harm peers through overt aggression.

In a more recent study, Cairns, Neckerman, Ferguson and Garipey (1989) asked fourth through ninth graders to describe recent conflicts with peers. "Content analysis of children's responses revealed that same gender conflicts among girls were significantly more likely than boys conflicts to involve themes of social alienation and manipulation of peer acceptance (i.e., themes that are consistent with relational aggression)" (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995, p. 711).

Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, and Peltonen (1988) used a peer rating scale with a sample of fifth graders to assess gender differences in children's use of several types of behaviors, some of which were relational aggressive behaviors. The results showed that girls exhibited higher levels of relational/ nonverbal aggression than the boys.

Despite the recent studies on the topic relational aggression no information has yet been generated on the correlates of relational aggression or the characteristics of the children who exhibit it other than the gender difference (Crick & Grotheter, 1995). Girls do not learn the right way to express aggression and have often been taught how to handle aggression based on their interactions with their parents (Campbell, 1993).

### **Parent and Child Relationship**

Recent research has begun to focus on the influence of the parent child relationship on the development of relational aggression in children. An important theoretical framework from which to consider linkages between parenting and relational aggression is provided by attachment theory and coercion theory. Attachment theory proposes that early family experiences are an important basis for the development of later peer relationships (Michiels, et al. 2008). Attachment theory also focuses on the role of parental insensitivity and unresponsiveness (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Coercion theory emphasizes parental reinforcement of a child's negative behavior and inconsistent parental discipline (Patterson, 1982). Attachment theory can assist researchers to understand the caregiving origins of relational aggression (Michiels et al, 2008). "Attachment theory proposes that early family experiences are an important basis for the development of later peer relationship" (Michiels et al, 2008, p. 522). Infants whom have an unresponsive parent may resort to relational aggressive behaviors to gain attention.

Children develop attachment relations through interactions with their caregivers. A secure attachment bond between a child and its parents provides a basis for survival competent functioning, particularly exploration (Michiels et al, 2008). According to Bowlby, (1988) caregivers provide a secure base for infants over the first year of life by being sensitive to the signals the infant produces and addressing the infant's needs and providing emotional regulation. This allows the infant to learn to trust their caregiver and know their caregiver will respond to their needs. On the other hand, insecurely attached children experience a hard time trusting their caregiver. If this occurs, children may be reluctant to tolerate separation from the attachment figure or may try to emotionally isolate the self from the caregiver (Kerns, 1998). Avoidant insecure children may limit their emotional expressions, whereas resistant insecure children may desperately seek help from their caregivers (Michiels et al, 2008).

Family system theory proposes that the family is a single unit made up of a variety of interconnected relationships (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). A child's emotional or behavioral difficulties reflect problems within the family unit rather than being evidence of something wrong with the child. According to Ingoldsby et al. (2001), the family system model focuses on the conflict within the family subsystems, then when conflict occurs in one subsystem the other subsystem and the family emotions are impacted. Although few studies have directly examined the families of children involved in aggressive behaviors, the research that has been conducted supports the theory that a child's behavioral problems are symptoms of a dysfunctional family system (Espelage & Swearer, 2004).

Some researchers have presumed that children's relational aggression may be predicted by a lack of parental support (Hart, 1998). Mothers who are warm and responsive and display synchronous and engaging interactions with their preschoolers, have children who are more socially competent and less physically aggressive with peers (Mize & Pettit, 1997).

Sullivan's interpersonal theory (1953) suggested that children learn disparagement both by observing their parents disparage other adults and by a parent responding to his or her child's disappointment at other children's superiority by the parent maligning the child's peers. The interpersonal theory fits well with social learning theory. Social learning theory and social cognitive theory has also been considered as starting points for the development of relational aggression (Crick et al., 1999). From a social learning perspective, parents are seen as models of (overt and relational) aggressive behaviors toward their children ( Michiels et al, 2008). Children may learn social aggression by observing their parents resolve conflicts in ways that harm relationships; giving one another the silent treatment when angry; enlisting other family members or friends to support their point of view in an argument or involving the child in the argument or conflict (Underwood, 2003). Findings from a study that explored relationships among one hundred and thirty six mothers self reported disciplinary strategies, preschoolers

(age range= 39-71 months) outcome expectations, and observed play ground behavior seem to support this perspective. Mothers were asked to respond to hypothetical situations describing disciplinary contexts at home and with peers mention all possible strategies they would likely use for each situation. Results from these homes disciplinary style interviews indicated that children raised in a power assertive manner are more likely to believe that aggressive strategies will help them achieve desirable outcomes in their relationships with peers. (Hart, DeWolf, & Burts, 1992). There are cognitive processes regulating how parents think about care giving and how their thinking combined with child characteristics and other contextual factors affect the child's behavior (Michiels et al, 2008).

Recent studies have shown an association between insecure parental attachment and peer relationships. Peer relationships of children with an insecure parental attachment are characterized by negative interactive emotions and behaviors such as aggression, withdrawal, and low self-confidence (Coleman, 2003). Parent and child interaction is very important but it is important to understand how friendships are formed. Adolescents from a variety of different ethnic and racial backgrounds typically believe their personal behaviors such as choice of clothes, hairstyle or friends, should be up to them to decide and should not be under the jurisdiction of their parents or other adults (Goldstein & Tisak, 2009).

### **Friendship Formation**

The formation of meaningful peer relations is one of the most important social developmental tasks in childhood (Allen, Moore, Kupermine, & Bell, 1998; Bohlin, Hagekull, & Rydell, 2000). Friendships provide unique opportunities for learning basic social skills and the workings of close relationships (Gest, Graham-Bermann, & Hartup, 2001). During adolescence females began to confide more in their friends, friendships become more focused on conversation and less on play, friends engage in self exploration together and offer support for one another while working through peer conflicts (Buhrmester, 1996). Manipulative behaviors

become noticeable after a friendship has been established and personal information has been disclosed (Ellis & Zarbatany, 2007).

Hart et al (2001) outlined two broad categories of prevention practices that foster positive peer relationships: managerial practices and educational practices. Examples of managerial practices include parents selecting their child's school, the activities they participate in, and initiating their child's play dates. A few examples of educational practices include supervising their children's peer activities, being actively present and involved when they play and assisting with resolving conflicts with their child's peers as they arise. If parents are able to listen to their daughter conversations with their peers and they overhear them gossiping or discussing situations demonstrating relational aggressive behaviors, then the parent should interject and provide advice for to her daughter and her peers. Another characteristic of adolescence is uniqueness. Each girl views herself as different, contending that no one else could possibly understand how she feels. She will sincerely believe she is the only girl in her whole school who worries about not having the right friends, enough friends, or one true friend" (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003, p. 15). Adolescents spend increasing amounts of time with their peers and increasingly count on peers for intimacy and affiliation (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Children with friends are more socially outgoing and display more prosocial behaviors than children without friends (Hartup, 1996).

It is important for parents to encourage their children to form and maintain friendships based on mutual interests rather than social status. According to Dellasega and Nixon (2003) girls between the ages of six to ten began to recognize that people have feelings but they focus on the more observable details. Examples of this include what girls are wearing, what they look like, and how they behave. "At this age a girl judges things good or bad according to their consequences, not according to their motivations behind them" (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003, p. 16). It is hard for the female victim to understand that aggressor is only using aggression toward

her because of her insecurities. Between age's nine to eleven, females try their best to please other people while worrying tremendously about what other people think. "Programmed by culture to place the esteem of others first, a girl can be so desperate for the approval of others she enters relationships where she is manipulated and controlled by others" (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003, p. 16).

Theorists have argued that the most effective way to control aggression is to reduce arousal levels or eliminate aversive stimulation (Taylor, 1986). Personal observation from the crowd tends to regulate aggressive behavior due to social pressure from their peers. Girls often fear interpersonal and relationship conflicts and being unwanted by their peers (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008).

### **Formation of Cliques**

Peer status matters a great deal to adolescents. Adolescents are concerned with how their peers view them, but low peer acceptance has been linked to both concurrent and long term adjustment, including aggression and poor academic adjustment (Mayeux & Cillessen, 2008). Popular students often become aggressive because they know their high status will shield them from the negative consequences of their actions, such as harassing their peers and getting in trouble with their teachers (Mayeux & Cillessen, 2008). Once an adolescent becomes aware of her social power and begins to enjoy her benefits, she will often engage in behaviors that perpetuate or increase her status (Mayeux & Cillessen, 2008).

According to Moser, (1957) if a female is restricted in meeting her needs, her behavior will be in the nature of attacking, retreating, or making some substitute for an unsatisfactory situation. However, if a female's needs are satisfied she will move forward in her relationship with others, which involves her being loving, learning, and maturing. Studies show that the girl who feels accepted are often friendly and considerate of others around them

(Moser, 1957). Females who feel rejected tend to become involve in attention seeking behaviors. Females then tend to form cliques to become accepted by others. Rosenberg and Simmons found that girls concern with being well liked and their lack of interest in success develop during early adolescence. Between late childhood (ages 8to 11) and early adolescence (ages 12 to 14), girls desire to achieve decreases, and their desire to be well liked increases (Eder, 1985). Rosenberg, and Rosenberg (1973), found that girls experience a significant decrease in self-esteem during early adolescence. A later study found that this drop in self esteem was associated with entrance into junior high school and with other social and developmental factors (Simmons et al., 1979) This suggest that there may be something about the transition to a junior high or middle school setting that may be difficult for girls. It is often assumed that girls are most concerned with their social success or popularity among boys. However adolescent girls may be equally concerned with their popularity among other girls (Eder, 1985). Students in middle school have a larger population from which to choose friends, which encourage the development of more distinct friendship groups or cliques (Eder, 1985) Studies suggest that children in high status peer groups alternately make prosocial gestures (to gain followers) and hostile gestures (to preserve group boundaries) toward classmates (Adler & Adler, 1995).

Hallinan and Smith (1989) research found that there is an impact on a student's academic and social development as a result of being involved in a clique. The impact was influencing the girls attitudes towards school, socializing with or excluding other school peers, and changing the way they perceive themselves. Student cliques can be identified through observation of student's interactions. Adolescents who are in the same clique will always work together on academic assignments, participate in the same co curricular and extracurricular activities and spend free time together. The less popular students tend to interact less frequently with their classmates and their or with fewer peers then clique members.

Peer influences may facilitate or hinder the learning process in school (Coleman, 1959).

“When the activities of cliques members are school related, the social support of a clique may help a student retain interest in schoolwork and carry it to completion. If the clique’s norms regarding assignments, homework, and in class behavior are positive, membership in a clique can promote learning. In contrast, if clique members develop attitudes that are anti-academic or that contradict teachers authority, the students are more likely to resist the instructional process and learn less” (Hallinan & Smith, 1989, p. 898).

Another negative impact of being a member of a clique that Hallinan and Smith (1989) found was the impact on a student’s social development. When a student is considered a member of a clique they are perceived as belonging to a popular group. “Since popularity is of considerable importance to youth, exclusion from a clique is likely to damage students self confidence and have a negative effect on their self image” (Hallinan & Smith, 1989, p. 899). Membership in a clique can strengthen a females self confidence and self image.

Another negative impact of being a member of a clique that Hallinan and Smith (1989) found was the effect on a teachers pedagogical decision. Cliques tend to create a social organization when in the classroom. “Teachers may take the social structure of the class into account in making track or ability group assignments in an effort to utilize student friendships to promote learning. As a result, the presence of cliques can affect a teacher’s decisions regarding the number, size, and composition of tracks and ability groups in a school” (Hallinan & Smith, 1989, p. 899). Teachers have to be wise about their decisions when assigning specific clique to work together on class assignments. When a teacher assigns a popular girl to work with another girl who may not be popular, the teacher is setting the less popular student up to potentially deal with cruel behavior from the popular student.

### **The Aggressor**

Based on direct observations, studies of early childhood students indicated that boys were more likely to be physically aggressive while girls were more likely to exhibit relationally

aggressive behaviors (Ostrov & Crick, 2007). Social exchange theory predicts that the aggressor seeks out targets for whom the negative consequences of aggression are minimal in relation to the benefits (Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000). “The victimization process may begin at transitional points between schools, when children are establishing relationships with a new peer group: for example, when a child enters school or a classroom in the middle of the school year” (Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000, p. 83). This often occurs because the aggressor is seeking out a victim whom they know they can intimidate.

Chesney-Lind & Irwin (2004) reported the following:

The hazing incident at Glenbrook High School, located in a middle class suburb of Chicago, on May 4, 2003, breathed new life into the contemporary constructions of mean girls. The hazing event turned violent when a few individuals the senior class decided they hated some of the juniors. Certain people decided they wanted to turn this whole thing into something personal. The violence reportedly included placing buckets over the heads of girls and beating the buckets with bats, as well as pushing and kicking. This is all in addition to smearing feces, pig intestines, fish guts, paint, and coffee grounds on girls while a collection of students looked on, cheered, and drank beer. After the event, five girls required medical attention; one had a concussion, one had a broken ankle, and another required stitches. Although the media consistently noted that the girls are not likely to be physically violent, the Glenbrook High hazing incident provided an exception to the rule. (49-50)

Although the students who participated in the hazing incident think they did nothing wrong.

This is a prime example of a relational aggressive act causing hurt and physical harm to selected individuals. The girls in this example decided to use violence against their victims rather than simply ostracism, rumors and manipulation (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008). This example

illustrates that if the aggressors are not dealt with, their aggression could turn to physical violence.

### **The Victim**

As mentioned earlier relational aggression behaviors are sometimes hard to detect. The victim may not inform someone right away of the targeted behaviors being used toward them. That is why it is very important to be aware of the warning signs that an individual is demonstrating to determine if they are becoming a victim. Victims of relational aggression often experience a range of difficulties in school. Students who are the frequent victims of relational aggression are more at risk for depression and a poor self concept in the areas of social relationships and physical attractiveness (Mckay, 2003). Being a victim can also affect their concentration while in school and lead them to avoid school in the future. Research has found that victims tend to go to school less and have higher instances of depression and suicidal ideations than students who are not bullied (Orpinas et al., 2003). Victims will also tend to withdraw from their family or school activities. This often occurs once a incident occurs with the victim, the victim will then withdraw from the school activity where the aggressive behaviors occurred. If the victim begins to experience constant headaches, panic attacks, stomachaches, or difficulty sleeping this is due to their body responding to stress of being targeted by turning on its chemical defense system pertaining to fight or flight (Coloroso, 2002).

### **The Bystander**

Bystanders are witnesses of relational aggressive behaviors being used toward a victim on a daily basis. The bystander does not always stand around watching; sometimes they often join the aggressor and encourage them to continue their selected aggressive behaviors toward the victim. "Actively engaging with the bully or cheering them on causes even more distress to the child who is bullied, encourages antisocial behavior of the bully, and puts the bystanders at

risk of being desensitized to the cruelty or becoming full-fledged bullies themselves” (Coloroso, 2002, p. 62). Standing by or turning away is a tough decision for a bystander to make.

According to Coloroso (2002) there are four reasons to prevent a bystander to intervene. The first reason is because the bystander does not want to get hurt. The bystander may fear the aggressor due to the size and strength of the aggressor. The second reason why the bystander may not intervene is due to their fear of potentially becoming the next victim. According to Coloroso (2002), if the bystander intervenes and is successful it is possible that they could potentially become the next victim in the future because the aggressor does not like it when someone intervenes. The third reason the bystander will not intervene is due to their fear of causing the situation to become worse. “In Santee, California, the friends of Andy Williams were afraid that if they told administrators about Andy’s threats to harm the kids who bullied him, Andy would be expelled from school. In hindsight, expulsion would have been better than a life sentence for murder” (Coloroso, 2002, p. 67). The final reason to keep a bystander from intervening is their lack of knowledge about what to do when placed in the situation that would cause them to intervene. It is possible the bystander may have not been taught how to intervene so they would rather just avoid intervening. The bystanders believe it is better to be involved in a group than to defend an outcast of the group.

Bystanders tend to have many excuses than valid reasons for not intervening. Bystanders tend to come up with excuses to keep themselves from being involved. According to Coloroso (2002) it is possible for the bystander to potentially to assume the role as the aggressor as time goes by.

### **The Parents**

According to Sheara (2002) a few indicators to determine if your child is demonstrating

relational aggressive behaviors is by noticing constant unhappiness or anger, decline in grades, reports of behavior problems in school, intimidating peers, rudeness, use of bad language and shortened attention span. It is hard for a parent to identify if their child is demonstrating relational aggressive behaviors because the child tries very hard to uphold their positive image in front of their parents.

Parents of victims are described as being overly intense and very involved in their child's life (Bowers et al., 1994). Ladd and Ladd (1998) found that mothers of victimized children tend to be overly controlling of their children while at the same time the mother child relationship appeared to be more emotionally close than typically seen. Whereas mothers of victimized boys are overly protective, mothers of victimized girls report having a negative attitude toward their mothers (Rigby, 1993). According to Finnegan et al. (1998) research showed that female victims described their mothers as hostile and rejecting and that their mothers would withdraw their love or threaten to reject or abandon them if they misbehaved. "Parenting behaviors used by the mothers are likely to threaten the girls need for communication and their development of the social skills needed to relate closely and effectively with others" (Finnegan et al., 1998, p. 1082). Finnegan et al. (1998) proposed that a hostile or rejecting mother leads to their daughter becoming depressed and anxious. Due to the mother being unable to model appropriate interpersonal skills, the daughter will also lack knowledge of how to develop a relationship with their peers. According to Rigby (2002) when parents provide appropriate care for their daughters they are less likely to be involved in aggressive behaviors but if the parent is overtly controlling then the child is likely to be involved in aggressive behaviors.

### ***School Environment***

"Students who are socially included have someone to sit with on the bus, someone to play with at recess, someone to eat with at lunch, someone who chooses them for their team,

and someone to talk to during their free moments in a classroom. Having a friend in class makes it easier to ask for assistance in times of stress, and much more likely that students will receive help when they ask” (Espelage & Swearer, 2004, p. 165). In a typical classroom, four percent of the students are not considered a friend to their classmates (Asher, 1995). Students who do not have a classroom friend are the students who will be at risk of victimization (Hodges et al., 1997). It is important for teachers to be aware if relational aggression is occurring in their classroom. Having friends, having a position in the network of informal peer groups and being liked or disliked is important to a student’s social position in the classroom (Gest, Graham-Bermann, & Hartup, 2001)

Classrooms are safe places for students when the teacher is warm, engaged, responsive and holds high expectations for the students (Pianta, 2009). The presence of caring and demanding teachers can improve student’s sense of class membership and reduce peer conflict in the room (Emmett & Monsour, 1986). If a student believes that they can trust their teacher, they will then feel comfortable enough to confide in them that their peers are using relational aggressive behaviors toward them. Teachers who are sensitive to their students respond swiftly to incidents to protect the students from being a victim while also providing the class with a sense of security and comfort (Olweus & Limber, 1999). By doing this, teacher demonstrates that they are always monitoring what takes place in the classroom. Conflicts are less likely to occur if teachers are aware of the warning signs of conflict, verbal intimidation, voices getting louder, and tense physical reactions (Meese, 1997).

A consistent finding is that school personnel including classroom teachers do not respond to students reports of victimization (Olweus, 1991). This is due to the teacher being unaware of it occurring or their lack of understanding of how to address the issue. Teachers do

not always recognize indirect intimidation such as social exclusion, spreading rumors, and name calling (Boulton, 1997). The teacher may choose not to intervene due to their belief that the victim is responsible for overcoming victimization (Olweus, 1993). It is important for teachers to listen to their students who may need support in the classroom when demonstrating effective ways to deal with the classroom aggressors.

Parents are rarely around when relational aggressive behaviors occur. Parents often hear about the situation after it has occurred if their child chooses to inform them or if they are informed by an adult. Interventions are more effective when parents are concerned about what their child's peer interactions and their child's experiences in the classrooms (Roberts & Coursol, 1996). According to Shumort and Millert (2001) when parents are actively involved in their child's classroom, the child tends to demonstrate a positive attitude toward their classrooms.

“Parental values about social courtesies and resolving conflicts influence the behaviors that their children used when faced with conflicts in the classrooms” (Espelage & Swearer, 2004, p. 108). Classroom interventions that target relational aggression should include family members and keep them informed of the class classroom rules and social skills that are used during peer interactions (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). It is important for parents to be very familiar of what goes on inside of their child's classroom.

### ***Review of Popular Literature***

Relational aggression has received more attention recently by researchers. Recent publications such as *Girls Against Girls: Why We Are So Mean to Each Other and How We Can Change* (Burton, 2009), and *Queen Bees and Wannabees* (Wiseman, 2002) have brought relational aggression into popular awareness.

In *Girls Against Girls: Why We Are So Mean to Each Other and How We Can Change*,

*Burton (2009)* details the six most common used methods of girl on girl cruelty. *Burton (2009)* also provides reasonable suggestions with how to respond to the abuse and when to seek help when a serious attack occurs. The six commonly used methods included females using the silent treatment, gossiping, boyfriend or couple splitting, verbal abuse, cyber abuse, and dumping.

The first method known as the silent treatment is used once the female decides another female has done something negative to them so they must be punished. Examples of the silent treatment include the aggressor ignoring the victim phone calls or text messages or acting deaf and blind to the victims existence (*Burton, 2009*). According to *Burton (2009)* this type of punishment easily falls below the radar of the adults in the victim's life because it is quiet method of cruelty demonstrated. The individual who decides to use the silent treatment method may not know how to address how they are currently feeling so they don't express their feelings. The silent treatment method is very hurtful toward the victim because they are unsure how long the behavior demonstrated to them will last.

According to *Burton (2009)*, the second most commonly method of relational aggressive used is gossiping. Gossiping can be premeditated. "If it's premeditated, the gossiper may play the sympathetic friend when you spill your guts about a big problem like a breakup, family tragedy, or divorce" (*Burton, 2009, p. 37*). By using this method the aggressor is obtaining information they can memorize to use as ammunition later on down the road. Another example of gossiping includes when female friends share secrets with one another and then the one friend informs the entire school. According to *Burton (2009)* the reason why girls gossip is because they are jealous or insecure and want to take down their peers in order to feel better about themselves. Gossip has a huge impact on the victims. Due to gossiping, the victims are forced to walk around with a reputation they did not earn or knew anything about (*Burton,*

2009).

According to Burton (2009) the third most commonly used method is boyfriend splitting or couple splitting. If a girl is interested in a particular boy but is unsure how to approach him, her friend may volunteer to talk to the boy for them to hook their friend up. The only problem with that situation is the friend becomes interested in the boy, the boy is still unaware of the person who likes him, and the friend tells her friend that the boy is not interested in her.

Another example involves a girl who witness a girl whom she dislikes arguing with their boyfriend approaches the boy and informs them she would like to be in a relationship with them. The girl ends up being in a relationship with the boy for a while but she is only doing this to cause the former girlfriend to be jealous because she dislikes her. This has an impact on the victim because she now emotional about losing her boyfriend to her enemy.

The fourth common method used is verbal abuse. This method involves girls saying hurtful degrading comments to their victims. The aggressors may have had to deal with teasing from their family members so they become to believe that it is alright to belittle their friends or someone whom they may not know (Burton, 2009). This method causes the victim to start to believe what the abusers are saying may be true about them.

The fifth common method used is cyber abuse. Computers have offered females another way to communicate with one another and has allowed them to expand their relationships to global proportions (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003) Due to the internet and cell phones people send degrading emails, post mean comments on someone's social networking page or hacking into another female URL page to tease, mock or humiliate them (Burton, 2009). The aggressor finds it easier to communicate their aggression online. This method is used by the aggressor because it is hard for them to get caught because their parents may not have a understanding of cyber abuse. This method is also easier for them to be cruel to an individual while also remaining anonymous because they can set up an account in a unidentified name.

The information placed online by the aggressor becomes public information and spreads to a million of people very quickly. “The anonymity factor only makes it worse because when you don’t know who is behind such cruelty, you become paranoid about why someone would say such awful things and find yourself wondering how to protect or defend yourself” (Burton, 2009, p. 51). Recently the girl scouts of America gathered information about the internet habits of over a thousand girls ages thirteen to eighteen dollars. “The negative aspects of computer use are that fifty eight percent of girls are more computer savvy than their parents and many admitted that they broke their parents’ rule for computer use. In person interviews many girls confessed to sending evil emails to friends when angry and using meaner behavior online then they would use in person” (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003, p. 25-26).

The last commonly method used is titled dumping. The dumping method is used when a best friend one day decides they no longer are interested in hanging out with their friend anymore. The friend will start to show clues of their lack of interest of hanging out by ignoring your calls or texts, making up excuses to avoid hanging out, or ignoring you whenever you are around. It is possible that the former friend is now interested in spending time with individuals who are more popular because this increases her social status in the school.

In the book *Queen Bees & Wannabes*, Wiseman (2002) wrote about the different popularity cliques and defined each adolescent role. Queen bee is described as the girl whose popularity is based on fear and control. “Through a combination of charisma, force, money, looks, will, and manipulation, this girl reigns supreme over the other girls and weakens their friendship with others, thereby strengthening her own power and influence” (Wiseman, 2002, p. 25). Examples of a queen bee female include having her friends do what she wants them to do, she is not intimidated by any girls in her class, she will not take responsibility for hurting someone feelings, or making another girl feel anointed by declaring her a special friend (Wiseman, 2002). When a young lady is tries to become queen bee in her school, she becomes

so busy trying to maintain her image that she may lose a real sense of self in the process.

The sidekick is the second in command and is a very close friend to the queen bee. When a young lady is portraying the sidekick role she will always support anything the queen bee says or do. When the queen bee and the side kick are together they appear to be an impenetrable force (Wiseman, 2002). The queen bee and the sidekick are usually young ladies who are first to focus on being in a relationship with the boys in their school. The sidekick has the opportunity to gain power over other girls that she may not acquire without the friendship of the queen bee. The sidekick will also become really good friends with one specific person who she makes her feel popular whenever she is around. Examples of a side kick young lady includes listening to whatever the queen bees tells her to do, and the queen bee is her best friend.

The third person involved is the gossiper. The gossiper will try to be friends with everyone. The gossiper does a great job with communicating and will give the impression that she is a trustworthy person. Once the gossiper obtains trust from her victims, her victims will then reveal person information about themselves. The gossiper shares the gathered information when she feels the need to expose her victim's secrets.

The fourth person involved is the floater. The floater will move freely from one group to the next to avoid excluding people. Females show respect toward the floater because she will stand up to the queen as needed. The floater avoids conflict as much as possible because they don't gain anything from being involved in conflict.

The fifth popular person is the torn bystander. The torn bystander often finds herself torn between selecting friends as well as also trying to accommodate all her friends. The torn bystander is a peaceful individual and often finds herself always apologizing for the queens behavior.

The next person involved is the wannabe. The wannabe is unable to tell the difference

between what she wants and what the group wants. The wannabe will usually do anything to be in the inner circle with the queen and sidekick. Occasionally the wannabe will be responsible for doing the dirty work for the queen and the sidekick.

The last individual involved is the target. The target is the victim of the group. If one of the individual in the group tries to challenge a group member, then they could possibly become the target in the future. The target is very helpless and does not know how to stop the other girls in the group behaviors. The target often hides their true feelings toward their group members. They usually associate themselves with a group of girls who are not as popular in the school. However, the target knows she is able to trust the group of girls because most times they have all experienced the victim role once. It's important to for individuals to be knowledgeable of the different cliques formed in school involved in relational aggression. However, it is also important to be knowledgeable of the commonly used relational aggressive behaviors demonstrated by females.

### **Interventions**

Relational aggression deeply hurts individuals, especially girls which is the reason why it is very important to developed prevention and intervention programs to reduce relational aggressive behaviors. "To date literature includes prevention or intervention programs that have been developed specifically for the purpose of reducing relational aggression and whose effectiveness has been empirically demonstrated" (Underwood, 2003, p. 209).

The first reason why it is important to intervene to reduce relational aggression behaviors is because it harms its victims and perpetrators. Frequent victimization by relational aggression is related to increased loneliness and depression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1999) and to low self concept, especially for girls (Paquette & Underwood, 1999).

The second reason why it is important to reduce relational aggression is because relational aggression creates a negative climate in school classrooms because it disrupts

students learning and interrupts the teachers. To better serve students, educators need to understand what is known about relational aggression and how to deal with the aggressors and the victims. Educators are beginning to call for an assessment and intervention tools to help them recognize and decrease relational aggression among their students ( Talbott, 1997).

Another reason for intervening to reduce relational aggression is because it may lead some children to becoming physically aggressive. Cunningham et al (1998) study showed that girl conflicts in kindergarten through fifth grade that were brought to the peer mediator involved 27% involved physical aggression and 71% involved relational aggression and 25.9 % of physical fights started as aggression retaliations to teasing. “Intervening to reduce relational aggression may be a fruitful avenue for reducing violence among girls, which in turn might help prevent a wide array of negative outcomes” (Underwood, 1999, pg. 211). (Pacquette & Underwood, 1999)

It is also important for parents to be aware of how to deal with their daughter who may be the aggressor or the victim of relational aggression. Parent training and parent intervention have been used to reduce antisocial behavior in young children to excellent effect (Patterson, 1982). As more parents, teachers, and adolescents become aware of this problem, programs and interventions still need to be developed to help educate students. Parents need to prepare themselves for the possibility of their daughter using relational aggressive behaviors or possibly being the victim of relational aggression. If their daughter is the aggressor or the victim, the parents need to be able to develop a solution to address the issue. If a parents daughter is demonstrating behaviors that are relationally aggressive, then the parent inform her daughter of her negative behaviors and discuss how the behavior can be corrected. Parents can be involved by being part of sports teams or clubs, chaperoning events, Parents should tell their daughters stories about their friends, how much they value them, times they supported you when a man was unable to (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003).

If a parent believes their daughter is an aggressor, victim, or bystander of relational aggression it is important for the parent to ask for advice on how to address each individual's concerns. A parent can seek advice from other parents, school staff, the internet or a mental health agency. Parents should always make time to visit their child's school on a regular basis. This will allow them a chance to get a better understanding of some of the behaviors that take place in their child's school.

Due to females expressing relational aggression on the computer, it is important for parents to understand technology. Many parents are intimidated or overwhelmed by computers, but the best way to protect your daughter is for parents to be computer savvy. Parents should also be aware and ask their daughters about the websites they are visiting while on the computer. "There are even software programs available for this purpose, or the simple command ctrl-I while on Internet Explorer will give a history of where your girl has been online. America Online has a special drop down menu next to the URL line for this same purpose" (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003, p. 31). If a parent's daughter is being threatened online, the parent should contact the police. When doing so a parent should contact the police within forty eight hours for the police to be able to retrieve the evidence.

Parents should inform their daughters to protect the personal information. Parents should inform their daughters to never give out their real name, address, phone number or anything else that will reveal your identity because it makes them vulnerable (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003). Parents should also inform their daughters to create a screen name that tells others anything personal about themselves. Females should also be aware of identity theft because someone can alter their screen name. Parents should also warn their daughters to be careful and mindful of the information they send in their emails, post in the chat room or instant messages.

Roberts (2008) developed seven talking points for helping parents to talk to their children

about being a victim. pp. 97-109.

1. Help parents understand the importance of listening to their concerns about bullying and teasing.
2. Asking the right questions will likely increase parent child communication.
3. Parents want to obtain as many details as possible in an understanding fashion.
4. Parents need to assure their children that they will work with them to find a solution to the problem.
5. Parents should ask the child's opinions and concerns about discussing the situation with school personnel.
6. Encourage the child not to respond to provocation with violence.
7. Parents should encourage their child to ask those in a supervisory capacity for assistance.

It is possible every girl may have been in the role of a bystander at some point in their life, which means they have stood around and observed an aggressive girl abuse their victim (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003). Some students who participate in relational aggressive behaviors may not want to change their behaviors because they do not perceive any problems with their relationship with their peers. Also the aggressor may not beware of the impact they have on their selected victims. "Due to relational aggression involving talking behind females backs, girls using those behaviors may try to sabotage intervention efforts by convincing an adult that they support the goals of the program while still sneaking and spreading rumors, gossiping and manipulating friendships" (Underwood, 2003, p. 228).

Counselors should run groups to teach the girls to be assertive. When a female is being assertive she is expressing her opinions, feelings, attitudes in a manner that doesn't take advantage of other people or hurt their feelings " The basic format for assertive communication

involves three steps. First, validate the other person by recognizing how she's feeling or what she's done. Second, state your feelings about the behavior. Third make a request for change or tell the other person what you would like" (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003, p. 69).

When a school counselor is listening to the victim tell their story it is important for them to maintain a judgmental attitude. According to Dellasega and Nixon (2003) girls are sensitive to the reactions of the adult they decided to share their story to. Overreaction from the adult or sharing their personal beliefs may convey to the victim that they are unable to manage the situation they are going through on their own. It is important for the school counselor or another adult to listen first, then paraphrase and reflect back what they heard. Some experiences the victim may share may be horrifying so it is very important for the adult to reflect their feelings to show that they understand what the victim went through even though they may not relate.

School districts are much more likely to have written policies about physical aggression without mentioning relational aggression or verbal forms of bullying (Mullen-Rindler, 2003). Establishing an effective whole school policy is a process that requires identifying the need, developing the specific guidelines, implementing the new policy, and evaluating its effectiveness (Sharp & Thompson, 1994) "Given that all school children are taught according to an academic curriculum, a promising avenue for prevention of social aggression is adapting the form and content of the curriculum in ways that might adapting the form and content of the curriculum in ways that might serve to decrease the likelihood of bullying episodes" (Underwood, 2003, p. 217). The curriculum should include cooperative practices that foster a climate of belonging and acceptance, or they can show films in school to address the issue of relational aggression. Another way to change the school environment is to train the entire staff about relational aggression and how it impacts everyone involved. According to

Underwood (2003) in schools in which lunchtime supervisors completed the training program, several forms of relational aggressive behaviors decreased.

A teacher can only react to the behavior when he or she witnesses it. If a teacher does see someone demonstrating relational aggressive behaviors in their classroom they should address the issue right away. According to Bott (2004) they should never question the victim about the harassment they are experiencing in front of the aggressor and the rest of their classmates because public pressure can dictate the response the victim provides. The teacher should address the behavior right away in private after they notice it the first time.

Establishing a bully prevention program at the school building level is very important. According to Bott (2004) it is important to build a school building committee. Recommendations for committee members include a few teachers, administrators, school counselors, nurse, support staff, bus drivers, security, cafeteria monitors, parents and some students. The committee will work together to educate the entire building about relational aggression by planning an awareness training. The committee should also create behavior guidelines appropriate for their building and post the expected behavior guidelines throughout the entire school. Bott (2004) also recommends for the committee to establish a system for students to feel comfortable to report it. The committee should also find helpful resources for the aggressor and the victim. Consequences should also be established for the aggressor. Examples of consequences include an anger management class, empathy training, community service or counseling.

Another important suggestion for intervention comes from research showing that for eight or nine year old girls on the playground, time alone was related to peer victimization and low levels of time alone predicted the greatest increase in peer social preference five months later (Boulton, 1999) . Girls who spend a lot of time alone can potentially become victims. It is important for school counselors and parents to be aware of girls who often spend time alone to

themselves. If the school counselors or parents can assist the girls with increasing their interest in interacting with others to allow the girls a chance to become a part of a peer group.

Developmental theory suggests that preadolescents girls desperately want to fit in, to feel part of the same gender peer group (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). In high school females often have limited access to activities in their school. If girls were able to be involved in at least one activity this would allow them an opportunity to feel accepted within at least one group. "Studies of adolescents time use across cultures suggest that teens in the United States spend enormous amounts of discretionary time hanging around with friends and talking up to eighteen percent of their waking time, approximately two and half hours per day in conversation with peers" (Larson & Verma, 1999, p. 701). Another reason why it is important to engage girls in structured activities is because it allows them to learn how to become comfortable with competition and enhance their skills in assertiveness. One reason why girls may be prone to relational aggression is that they have less experience in competing in organized games (Lever, 1976).

Intervention can be developed to address relational aggressive behaviors, it is also important to understand that the behaviors can sometimes be difficult to change. The first reason why relational aggressive behaviors can be difficult to change is because sometimes it can be hard to detect. Victims maybe uncomfortable informing someone about the aggressive behaviors demonstrated toward them in fear of retaliation from the aggressor. It is also possible that the victim may lack knowledge of relational aggression and may not be aware that what the aggressor is doing to them is wrong. However, an intervention should be put into place to address relational aggressive behaviors.

Dellasega and Nixon (2003) developed a tool kit of options for to use if and when an individual becomes a victim of relational aggression. A few of the tools consist of the victim learning to seek refuge, getting advice from neutral others, finding adults you can trust, using

other outlets to express feelings, start a support a group, and confront your aggressor calmly. School staff, parents and students are going to have to be consistent with one another for whatever they decide to implement within their school building for the interventions to be successful.

### **Prevention Programs**

The Ophelia Project serves youth and adults who are affected by relational and other non-physical forms of aggression by providing them with a unique combination of tools, strategies and solutions. The Ophelia Project has become a very popular program to address relational aggression in schools. For example, Monroe County in upstate New York is part of the National Ophelia Sister Project and has taken the issue of relational aggression among middle school girls. Teaming with a variety of community agencies, including the Community Conflict Resolution Program, the Ophelia project is working with girls to understand how to change negative and destructive behaviors without sacrificing their assertiveness or strong sense of self (Garbarino,2004).

According to Bott (2004), the ideal bully prevention program should exist on three levels: the classroom, the building, and the district. The main focus of a bully prevention program is to keep the students safe from harm. According to Bott (2004) the easiest place to start is in the individual classroom. Teachers are in charge of their own classroom and it is their duty to provide a comfortable environment for students to be comfortable to learn. In the beginning of school year, the teacher should set classroom rules and guidelines while also providing the students a chance to include some of their rules they would like to see demonstrated in the classroom. “Classroom environments are powerful places and sometimes the teacher’s views of the classroom differs from the back of the room, which is why student input is so valuable” (Bott, 2004, p. 9). Once the classroom guidelines are established it is the

teacher job to follow through to make sure the students are applying the established guidelines. According to Bott (2004), respectful environments can be created through many strategies. A few examples of a couples of strategies include during class discussions, group projects and class meetings.

Based on the literature reviewed, research regarding relational aggression continues to grow. Relational aggression is a behavior that does not change overnight. There is no doubt that girls are becoming more aggressive. Spreading rumors, getting even by forming coalitions against a target continue to be an issue for females today (Hinshaw & Kranz, 2009). Young women reported that the girls meanness was the worst, hell on earth, or catastrophic experience and that they would always remember the way they were treated by their peers even when they become an adult (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008). More information is needed to regarding school counselors awareness, preparedness, and the interventions used to address relational aggression in schools.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were addressed in this study:

1. Have you ever participated in relational aggressive behaviors?
2. Have you ever been a victim of relational aggressive behaviors?
3. Which high school grade level were you a victim or an aggressor?
4. What are the most common relational aggressive behaviors used?
5. What are the locations in the school where relational aggressive behaviors are demonstrated?
6. Have you ever loss a friend due to them using relational aggressive behaviors?
7. Have you ever missed school due to someone using relational aggressive behaviors

toward you?

8. Do you think your school is doing everything they can to address relational aggression?

### **Method**

Relational aggression is an indirect form of bullying commonly used by females to manipulate their peers to isolate, spread rumors or expose secrets about an individual female whom they dislike (Crick & Grotpeter 1995). The researcher created a survey to identify if relational aggression has an impact on female adolescents. The survey focuses on the aggressor, the victim, the impact of relational aggression toward friendships, school attendance and the most commonly used relational aggressive behaviors.

### **Setting**

The study was conducted at a suburban high school in the northeastern United States. At the time of the study, there were 1,717 students enrolled in grades nine through twelve. There were 473 students enrolled in the ninth grade, 440 students enrolled in the tenth grade, 423 students enrolled in eleventh grade, and 381 students enrolled in the twelfth grade. Seventy eight percent of the students were Caucasian, fourteen percent of the students were African American, five percent of the students were Hispanic, and three percent of the students were Asian. Thirteen percent of the students were eligible for free lunch and eight percent were eligible for reduced lunch.

With a population of approximately thirty-eight thousand people, the community provides educational and sport opportunities to elementary, middle, and high school students. According to the (2000) U.S. Census Bureau 88 % of the community is Caucasian, 6.4 % were African American, 0.2% were American Indian & Alaska Native, 2.4 % Asian, 0 % Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, 1.1 % some other race, 1.3 % were two or

three other races, 2.9% were Hispanic or Latino. According to the public school review data, the population average age is thirty eight years old and the median household income is \$54, 319. Eighty two percent of the community owns there house and eighteen percent of the community are renting.

### **Instrument**

The researcher created a qualitative survey entitled Relational Aggression Survey. Questions on the survey focused on identifying which individuals have participated in relational aggressive behaviors, who has been a victim, which high school grade level was more prominently used by the aggressor to demonstrate relational aggressive behaviors, and which grade level did the victim experience different types of relational aggressive behaviors. The survey also asks the students to identify in their opinion where in the school did they notice relational aggressive behaviors occur. The survey also questions if relational aggression has caused the victim to miss school, lose a friend, and if the school is addressing relational aggression. There are three questions on the survey which allowed the students to provide feedback for their school counselor, teachers and school administrators. The contents of the survey are supported by an extensive literature review of articles and books related to relational aggression and the impact it has on female adolescents. Forty- five questions from the survey utilized the purpose of this study (see Appendix D).

### **Sample of the Study**

The researcher used the school's database to identify females who were eighteen years of age. By selecting to use female students who were eighteen years of age, the researcher believed this age group would be easier to obtain consent from to participate in the study. The school database highlighted a list of sixty female students who were eighteen years of age. The researcher decided this would be the list of participants invited

to participate in the study. Once the participants were selected, the participants were recruited by recruitment letters sent to their first period classroom (See Appendix A). Once each participant received their recruitment letter, they were provided with a specific date, time, and location to complete the survey (See Appendix B).

### **Procedures**

The researcher wanted to survey female students who were eighteen years of age. Using the high school database, the researcher was able to assemble a list of sixty female students names. Using the high school database, the researcher then identified each student from the list first period classroom. This information was necessary to assist the researcher with identifying where to send the selected students recruitment letter. The recruitment letter was sent to sixty female participants. The recruitment letter provided the participants with a specific date, time and location.

Forty out of sixty students followed the instructions on the recruitment letter. Once the students arrived at the designated location, each was provided with a consent form (See Appendix C). The consent form included the purpose of the study and informing them that their participation is voluntary; information regarding participant's responses being confidential; no anticipated personal risks or benefits from completing the survey; participant rights and the nature and procedures of the survey. The consent form included researcher contact information for the participants to use if any questions arose. Once each participant finished reviewing the consent form, they would demonstrate their participation in completing the survey by turning their consent form face down. Whenever the researcher noticed a consent form turned face down, the researcher would then remove the consent form from the individual and hand them a survey. The survey contained forty five questions for the participant to complete. It was estimated that it may take each participant thirty minutes to complete the survey. Upon, finishing their

survey, students were instructed to hand their completed survey to the researcher and then leave the assigned location.

### **Analysis procedure.**

To answer the research questions, the survey results were analyzed and interpreted by utilizing qualitative data analysis procedures. Once the surveys were collected, the researcher read through the data, then organized the data based on each survey question and turned the survey responses into percentages.

### **Results**

The purpose of this study was to determine if relational aggression has an impact on females adolescents friendships, school attendance and identify which relational aggressive behaviors are commonly used. The study was also intended for the students to provide feedback for their school counselors, teachers and administrators on how they should address relational aggressive behaviors in their school. Results will be reported according to each research questions.

#### *Research Question 1: Have you ever participated in relational aggressive behaviors*

At the beginning of the survey the students were provided with a definition of relational aggressive behaviors. Once the definition was reviewed, the first question on the survey asked the students if they had ever participated in relational aggressive behaviors. According to the results, eighty percent of the students that participated in the study answered that they had participated in demonstrating relational aggressive behaviors toward in school.

#### *Research Question 2: Have you ever been a victim of relational aggression?*

Fifty five percent of the students reported being a victim of relational aggression. Forty-five percent of the students reported never being a victim.

#### *Research Question 3: Circle the grade levels that apply when you participated in relational*

*aggressive behaviors.*

Seventy-three percent of the students circled ninth grade, twenty-five percent of the student's circled tenth grade, fifteen percent of the students circled eleventh grade, and thirteen percent of the students circled twelfth grade.

*Research Question 4: Circle the grade levels that apply to you if you ever were a victim of relational aggression.*

Fifty five percent of the students reported being a victim in the ninth grade, fifty percent in the tenth grade, twenty five percent in the eleventh grade, and thirteen percent in the twelfth grade.

*Research Questions 5-21 requested the students to circle the grade levels that applied to them if they participated in the selected aggressive behaviors. Refer to the chart below for a descriptive of each relational aggressive behavior, which grade the behavior occurred and the percentage of students who demonstrated the selected behaviors.*

Aggressor Relational Aggressive Behaviors	Percentage Results of Students in the Ninth Grade	Percentage Results of Students in the Tenth Grade	Percentage Results of Students in the Eleventh Grade	Percentage Results of the Students in the Twelfth Grade
5.Talked about other girls	100%	50%	25%	28%
6. Walked by someone and rolled your eyes	38%	18%	15%	12%
7.Called someone a negative name	95%	60%	45%	28%
8.Spreaded rumors about someone	10%	5%	7%	0%
9.Did not invite someone to a party because they were not invited before	13%	0%	0%	5%

10. Watched another girl tease someone and joined in	75%	55%	45%	15%
11. Repeated secrets about another girl to someone they were not suppose to	70%	65%	13%	5%
12. Intentionally embarrassed someone	100%	93%	70%	25%
13. Sent nasty text messages	70%	38%	15%	7%
14. Insulted someone to be accepted by peers	40%	5%	2%	0%
15. Teased someone because of the way they were dressed	100%	88%	50%	7%
16. Excluded someone from the lunch table	50%	30%	0%	0%
17. Became interested in a boy because a girl you disliked was dating him	2%	5%	0%	0%
18. Posted an embarrassing picture around the school of a girl you disliked	2%	0%	0%	2%
19. Posted comments about girls you've disliked on Myspace, Facebook, or Twitter	100%	58%	25%	5%
20. Created a webpage to embarrass	0%	0%	0%	0%

someone you disliked				
21. Played on someone's phone	70%	43%	23%	0%

*Research question 22-37 requested the students to circle the grade level that applied to them if they were a victim of relational aggression. Refer to the chart below for a descriptive of each relational aggressive behavior, which grade the behavior occurred and the percentage of students who were a victim to the selected behaviors.*

Victim Relational Aggressive Behaviors	Percentage Results of Students in the Ninth Grade	Percentage Results of Students in the Tenth Grade	Percentage Results of Students in the Eleventh Grade	Percentage Results of the Students in the Twelfth Grade
22.I have had girl talk about me	100%	100%	70%	35%
23. Someone walked by me and rolled their eyes	100%	80%	63%	13%
24. Someone called me a negative name	45%	28%	23%	25%
25. Someone spread rumors about me	50%	45%	18%	15%
26.I was not invited to a party because they were not invited before	0%	0%	0%	0%
27.I was teased and others joined in	15%	1%	7%	1%
28. Someone repeated my secrets to another girl to someone they were not suppose to	50%	38%	28%	20%
29.Intentionally	30%	20%	13%	7%

embarrassed by someone				
30. Someone sent me nasty text messages	95%	90%	70%	30%
31. Someone insulted me to be accepted by their peers	60%	53%	45%	15%
32. Excluded from the lunch table	48%	30%	13%	8%
33. Someone became interested in a boy I liked because they disliked me	25%	13%	3%	5%
34. Posted an embarrassing picture around the school of me	13%	7%	3%	3%
35. Posted comments about me on Myspace, Facebook, or Twitter	55%	38%	8%	13%
36. Created a webpage to embarrass me	0%	0%	0%	0%
37. Played on my phone	30%	20%	10%	13%

*Research Question 38: In your opinion please circle all that apply where relational aggressive behaviors occur.*

Results from the survey, students ranked the classroom, hallway, lunch room, the bathroom, and the bus were the highest ranked locations where relational aggressive behaviors occur. The school auditorium, the library, and the locker room were the lowest ranked locations based on the students opinion where relational aggressive behaviors occur.

*Research Question 39: Have you ever missed school because you were a victim of relational*

*aggressive behaviors?*

When examining if victims of relational aggression had ever missed school due to an aggressor demonstrating relational aggression toward them, the results were very interesting. According to the results, ninety-three percent of the students reported that they had never been absent from school due to relational aggression. Seven percent of the students reported that they had been absent from school before due to being a victim of relational aggressive behaviors.

*Research Question 40: Have you ever loss a friend due to them using relational aggressive behavior toward you?*

Seventy percent of the students reported that they have loss a friend due to them using relational aggressive behaviors toward them.

*Research Question 41: Have you ever loss a friend due to you using relational aggressive behaviors toward them?*

Eighty-five percent of the students reported that they have not loss a friend due to them using relational aggressive behaviors toward them.

*Research Question 42: In your opinion do you think your school is doing everything they can to address relational aggression?*

The final analyses focused on the student's opinion about whether or not they felt there school was doing everything they could to address relational aggression. According to the results only eight-two percent of the students reported that in their opinion they believed the school was addressing relational aggression. Eighty-two percent of the students reported that in their opinion believe their school is not doing everything to address relational aggression. Eighteen percent of the students reported in their opinion they believe their school is doing everything they can to address relational aggression.

*Research Question 43-45 allowed the students to provide suggestions to their school*

*counselor, teachers, and administrators on how to address relational aggression. Refer to Appendix D for the student's responses.*

### Summary of Findings

The results of the analyses revealed that female students were participating in relational aggressive behaviors. The aggressors tend to demonstrate relational aggressive behaviors toward their victim when they are in their freshman and sophomore year of high school.

According to the study, it is important to note -that engaging in relational aggressive behavior does appear to have an impact on female adolescents friendship when they are in there freshman and sophomore year of high school. However, the victim and the aggressors both reported that they have not lost a friend due to the aggressor using relational aggression toward the victim or the victim eventually using relational aggression toward one of their friend which has not caused them to lose a friend. Relational aggressive behaviors used toward the victim have not affected their attendance to school. The students seem to believe that their school is not doing everything in their power to address relational aggression.

### **Discussion**

This section summarizes the interpretations of findings, limitations of the study and future recommendations for counseling practice.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

Based on the results of the study, relational aggression does not have an impact on the female adolescents who were surveyed. The researcher predicted that relational aggression would have an impact on the female adolescent's friendships and school attendance. Ninety-three percent of the students reported never missing school due to them being a victim of relational aggression. Seventy percent of the students reported never losing a friend due to them being a victim of relational aggression. Eighty-five percent of the students reported never losing a friend due to them being an aggressor in their friendship. Although the students

reported participating in relational aggressive behaviors, the behaviors did not have an impact on their friendship or school attendance. This is interesting because the results are inconsistent with the literature. Crick and Grotpeter (1995), hypothesized that girls attempt to harm others would focus on relational issues and would include behaviors that are intended to significantly damage another child's friendship or feelings of inclusion by the peer group. Being a victim can affect their concentration while in school and lead them to avoid school in the future (Coloroso, 2002).

The results showed that the relational behaviors that the aggressors used toward their victims were demonstrated more when they were in their freshman or sophomore year of high school. As the students entered into their junior and senior the relational behaviors they would use began to decrease. Relational behaviors demonstrated by the students included: talking about other girls, rolling their eyes as they passed another student, calling someone a negative name, spreading rumors about someone whom they disliked, excluding someone from their party because they were excluded in the past, watching another girl tease another girl, repeating secrets, intentionally embarrassing someone, sending inappropriate text messages, insulting someone to be accepted by their peers, teasing someone because of the way they were dressed, excluding someone from the lunch table, became interested in a boy because someone they disliked like them, posted an embarrassing picture of someone around the school, posted comments about someone on MySpace, Facebook, or Twitter, and called someone's telephone and played on it. The only behavior the students did not admit to using was creating a webpage to embarrass someone they disliked.

According to the results the common relational aggressive behaviors demonstrated by the aggressor during their high was talking about other girls, calling someone a negative name, intentionally embarrassing someone, teasing someone because of the way they were dressed, and posting comments about girls they disliked on MySpace, Facebook, or Twitter. The common

relational aggressive behaviors demonstrated by the aggressors are very consistent with the literature that was reviewed. According to Burton (2009) girl's gossip because they are jealous, insecure and want to take down their peers in order to feel better about themselves.

Due to the internet and cell phones people send degrading emails, post mean comments on someone's page or hack into another female URL page to tease, mock, or humiliate them (Burton, 2009). This method is more commonly used because it is harder to get caught because their parents may not be familiar with cyber abuse. By using the internet the aggressor can be cruel to a selected individual while remaining anonymous. The aggressor uses the internet to spread public information quickly. "The negative aspects of computer use are that fifty eight percent of more computer savvy than their parents and many admitted that they broke their parents' rule for computer use. In person interviews many girls confessed to sending evil emails to friends when angry and using meaner behavior online than they would use in person" (Dellasegga & Nixon, 2003, pp. 25-26).

According to the results, the common relational aggressive behaviors the victims endured during high school were having someone talk about them, having someone walked by them and rolled their eyes, and having someone sent them nasty text messages. The behaviors that were less demonstrated toward the victims was being teased and having other join in, being intentionally embarrassed by someone, having someone interested in a boy they liked because they disliked them, posted an embarrassing picture of the student around the school, and played on their telephone. The behaviors that did not occur were having someone create a webpage to embarrass them and not being invited to a party because they did not invite them to their party. Gossip has a huge impact on the impact on the victims. Due to gossiping, the victims are forced to walk around with a reputation they did not earn or knew anything about (Burton, 2009).

According to Burton (2009) the third most commonly used method is boyfriend splitting or couple splitting. The girl will end up being in a relationship with the boy for a while but she is

only doing this to cause the former girlfriend to be jealous because she likes dislikes her. According to Burton (2009) the fourth common method used is verbal abuse. This method involves girls saying hurtful degrading comments to their victims. This method causes the victim to start to believe what the abusers are saying may be true about them.

Results from the survey showed that eighty-two percent of the students surveyed felt there school is not doing everything they can to address relational aggression. This is interesting because when the students were surveyed about where in the building does relational aggression occur the most, the top five locations was the classroom, hallway, lunch room, bathroom, and on the bus. Results showed relational aggressive behaviors occurred less in the auditorium, locker room and the library. These results are very interesting because the auditorium, locker room and the library are areas in the school that are less supervised. The staff in the building needs to be informed about the student's opinion about the top five locations about where relational behaviors often occur.

The result from the section of the survey is consistent with the literature. A consistent finding is that school personnel including classrooms teachers do not respond to students reports of victimization (Olweus, 1991). This is due to the teacher being unaware of it occurring or their lack of understanding of how to address the issue. Teachers do not always recognize indirect intimidation such as social exclusion, spreading rumors, and name calling (Boulton, 1997). The presence of caring and demanding teachers can improve student's sense of class membership and reduce peer conflict in the room (Emmett & Monsour, 1986). Teachers who are sensitive to their students respond swiftly to incidents to protect the students from being a victim while also providing the class with a sense of security and comfort (Olweus & Limber, 1999). Conflicts are less likely to occur if teachers are aware of the warning signs of conflict, verbal intimidation, voices getting louder, and tenses physical reactions (Meese, 1997).

### **Limitations of the Study**

The information provided by this research provided a great deal of useful data. However, gathering data from only one school and a small number of students that was surveyed leaves little room for further generalization. The information obtained may not be relevant across other populations. In the beginning, the researcher wanted to conduct the research with the freshman and sophomore students. Due to the researcher needing parental consent from each of the student's parent, the researcher had to survey students who were eighteen years of age. Due to the student's age they were able to provide consent for themselves. However, there were only a small amount of students who were of age to provide consent to participate in the study. Due to the results showing that relational aggressive behaviors occur during freshman and sophomore year of high school, it would be beneficial to conduct the survey with the freshman and sophomore students.

In gathering data via surveys, the possibility for inaccuracy and dishonesty exists. The subject's responses to the answers depended on their level of honesty, their memory and their ability to respond. Although the subjects were informed that their name would not be included on their survey, they still may have been uncomfortable sharing their true responses to the survey questions.

The researcher was able to identify the common relational aggressive behaviors used by the students surveyed. However, thinking about it now the researcher believes it would have been more beneficial to include on the survey questions about the victim and aggressors experience, and why the aggressor demonstrated the behaviors, as well as how the victim and the aggressor were impacted other than by their school attendance and friendship.

### **Recommendations for Counseling Practice**

The results from the survey showed that relational aggression does not have an impact on female adolescents friendship or school attendance. Results from the population surveyed shows that the students were aware of the different forms of relational aggressive behaviors.

However, the results showed that in the student's opinion they do not believe that their school is doing everything to address relational aggression behaviors in the school. Other relational aggressive behaviors were mentioned on the survey. However, according to the results the other selected behaviors were not commonly used. However It is very important for the entire staff to be aware of the behaviors so they are able to identify the different relational behaviors that can occur.

Although the majority of the relational aggressive behaviors were shown more when students were in their freshman and sophomore years of school, the information from the survey will allow the school counselors to work close with the entire school staff to develop appropriate ways to handle the behaviors. According to Bott (2004), the ideal bully prevention program should exist on three levels: the classroom, the building, and the district. According to Bott (2004) the easiest place to start is in the individual classroom. Teachers are in charge of their own classroom and it is their duty to provide a comfortable environment for students to be comfortable to learn.

Recommendations also include establishing a committee to address relational aggression. If the school counselors work collaboratively with a selective group of staff members in the building they will be able to then educate the entire building about relational aggression by planning an awareness training. To better serve students, educators need to understand what is known about relational aggression and how to deal with the aggressors and the victims. The committee should also create behavior guidelines appropriate for their building and post the expected behaviors guidelines throughout the entire school. Bott (2004) recommends for the selected committee to establish a system for students to feel comfortable to report when they are being victimized. The committee will also have to establish as a group the consequences the aggressor will have to endure due to their negative aggressive behaviors.

It is important for the school counselors to be aware of the commonly used relational

aggressive behaviors. This will assist them with developing a curriculum that they could go into the classroom and teach. The lesson plan would be helpful for them to implement with the freshman and sophomore class based on the survey results. The results from the survey showed that the relational aggressive behaviors were demonstrated more when the students were in their freshman and sophomore year of school, it would be wise for the school counselors to focus their lesson plan on those students. The survey also allowed the students to provide feedback for their school counselors, teachers and school administrators (See Appendix D).

In conclusion, this study has provided information regarding the impact relational aggression has on female adolescents. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of relational aggression on females adolescents friendships and school attendance. It can be concluded that as an adolescent becomes older. The less they become involved in demonstrating relational aggressive behaviors. Relational aggression among females is a much researched topic with many proposed solutions, yet still many adolescents are affected by this issue. If our future is important, research must continue to be invested in continuing to develop programs to provide schools to help students to understand what relational aggression is and how being an aggressor or a victim can be affected.

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**Appendix A: Letter of Informed Consent****STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT**

The purpose of this research project is to examine relational aggression and the impact it has on female adolescents. This research project is also being conducted in order for me to complete my master's thesis for the Department of Counselor Education at the College at Brockport SUNY.

In order to participate in this study, your informed consent is required. You are being asked to make a decision whether or not to participate in the project. If you want to participate in the project, and agree with the statements below your completion of the survey signifies your consent. You may change your mind at any time and leave the study without penalty, even after the study has begun.

I understand that:

1. My participation is voluntary and I have the right to refuse to answer any questions.
2. My confidentiality is guaranteed. My name will not be written on the survey. There will be no way to connect me to my written survey. If any publication results from this research, I would not be identified by name.
3. There will be no anticipated personal risks or benefits because of my participation in this project.
4. My participation involves reading a written survey of forty-five questions. It is estimated that it will take thirty minutes to complete the survey.
5. Approximately sixty people will take part in this study. The results will be used for the completion of a master's thesis by the primary researcher.
6. Data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet by the investigator. Data and consent forms will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been accepted and approved.

I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the study realizing I may withdraw without penalty at any time during the survey process. Returning the survey indicates my consent to participate.

If you have any questions you may contact:

Primary researcher	Faculty Advisor
Name: Rebecca Hamilton	Name: Thomas Hernandez
Phone Number: (585)544-6045	Department and phone number: Counselor Education (585) 395-5498

Email address: rhami1@brockport.edu	Email address: thernandez@brockport.edu
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**Appendix B: Recruitment Letter**

Dear Students,

I, Rebecca Hamilton, am a graduate student in the Counselor Education program at the State University of New York College at Brockport. I am currently working on my thesis for graduate school, which is entitled *Relational Aggression and the Impact it has on Female Adolescents*. The purpose of this research project is to examine relational aggression and the impact it has on female adolescents. Relational aggression is a nonphysical means of inflicting harm that targets the social relationship or status of victims. A few examples of relational aggressive behaviors demonstrated by females within a school setting include spreading rumors, humiliation, or telling peers to exclude another peer from a specific group.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to participate in completing a survey on relational aggression. Your participation is voluntary. If you are interested in completing the survey then please come down to the conference room on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ am/pm. Your responses to the survey are confidential. You are not required to place your name on the survey. Your responses from the survey will allow the researcher a chance to identify which grade level relational aggressive behaviors are most commonly used, which relational aggressive behaviors are commonly used within your school setting, how you handle relational aggression, and how the school can learn how to create a relational aggression free environment.

If you are not interested in participating in completing the survey then you may throw your letter out.

Thank you for your time in advance,

Rebecca Hamilton, School Counselor Intern

**Appendix C: Relational Aggression Survey**

## Relational Aggression Survey

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

“Relational aggression includes acts that “harm others through damage (or the threat of damage) to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion” (Simmons, 2002, pg. 21).

Relational aggressive behaviors include: Ignoring someone to punish them or get one’s own way, Excluding someone socially for revenge, Using negative body language or facial expressions, Sabotaging someone else’s relationship.

1. Have you ever participated in relational aggressive behaviors?

Yes                      No

2. Have you ever been a victim of relational aggression?

Yes                      No

3. Circle the grade levels that apply when you participated in relational aggressive behaviors

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

4. Circle the grade levels that apply to you if you ever were a victim of relational aggression

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

Please circle the grade levels that apply to you if you participated in the selected aggressive behaviors

5. I have talked about other girls:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

6. I walked by someone I did not like and rolled my eyes:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

7. I have called someone negative names:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

8. I have spread rumors about someone whom I dislike:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

9. I didn't invite someone to my party because they did not invite me to theirs:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

Please circle the grade levels that apply to you if you participated in the selected aggressive behaviors

10. I have watched another girl tease another girl and then join in by also teasing them:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

11. I have repeated secrets about another girl to someone I was not suppose to tell:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

12. I have intentionally embarrassed someone:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

13. I sent nasty text messages to someone I disliked:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

14. I have insulted someone before to be accepted by my peers:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

15. I have teased someone because of the way they were dressed:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

16. I have excluded someone from the lunch table before because I was mad at them:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

17. I became interested in a boy because a girl I disliked was dating him:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

18. I posted an embarrassing picture around the school of a girl I disliked:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

19. I have posted comments about girls I dislike on myspace, facebook, and twitter:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

20. I created a webpage to embarrass a girl I disliked:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

21. I have called someone's phone I disliked and played on their phone:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

Please circle the grade levels that apply to you if you participated in the selected aggressive behaviors

22. I have had another girl talk about me:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

23. Someone I disliked walked by me and rolled their eyes:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

24. I have had someone call me a negative name:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

25. Someone who disliked me spread a rumor about me:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

26. I wasn't invited to someone party because I did not invite them to mine:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

27. I was teased by someone and others joined in:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

28. Someone repeated my secret to another girl after I asked them not to tell:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

29. I was intentionally embarrassed by someone:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

30. Someone who I disliked has sent me nasty text messages:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

31. I have been insulted by another girl so she can be accepted by her peers:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

32.I have been excluded from the lunch table before because a girl was mad at me:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

33.I have had someone become interested in my boyfriend because they disliked me:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

34.An embarrassing picture of me has been posted around the school by someone who dislikes me:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

35..Someone has posted comments about me on myspace,facebook, and twitter:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

36.A webpage was created by a girl I dislike to embarrass me:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

37.Someone I dislike has called my phone and played on it:

9<sup>th</sup> Grade      10<sup>th</sup> Grade      11<sup>th</sup> Grade      12<sup>th</sup> Grade

38.In your opinion please circle all that apply where relational aggressive behaviors occur:

In the classroom      On the bus      In the lunch room      In the hallway

In the bathroom      In the school auditorium      In the library

39. Have you ever missed school because you were a victim of relational aggressive behaviors?

Yes      No

40. Have you ever lost a friend due to them using relational aggressive behavior toward you?

Yes      No

41. Have you ever lost a friend due to you using relational aggressive behavior toward them?

Yes      No

42. In your opinion do you think your school is doing everything they can to address relational aggression?

Yes      No

43. Using the space below, do you have any suggestions for your school counselors to address relational aggression?

44. Using the space below, do you have any suggestions for your school teachers to address relational aggression?

45. Using the space below, do you have any suggestions for your school principals to address relational aggression?

*Thank You For Taking Time Out To Complete This Survey*

**Appendix D: Students Responses**

43. Using the space below, do you have any suggestions for your school counselors to address relational aggression?

\*I don't believe a lot can be done about it. It happens everywhere in and out of school.

\*Talk to students more rather than them voluntarily coming in and making an appointment with them.

\*Maybe letting students know what the terms are of relational aggression. Letting the students know they can come to them for help.

\*I think it depends on the case and how long it's been happening I think the school does what they can but there is always room for improvement.

\*Be honest and don't try to "baby" problems to talk to the people who have disliked working out problems they have.

\*Get all sides of the story.

\*I think the school counselors should go into each classroom and educate students about relational aggression because this issue could lead to many psychological problems.

\* Try and have girl's workshops where girls can discuss the problem at hand.

\*I think it can only be addressed if girls come forward about it and most wont because they won't be able to handle their problems on their own.

\*I think that it helps when people have positive advice from teachers and counselors. Also when the group of people having problems they should be able to talk it out face to face.

\*School counselors should make meetings with students to ask about relational aggression.

\*There needs to be a meeting for all girls in the auditorium to talk about it.

44. Using the space below, do you have any suggestions for your school teachers to address relational aggression?

- \* If they see or hear it to stop it. If not stopped then go to the principle.
- \* School teachers should address parents when they see it
- \* Show people that everyone is different and if people just learn to accept that fewer problems will occur. Often time's girls think that it's okay or funny to be rude to others but as soon as you get older you realize that it makes you look foolish. People need to understand that as a younger age.
- \* To find a way to stop others from whispering about you when you are right there.
- \* Keep an eye out for it in the classrooms and hallways but you can't punish someone for rolling their eyes.
- \* Tell both parties to knock it off before they get into a serious consequence.
- \* School teachers should be able to let the students talk comfortably with them about their problems.
- \* Don't ignore it.
- \* To keep people away from each other in the classroom if you see if someone is disliked by others
- \* Rather than ignoring disrespectful comments confront the students right away with it. Don't be afraid to administer proper punishment.
- \* To defiantly make sure the situation is controlled.
- \* Some teachers become closer to students than others and this allows students to feel more comfortable because of the bond. Being able to talk to teachers is important.
- \* For the teachers to be more aware of what's goes on in the hallways or in the classrooms.
- \* Pay more attention to when a student is upset, mad, or showing any emotion relating to drama.

45. Using the space below, do you have any suggestions for your school principals to address relational aggression?

- \*Don't be so hard on the students, get to know them and let them trust you.
- \* To put awareness around the building of relational aggression.
- \*To not just brush it off and take it seriously.
- \*Make themselves better known by all students so they are respected.
- \*To just try to work out problems, try to stop fighting in the halls and if they see it pull the people away to talk and work it out
- \*Don't ignore it and understand everyone.
- \*I believe that school principals should be able to learn why certain students act out as the faculty and administration.
- \*We should be more involved with the school drama and help out the teachers and counselors.
- \*Make it clear that this behavior is not to be tolerated and then follow through with that statement.
- \*Keep enforcing tough rules on people about fighting and other things because it really does affect the way that we as high school students carry ourselves, and how our priorities change due to certain rules and policies.
- \* When there is a fight at school, I believe that the person who started it and who threw the first punch should be the only one punished and not the person who defends themselves.
- \*I think school principals should talk to all the students about it before it happens.
- \*They need to look out for it more.