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Hidden Aggression: A Study of Group Counseling and Female Relational Aggression.

Sarah R. Blencowe

State University of New York College at Brockport

Abstract

This paper explores female relational aggression among adolescents. The paper also discusses the implementation of process-oriented group counseling and its effects on relational aggression among Varsity cheerleading team members at Byron-Bergen High School. The methods and description are followed by a discussion and implications for further research.

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Introduction

According to Nishina and Juvonen (2005), "up to 75% of students report having experienced peer harassment at some point during their school careers" (p.446). Relational aggression is one form of peer harassment that students may be subjected to, particularly females. The effects of relational aggression can be devastating and long-lasting. Most women can remember a time in their lives when they were gossiped about, excluded from the group, or received threatening looks or messages from peers. Most women can also remember the way it felt to be ridiculed and judged by their own peers, and many times friends. Relational aggression is a form of hidden aggression that aims to harm relationships of the victim through various behaviors, such as spreading rumors, group exclusion, ignoring, abusive instant messages, or phone calls. It is imperative that school counselors be aware of the negative effects of relational aggression and possible ways to intervene and prevent it from occurring in our schools. The purpose of this study is to look at the effects of a semi-structured group counseling program on relational aggression among female high school students.

Literature Review

In her book, *Odd Girl Out,* Simmons (2002) describes relational aggression as "ignoring someone socially for revenge, using negative body language or facial expression and sabotaging someone else's relationships" (p.21). Relational aggression is a type of bullying that is common in schools, particularly among females. It involves harming a person through manipulation or damage of peer relationships (Crick, 1996). Relationally aggressive behaviors include rumor-spreading, group exclusion, cliques, and teasing. Unlike physical bullying, relational aggression

is covert and can remain undetected to outsiders, such as counselors and teachers. Relational aggression can have severe consequences on adolescence. Research has linked relational aggression with depression, loneliness, alienation, emotional distress, and isolation (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003). Victims of relational aggression also may exhibit social adjustment difficulties and be at risk for future social problems (Crick, 1996). Developing intervention and prevention strategies is important to attempt to reduce female relational aggression.

Definitions and Terminology

Aggression usually involves inflicting harm unto others. While physical aggression is one type that can be harmful, there are three other types of aggression: indirect, social, and relational. Indirect, social, and relational aggressions are similar and may involve the same acts (Archer & Coyne, 2005). There has been some debate about these terms and definitions and whether or not they are the same. Indirect aggression involves hidden, covert acts intended to harm. Relational aggression is defined as a way to manipulate relationships or friendships. Social aggression manipulates group acceptance and damages social standing, usually through social exclusion or rumor spreading (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Bright, 2005). This thesis focuses on relational aggression, although research regarding indirect and social aggression that relates to relational aggression is included. All of these behaviors are considered peer victimization, an "unprovoked attack that causes hurt of a psychological, social, or physical nature" (Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowen, 2001).

History of Research

Past research was focused primarily on physical aggressive behaviors and excluded females. Physical aggression is obvious and its effects can be seen with evidence of physical injury. However, with relational aggression, there is no tangible evidence of harm. Sometimes

there is no evidence that it even exists (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). It was suggested that males were more aggressive that females (Shute, Owens, & Slee, 2002). However, some recent research suggests that females are more aggressive, but there aggression is more indirect and covert (Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000b). Because of the secretive nature of relational aggression, it can be difficult to study in traditional observation. Research mostly relies on self reports (Owens et al., 2000). In the past decade, researchers have begun to study social aggression. Studies aimed to measure relationally aggressive behaviors and link relational aggression with social or psychological adjustment (Shute et al., 2002).

More recently, qualitative literature has described the effects of aggressive behaviors on the victims and what it feels like to be a target of peer aggression. In recent years, female bullying has been the topic in popular literature and describes the social lives of adolescent girls as a social jungle where only the most aggressive and dominant girls succeed (Hadley, 2003). Furthermore, as awareness of the prevalence and negative impacts of indirect aggression increases, authors have published books offering intervention strategies to combat bullying.

Development and Aggression

According to Shute et al. (2002), research has found that relationally aggressive behaviors increase with age, as children mature and gain social intelligence. As children, people tend to use physical means to achieve wants and needs. Indirect aggression is not seen until the preschool years, after vocabulary is formed and peer relations begin (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006). Relational aggression involves using more sophisticated social cognitive skills than physical bullying. In schools, relational aggression occurs most frequently in middle schools and then in high schools. Pepler et al. (2006) found that aggression increases throughout the

elementary years and peaked in Grade 9 for females. Once children develop social intelligence, they use relational aggression to manipulate social circles to achieve desires (Coyne et al, 2006).

Gender Differences in Relational Aggression

Most research has shown females to be more relationally aggressive than males and attribute this to the earlier social maturity of females. Boys are more likely to use physical aggression because it is consistent with goals of physical dominance (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Crick and Grotpeter (1995, p.710) purported that "when attempting to inflict harm on peers, children do so in ways that best thwart or damage the goals that are valued by their respective gender peer groups."   Because females place greater importance on same sex peer relationships, relational aggression is particularly effective in hurting females (Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowen, 2001; Shute et al., 2002). Females incorporate peer feedback to develop their self-worth than males, especially regarding physical appearance, attractiveness, and acceptance in to a social network (Casey-Cannon et al, 2001). Gender differences also existed in a study of American and Indonesian children. Females were more relationally aggressive in three subcategories: relationship manipulation, social ostracism, and malicious rumors (French, Jansen, & Pidada, 2002).

A study conducted by Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, and Peltonen (1988) found that girls reported more indirect aggressive behaviors. They also found that boys had larger social circles than girls, but girls reported having more close friendships. Therefore, the most effective way to harm a girl is through the manipulation of close friendships. Green, Richardson, and Lago (1996) found that boys were more directly aggressive, but there were no gender differences among indirect aggression. Rivers and Smith (1994) found the same results in a similar study. A study by Werner and Crick (2004) found that girls are more likely to retaliate against peers by

exclusion and influencing others to do the same. Girls seemed to recruit other females to use aggression against a target (Werner & Crick, 2004).

Gender differences in relational aggression continue to be debated. However, findings suggest that females and males interpret relational aggression differently. Females tend to believe that relational aggression is more hurtful to relationships (Galen & Underwood, 1997; Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006; Goldstein & Tisak, 2006). Studies have also found that females are impacted differently by relational aggression. Although boys experience some relational aggression from peers, research has shown that females find indirect aggression to be more hurtful and equate it with physical bullying (Owens et al., 2000b).

Females are also more likely to influence others to be relationally aggressive and harm another through exclusion. Some girls feel pressured to attack another due to influence from a friend, which creates a closer friendship and protects them from being victimized. According to Werner and Crick (2004), boys did not exhibit the same behaviors or influences.

Why Females Engage in Relational Aggression

Females use relational aggression because they are discouraged from using physical aggression (Owens et al., 2000b). Owens, Shute, and Slee (2000b) studied the functions of relationally aggressive behaviors in adolescents' own words. The study was conducted with high school girls and they were asked to discuss and answer questions regarding a scenario that described a story of a girl that experienced relational aggression from her peers. Owens et al (2000b) found that the most common reason for aggressive behavior, such as gossip or breaking confidences, was to alleviate boredom. The participants reported that this behavior was fun and added excitement to their lives.

Owens et al. (2000b) found that participants explained using relational aggression in friendship and group processes. For example, girls reported getting attention themselves when they were being aggressive. They also reported that relational aggression determines who is included in the group. If the group shares secrets about someone, they are establishing intimacy within the group. However, the person being talked about is definitely known as not a part of the group. Owens et al. (2000a, 2000b) also found that girls go along with relationally aggressive behaviors to feel like they belong in the group. They may find themselves talking about others and spreading gossip, to feel a sense of belonging, empowerment, and popularity. Girls also go along with the bullying because it may help them to avoid becoming the next target and protect their status within the peer group. Feelings of jealousy and wanting revenge also contributed to acts of relational aggression (Owens et al., 2000a, Owens et al., 2000b).

According to Conway (2005), relational aggression may be a result of females' suppression of emotions, especially anger. Females are expected to regulate emotions, which results in a failure to express anger directly and internalizing emotions, while maintaining harmonious friendships (Crothers, Field, & Kolbert, 2005). Relational aggression is one strategy that can allow a person to express suppressed emotion without confrontation (Conway, 2005).

Crothers, Field, & Kolbert (2005), found that female adolescents that identified with a more traditional female role were more likely to use relational aggression than those females that identified with a more nontraditional gender role. The females reported that they were more likely than boys to use relationally aggressive behaviors to resolve conflicts and achieve status. Using relational aggression was seen as an effective strategy to resolve conflict and gain status or harm someone. By using relational aggression, females were able to maintain their traditional role of being non-confrontational and avoid conflict (Crothers et al., 2005).

Peer Relationships

The development of friendship is an important component of social development, particularly during adolescence. The importance of being accepted by the peer group is highest during mid to late adolescence (La Greca & Lopez, 1998). Research has shown that high-quality friendships may enhance self-esteem, adjustment, and the ability to cope with stress (Cillessen, Jiang, West, & Laszkowski, 2005). Same-sex friendships are closer during early adolescence, 12 to 16 years of age, than in any other phase of the life span (Berndt, 1982). Adolescents find themselves stuck in limbo, not treated as adults, but more responsibilities than children. During this time, friendship becomes even more important and peers replace parents as the primary social interactions. Adolescents explore their own identity through relationships, as well as develop understanding of others' thoughts and feelings (Berndt, 1982). According to Berndt (1982), there are four features of friendship that have a potential effect on development: intimacy (knowledge of other person, self-disclosure, closeness), mutual responsiveness within the relationship, similarity between friends, and stability and change in friendship.

Cillessen et. al (2006) examined the effects of social behavior on friendship quality. They found that relational aggression was not related to friendship quality in females that were perceived as relationally aggressive by peers. Peer-nominated relationally aggressive females did not report lower qualities of friendship. However, female adolescents that reported themselves as being aggressive had a negative correlation with friendship qualities. Cillessen et. al (2006) suggested that although relational aggression was disliked by peers, it "can function at the same time to forge coalitions and alliances with others, which may lead to greater social network centrality" (p.170).

Werner and Crick (2004) studied the link between peer rejection and the development of relational aggression. They found that girls, who had friendships with relationally aggressive peers, became more aggressive over time compared to girls that did not have aggressive friends. this suggested that peer influence can have an impact on the development of relational aggression. Werner and Crick (2004) suggested that relationally aggressive children may "positively reinforce derisive remarks about other children in their conversations with close friends, whereas kind words spoken about disliked peers are ignored. In this way, relational aggression is likely to be promoted within the friendship context" (p.509). When females use relational aggression against a victim, the aggressive females may become closer. They may also fear if they do not participate in relational aggression with their peers, they will become the next target. Therefore, relationally aggressive females may also be attempting to protect themselves from becoming a victim (Werner & Crick, 2004).

Peer relationships can be important when dealing with relational aggression. Having a close, dyadic relationship can help victims deal with aggression from the larger peer group (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996). Grotpeter and Crick (1996) studied friendship and aggression among children. They found that relationally aggressive children reported the same quality of friendships than non-aggressive peers. However, aggressive children did not self-disclose as much in their friendships and would rather friends tell them private information (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996).

Popularity

In a longitudinal study of 905 children conducted by Cillessen and Mayeux (2004), associations between relational aggression and perceived popularity increased from childhood to early adolescence (Grade 5-9). Perceived popularity is "assessed by students' nominations of

"popular" classmates" (Rose, Swenson, & Waller, 2004, p.378). Perceived popularity is usually

associated with "being well-known, attractive, athletic, having desirable possessions, being

accepted by others who are perceived as popular, and being desirable to the opposite sex" (Rose

et al., 2004, p.379). Peers saw relationally aggressive students as more popular and the effect of

relational aggression on perceived popularity doubled from grade 5 to grade 9.   However,

popularity did not mean well-liked and relational aggression decreased liking. Schwartz et al.

(2006) found associations between aggression and popularity. They also found increased

aggression and popularity to be associated with lower grade point averages and more absences

from school (Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & McKay, 2006).

 Cillessen and Mayeux (2004) suggested that the study showed the reinforcement of

relational aggression, as children grow older. It was noted "status led to behavior more often

than the reverse. Perceived popularity consistently and positively predicted relational

aggression, especially in girls" (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004, p.160). The results of the study

showed that adolescents were acceptable of using relational aggression to achieve popularity,

where the benefits of social centrality within the peer group outweigh any negative

consequences. They also used relational aggression to achieve power and influence within peer

groups (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). Some aggressors can remain anonymous and avoid

appearing mean by engaging in relationally aggressive behaviors that increase their own social

standing (Rose et al., 2004).

Popularity may be linked to relational aggression, because in order for the aggression to

be harmful, the aggressor must have a central role in their social circle. If the aggressor does not

have a social network, then behaviors such as gossip and group exclusion would probably fail.

The more influence a girl has in her social network, the more successful relational aggression will be in harming the victim's relationships (Xie, Swift, Cairns, & Cairns, 2002).

Relationally Aggressive Behaviors

Relational Aggression is often hidden in front of adults, but does not have to be covert. Oftentimes, relational aggression occurs face-to-face and can be witnessed by peers. For instance, a girl may tell her friend that if she does not do something, she will no longer be her friend. The behavior is intended to punish the victim and harm relationships (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006). Relational aggression can occur directly or indirectly. Direct relational aggression is the use of confrontational strategies to achieve interpersonal damage" (Crothers, Field, & Colbert, 2005). An example of direct relational aggression is telling some that they are excluded from the group. An example of indirect aggression is rumor-spreading. The victim may not even know she is the target of relational aggression or who started the rumor.

Types of relationally aggressive behaviors reported by Archer and Coyne (2006) that are seen particularly in childhood include:

Gossip/rumor spreading	Imitate behind back
Back bite	Embarrass in public
Break confidences	Anonymous notes
Criticize clothes and personality behind back	Practical jokes
Ignore	Abusive phone calls
Social exclusion/ostracism	
Turn other against	
Become friends with another as revenge	

Shute et al. (2002) conducted a qualitative research study to determine the socially aggressive behaviors reported by adolescents and what their explanations were. The participants were groups of 15 year-old girls. Behaviors reported by the participants included: gossiping, spreading rumors, criticizing, group exclusion, and harassment. Peer harassment occurred through prank phone calls and written anonymous messages. The study also focused on non-verbal aggressive behaviors. Some girls reported giving "daggers," or threatening looks to other girls, in an attempt to intimidate or show dislike. Another nonverbal reported behavior was the use of gestures to victimize a person. Sarcasm was another behavior used to hurt others. Participants reported that how something was said was more important than what they said and sarcastic remarks can be hurtful. Adolescents also used non-verbal behavior to exclude peers from a group by simply ignoring them.

In a qualitative study conducted by Casey-Cannon, Hayward, and Gowen (2001) among 157 seventh-grade females, 30% reported some type of relational aggressive behavior occurred to them. The majority of girls reported that the victimization occurred regularly, and school was the most common place for the bullying to occur. The victims reported overt victimization, which involved verbal remarks. Common themes were insults about desirable traits (intelligence), insults about undesirable physical and psychological traits, race, being new to the school, and name-calling. Three girls reported rumors being spread about them and being socially excluded (Casey-Cannon, Hayward, and Gowen, 2001).

Coyne, Archer, and Eslea (2006) found that verbal aggression is the most-witnessed type of aggression among 422 adolescents. Indirect aggression occurred more frequently than direct forms of aggression. The participants viewed relational aggression as the most harmful, followed by physical aggression (Coyne et al, 2006).

Group Exclusion

Social exclusion is one form of relational aggression that involves ostracizing an individual from the peer group. An example of this is when a girl has sat with the same group during lunch for the entire school year. One day, when she approaches her lunch table, she is informed that there is no longer room for her at the table and she is not allowed to sit with them. The group exclusion is not just confined to the cafeteria. The girl's peer group goes out of their way to ignore and stay away from her.

Werner and Crick (2004) found that peer rejection and friendships with aggressive peers predicted future relational and physical aggression. They suggest that peer relationships are an important component of the development of relational aggression. Werner and Crick (2004) found that relational aggression is positively reinforced within the context of the friendship.

Relationally aggressive behaviors can be difficult to observe as an adult outside of the social context of an adolescent. Leets and Sunwolf (2005) studied social exclusion from the perspectives of adolescents. Based on the information gathered, they were able to establish seven rejection categories that were common responses among the participants. The first category was based on lack of physical or social attractiveness. This also includes the similarity to other members of the peer group. If a person is seen as being different, they may face social exclusion. Adolescents also reported that social exclusion is an acceptable form of punishment or revenge. Another theme Leet and Sunwolf (2005) found is the perception of the victim as being dangerous. The participants found exclusion acceptable if the victim was physically, socially, emotionally, or legally threatening.

Another reason for excluding someone was to maintain group loyalty. Adolescents may engage in excluding another peer to avoid conflict or due to peer pressure. The study also found

that some teens excluded others to protect them from harm that could happen to them if they

were a part of the group. The sixth category involved the competency of the individual. If the

person is not able to meet group goals, then they can be excluded. Finally, some participants

reported that it was never okay to exclude anyone (Leet & Sunwolf, 2005). This study is

important for counselors because it gives an inside look and the social norms and rules of

adolescents and group exclusion.

Beliefs That Support Aggression

In a study of beliefs about the perceived role of bullying with two-hundred 7th through

12th graders, participants gave several reasons for bullying behavior. For example, participants

believed that victims brought the bullying on themselves and were partly to blame. The reasons

for bullying included weakness, emotionality, and social skills. The students (61%) also

believed that bullying made the victim tougher and was supposed to teach them a lesson. They

also reported that bullies had a higher social status than victims, this was particularly high among

females, who are likely to bully using relational aggression (Oliver, Hoover, & Hazler, 1994).

With many students believing that bullying serves an important purpose to teach victims a

deserving lesson, it may be difficult to intervene in aggressive behaviors.

Goldstein and Tisak (2006) studied adolescents and their beliefs about parents

intervening in physical aggression, relational aggression, and personal choices (such as clothing,

hair styles, friends). They found that adolescents agreed with parental jurisdiction in regard to

physical aggression than to relationally aggressive behaviors, such as gossip or peer exclusion.

Furthermore, the study showed that the participants found it more acceptable for parents to

intervene with personal choices, such as hairstyles, than to intervene with social exclusion.

Goldstein and Tisak (2006) suggested that adolescents might not realize the harm of excluding

others and think it is their personal choice to leave someone out. The participants viewed gossip as more harmful to relationships than exclusion, perhaps because it involves breaking trust and intimacy. These findings suggested that it might be difficult to intervene in relational aggression with adolescents because they do not want adults to become involved (Goldstein & Tisak, 2006).

Contrary to popular belief, relational aggression is harmful and is not just "the way girls are." As long as these beliefs continue, girls will continue to have troubles in their peer relationships and have to deal with aggression. Adults may be oblivious that relational aggression is occurring because of its hidden nature. This may reinforce victims and bystanders to keep relational aggression a secret. In interviews with victims of relational aggression, Casey-Cannon et al (2001) found that victims reported negative feelings and fear of informing adults about being bullied.

Characteristics of Victims and Aggressors

Owens et al. (2000b) found that peers viewed victims as bringing on aggression themselves. Whether the victim is aware or not, they may have done something annoying or aggravating to start the conflict. The participants reported that some peers are vulnerable to relational aggression, particularly if they are new to the school, have few or no friends, are unassertive, and being "different." Other characteristics of victims might include a lack of social skills or having difficulty with relationships at home (Owens et al., 2000c).

According to Archer & Coyne (2005), girls that use hidden relational aggression are found to have a higher rank among the group and are less lonely than non-aggressive peers. Some studies have shown aggressors to have higher social intelligence, as well (Xie et al., 2002). Aggressors are associated with popularity, although they may not be likable. They are likely to have friends, but their friends are likely to engage in relationally aggressive behavior, as well

(Werner & Crick, 2004). Research has linked jealousy with aggression. Girls that were seen as the most jealous were also the most aggressive. The study linked jealousy with passive and social aggression, which may suggest that jealousy stimulates aggression in friendship (Parker, Low, Walker, & Gamm, 2005). However, aggressors that outwardly use relationships to manipulate and gain control over their peer group could be rejected from the very group that they are trying to control. Although peers condoned relational aggression, aggressors were viewed negatively by victims and those outside of their social groups (Archer & Coyne, 2005). At times, the perpetrator of relational aggression may remain anonymous to the victim, especially in gossip and rumor-spreading. Therefore, the bully is able to avoid confrontation, but still harm their target.

Effects of Relational Aggression

A study by Owens, Shute, and Slee (2000a) used focus groups to investigate female relational aggression and the effects and their reactions to it. The participants reported that after being victimized, the initial reaction is confusion. The girl may not understand why she is being targeted or wonder what she has done wrong. Owens et al. (2000a) reported that confusion leads to denial of what is happening to them. Eventually psychological pain can occur including "hurt, fear, loss of self-esteem, anxiety, loss of self-confidence, and fear for future relationships" (Owens et al., 2000a, p.78). The psychological pain endured can sometimes lead to negative or irrational self-talk by the victims, which can reduce their ability to cope and recover from victimization. The girls may develop a self-fulfilling prophecy by always seeing themselves as victims and that everyone knows about them (Owens et al., 2000c).

Peer victimization is "negative actions that are repeatedly directed by peers at child through physical, verbal, or relational aggression" (Storch, Brassard, & Masia-Warner, 2003,

p.1). Casey-Cannon et al (2001) found that victims reported feeling sad, hurt, or rejected in reaction to victimization. Some girls cried, while some tried to hide tears for fear of being targeted more aggressively. Behavioral responses included ignoring the aggressor, verbal retaliation, or reacting with physical aggression. Few girls reported seeking help from a parent or other adult (Casey-Cannon et al, 2001). Gamliel, Hoover, Daughtry, and Imbra (2003) found middle schoolers used coping strategies to deal with bullying that included avoidance, rational and calm confrontation, and cathartic activities. Some of the victims reported verbal retaliation as catharsis to make themselves feel better after being attacked (Galiel et al., 2003). Other victims of relational aggression are able to recover and attempt to resolve conflict by approaching the aggressor, usually one-on-one (Owens et al., 2000c).

Bullying can have a negative effect on both victim and aggressor. In a study of victims and aggressors, students that reported themselves as both bully and victim had higher levels of self-reported psychiatric problems (Ivarrson, Broberg, Arvidsson, & Gillberg, 2005). Symptoms included aggression, delinquency, depression, confusion, self-destructive/identity problems, and suicidality, which might lead to future psychopathology (Ivarrson et al., 2005).

Victims can also have negative thoughts regarding physical appearance, romantic appeal, self-worth, and close friendships (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006). According to their research, Casey-Cannon et al (2001) found that relational aggression had an impact on some participants' self-image. They reported internalizing the insults and feeling bad, even if they knew the remark was untrue or just to hurt them. Insults also reinforced negative self-perceptions. Girls also reported losing friendships because of relational aggression. Prinstein et al. (2001) found that participants that reported having close friendships adjusted and coped better to relational

victimization compared to those without close friendships. However, this strategy might be difficult when the aggression occurs amongst close friends (Prinstein et al., 2001).

Social Problems

Relational aggression within the peer group can lead to the victim seeking another social group or leaving the school. Victims may attempt to become friends with another social group, although they may have to join one of lower social status. Usually, the victims still want to gain reacceptance into their original social group. Owens, Shute, and Slee (2000c) found that some girls reported being ostracized from their entire grade level. Students faced with such exclusion may choose to leave the school and relocate, only to find that their reputation was passed on to another school. Finally, some girls reported suicidal ideations and consideration due to severe victimization by peers (Owens et al., 2000c). Owens et al. (2000c) reported "a significant amount of girls talked about fear, anxiety, and apprehension in their relationships with peers" (p.369).

Research has linked internalizing feelings of depression, anxiousness, and loneliness with victims of relational aggression (Prinstein, Beorger, & Vernberg, 2001). Storch, Brassard, and Masia-Warner (2003) associated overt and relational aggression with elevated levels of social anxiety and loneliness. Adolescent victims of aggression reported fear of negative evaluation, physiological symptoms, and social avoidance. They found that repeated victimization might lead to development of social anxiety (Storch et al., 2003). Another study with relational aggression predicted social phobia symptoms one year later. Adolescents that are repeatedly victimized by peers may avoid social interactions in order to avoid possible aggressors (Storch, Masia-Warner, Crisp, & Klein, 2005).

Social anxiety may be linked to problems in friendships because females share close friendships that emphasize intimacy and emotional support (La Greca & Lopez, 1998). La Greca and Lopez (1998) found that adolescents that reported high levels of social anxiety felt less accepted by peers. Research by Crick (1996) found that relational aggression is predictive of future social maladjustment in girls. Crick (1996) studied children throughout a school year and found that relational aggression was associated with an increase in peer rejection in both males and females. It was also found among the female participants that relational and overt aggressions were both negatively related to future peer acceptance. The study also found that aggressive behaviors remained constant over the course of time.

School Experience

Rivers and Smith (1994) found that students used indirect bullying to target victims at school, in classrooms and hallways. It is important to look at relational aggression and the school experience because of the amount of social and emotional skills that are learned at school. According to Merrell, Buchanan, and Tran (2006), "it is the school setting that provides the first significant experience for most children with respect to social roles, expectations, hierarchies, and conflicts in larger groups" (p.347). While most research focuses on the victims and aggressors of bullying, there are usually numerous bystanders that witness the victimization. In a study of middle school students, bystanders reported increased anxiety and school dislike after witnessing peer harassment (Nishina & Juvonen, 2005).

Relational aggression can have a negative effect on victims' school experiences, as well as students' adjustment (Casey-Cannon, 2001). Repeated bullying has been linked to poor academic performance and excessive absences (Casey-Cannon, 2001). In a study conducted by Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, and Perry (2003), students that reported being harassed by peers

had lower grades and disliked school more than those who did not report harassment. According to Nishina and Juvonen (2005), "experiencing peer victimization is related to negative attitudes toward school, lack of engagement in class, and fewer positive experiences in school" (p.435). Students that are bullied at school may feel less connected to peers, teachers, and have less motivation to perform well (Skues, Cunningham, & Pokharel, 2005).

According to Hill and Werner (2006), "student attachment to school is consistently associated with positive social, emotional, and academic adjustment" (p.231). They found that students with affiliative motivation, the desire to have relationships with other students, was positively associated to school attachment and negatively associated with aggression. Students who valued close relationships had more school attachment and were less aggressive. Aggressive students were more likely to have instrumental goals, rather than relational and use aggressive means to achieve goals (Hill & Werner, 2006).

School connectedness is a term that describes "the sense of attachment and commitment a student feels as a result from perceived caring from teachers and peers" (Wilson, 2004, p. 1). Wilson (2004) found that students that reported less school-connectedness, compared to peers, had higher rates of physical and relational aggression. School connectedness may yield protective qualities for students. Furthermore, highly connected students were less likely to be victimized (Wilson, 2004). Creating a school climate that promotes students feeling connected to the school may be an important factor in preventing and intervening in aggressive behavior.

Interventions in Relational Aggression

Gamliel et al. (2003) found that students preferred calm, rational approaches to bullying, but not confident in effectiveness of strategies given to them. Students felt helpless and fearful of asking adults for help (Gamliel et al., 2003). Adolescents often think it is more acceptable to

report direct aggression, rather than indirect (Rivers & Smith, 1994). Therefore, it is important

for teachers, administrators, and counselors to be aware of bullying and willing to help students.

Oftentimes, bullying occurs in the presence of adults in the school through note-passing, rumors,

and exclusion (Rivers & Smith, 1994). It is important for school counselors to be aware of the

harmful consequences of relational aggression and prevalence in their schools. There are various

ways to assess relational aggression, including sociometric techniques, teacher rating, self-

reports, student interviews, and behavioral observations (Merrell et al., 2006).

Casey-Cannon et al.(2001) wrote that counselors should advocate for students and create

awareness in the school through policies, programs, and interventions. Students should be

informed of the code of conduct and consequences of bullying actions. Counselors should

conduct assessments and surveys to identify the extent of aggression in the student population.

They should work with victims of bullying and the bullies. They stressed the importance of

creating trusting and supportive relationships with students and empower students to "increase

their sense of control over the experience and improve their sense of belonging in the

community" (Casey-Cannon et al, 2001).

Training should be provided to employees to deal with relational aggression. Merrell et

al. (2006) suggested a starting point for training as a discussion about the problem and issues

regarding relational aggression, including "how it may manifest, possible negative outcomes,

gender issues, cultural and familial issues, and effective brief screening and assessment

practices" (p.357).

Prevention programs can also be designed to help reduce relational aggression, including

the student code of conduct that addresses bullying. Clear rules that do not tolerate bullying

should be established. The school and students should encourage and promote prosocial

behaviors and reward inclusive behaviors. Prosocial behaviors are "emotional (e.g., saying kind words, cheer a peer up when sad) and tangible (e.g., helpfulness, sharing) support that is received through peer interactions" (Storch et al., 2003, p.3). Storch et al. (2003) found that victims of aggression that reported receiving prosocial behavior from peers had lower levels of loneliness of those that did not report prosocial behaviors. The power of close relationships may buffer the negative effects of relational aggression. Also, including student input while designing codes and rules will serve to empower students (Casey-Cannon et al, 2001).

Hall (2006b) used a problem-based learning technique in a counseling group of seventh graders who reported being bullied. The students were to brainstorm ways to reduce name-calling and rumor spreading, physical violence, and an action plan for bullies. Students were then given a case and utilized their problem-solving skills. By working on ways to solve the problem, "students become engaged in the discovery of knowledge and skills and learn techniques for solving future problems" (Hall, 2006, p.213). Hall (2006b) found that the group of students increased their assertiveness skills after the five group sessions. The study indicated that problem-based learning might be an effective tool in teaching students how to handle any type of aggression.

A study of the Second Step program implemented among middle school students found that students in the program were less likely to use aggression than the control group (Van Schoiack-Edstrom, Frey, & Beland, 2002). Participants were also "less tolerant of physical aggression, verbal aggression, and social exclusion that were controls, and were also less likely to view prosocial skills as difficult to perform" (Schoiack-Edstrom et al., 2002). The Second Step program involves a curriculum that focuses on teaching students empathy, anger

management lessons, problem solving, and skill application. Schoiack-Edstrom et al. (2002) suggested programs be long-term and use multiple methods of teaching students.

There is not a specific intervention that has been proven to help decrease relational aggression. Some anti-bullying programs have shown to decrease bullying for a short period of time. Merrell et al. (2006) suggested an intervention that does not specifically target relational aggression, but "promotes positive social behavior and healthy emotional development, and to reduce antisocial behavior in general" (p.357). Because females that engage in relational aggression is associated with popularity and achieving social goals, there may be little motivation to change in aggressors (Rose et al., 2004).

Dellasega and Nixon (2003) wrote about different strategies for girls, parents, and schools to stop female bullying. In Girl Wars: 12 Strategies That Will End Female Bullying, the strategies focus on informing self and others, prevention, confronting relational aggression, providing support, and changing the culture (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003). To decrease relational aggression, the focus should not only be on adolescent females. Parents and school staff should increase their awareness

Summary

The purpose of this research is to explore the effects of relational aggression. The study of this hidden form of bullying is fairly recent, but becoming more popular in literature and movies. Some studies suggest that relational aggression is more prevalent amongst females and females view relational aggression to be just as harmful, if not more harmful, than physical bullying. Relational aggression has been linked to anxiety, depression, social and school problems. Aggressors may not look like the typical mean bully that one thinks of and sees in

movies. Aggressors that use indirect, relational, and social bullying may be the most popular girls in the school, with a large social network and followers.

Because of the potential harmful effects of female relational aggression, finding appropriate interventions is very important. No specific intervention has been proven effective in reducing relational aggression. Therefore, this researcher sought to study the effects of group counseling on female relational aggression, using some of the strategies illustrated in Girl Wars: 12 Strategies That Will End Female Bullying (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003). Unless relational aggression is taken seriously and parents, students, and school staff are educated, this hidden bullying will continue to affect many girls with sometimes devastating consequences.

Method

The objectives of this research are 1) Educate girls about relational aggression and help

them develop strategies to create and maintain positive peer relationships, and 2) To study the

effect of group counseling on aggressive behaviors, bystander behaviors, and victimization in

relational aggression. This research study was implemented in a rural high school. A letter was

written to the principal to obtain permission (Appendix A). It was expected that after the six

group counseling sessions, aggressive, bystander, and victim behaviors would decrease, while

power behaviors increase.

Setting and Population

The setting is a rural high school, located in Genesee County, New York. According to

the most recent on-line district report card, published by the New York State Department of

Education (2006), there were approximately 400 students in the school. Only 4.1% of the

student population were minorities, with 95.9% of students labeled as white, non-Hispanic.

Approximately 24% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch, which indicate a

socioeconomic need (NYSED, 2006).

Participants

Members of the high school cheerleading team were given a brief explanation of the

research study, followed by a question and answer session. The girls were told that they would

have an opportunity to participate in six group counseling sessions. The purposes of the sessions

were to educate about female bullying and provide members with an opportunity to discuss

relationships and coping strategies. Team members were then given the Statement of Informed

Consent (Appendix B). Because participants were underage, parents also had to sign a Statement

of Informed Consent (Appendix C). Four students returned their permission slips and became

participants in the group counseling sessions. Three of the students were freshmen and one participant a junior. All students were Caucasian.

Procedures

The six counseling sessions were approximately 40 minutes in length and were held afterschool, during a study hall for athletes. At the beginning of every session, a story was read from *Girl Wars: 12 Strategies That Will End Female Bullying* (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003) that pertained to the topic of that day. The facilitator then briefly described a topic and lead a discussion with the group members. Strategies from *Girls Wars* were also described and discussed as useful tools with relational aggression. Members were encouraged to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences that pertain to the topic. The participants could also use the group time to discuss their relationships and resolve issues with each other.

Session One

The purpose of the first session was to get acquainted with the group through introductions, as well as administer the pre-test "What is Your RA Quotient?" questionnaires. The facilitator described the group rules of confidentiality and being respectful of each other. It was reiterated that the counselor also would maintain confidentiality, unless there was threat to harm self or others. If a parent or another person were to be contacted, the student would be informed prior.

During the first session, group members learned the definition of relational aggression and why it is considered female bullying. The intent is to harm or manipulate relationships. the following examples of relationally aggressive behavior were given: starting rumors, gossip, exclusion, cliques, and teasing. It was also noted that relational aggression can occur online through instant messaging or sites, such as MySpace.com.

Group members were then given the "What's Your RA Quotient?" questionnaire, developed and published by Dellasega and Nixon (2003) in their book, *Girl Wars*. Permission was given by Dr. Cheryl Dellasega to reproduce any information in the book. The girls each drew a number to identify their tests instead of using names. The identity of the participants was unknown to the facilitator.

Upon completion of the questionnaire, the facilitator began a discussion about relationally aggressive behaviors the participants experienced. An example of being an aggressor and victim were given. The girls were asked to share experiences that may have occurred within their cheerleading team or with other peers.

Session Two

The purpose of session to was to define the roles in bullying: bully, victim, and bystander. Members also talked about feelings associated with each role. Discussion questions included: What are the options of bystanders of bullying? What is expected? What is the motivation to use relational aggression with friends or peers? There was a discussion of examples of relational aggression and group members shared some of their own experiences. Discussion continued about why they think relational aggression occurs, especially among girls.

The members also discussed empathy and what it meant to them. According to Dellasega and Nixon, empathy is a concept that can be taught and is very important in relationships. Empathy involves: 1. Identifying other's feelings, 2. Taking another's perspectives, and 3. Showing empathetic behavior. During this session, there was discussion of how to show empathy and how empathy can help reduce relational aggression.

Session Three

The goal of this session was to introduce conflict resolution and problem solving techniques. Girls were given the handout Conflict Resolution Skills, located in Appendix E (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003). The handout is a list of skills that "promote a peaceful resolution of conflict and disagreement" (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003, Appendix D). Discussion included talking about active listening, getting all the facts, using "I" messages, and being aware of tone of voice. During this session, members used role plays from stories in *Girl Wars* (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003) to practice the conflict resolution skills.

Session Four

In group meeting four, a discussion about friendship was facilitated. Girls described important traits and values in friends and their relationships. They also talked about how relational aggression can negatively impact those relationships. Participants noted the importance in distinguishing between friends who care and those who don't. A discussion question was proposed to the group, "Have you ever said you weren't mad at someone and then went behind their back and talked about it?" The group the discussed ways they could have approached the situation differently.

The facilitator also presented the difference between being aggressive versus assertive in reference to solving conflict. Girls worked on completing "I" statements: "I feel _____, when you_____ and I _____." The goal of this session was to learn how to express thoughts, opinions, feelings, attitudes, and rights in a manner that doesn't take advantage of other people or hurt their feelings. It is important to be able to relate with empathy and be able to show frustration, displeasure, and disinterest in appropriate ways.

Session Five

In session five, participants were given a toolkit of options, list of strategies, published in *Girl Wars* to combat relational aggression (Appendix F). The group discussed which strategies they thought would be helpful and some strategies of their own. Some of the girls acknowledged the need to change the way they handle being a victim of relational aggression. There was a discussion of how to be a leader against female bullying by standing up for victims, not laughing at mean jokes, and not listening or spreading gossip. The group also acknowledged that the next session would be the last.

Session Six

This session was devoted to discussing what the members learned from the group and how they could help others decrease relational aggression. Group members also completed the "What's Your RA Quotient?" questionnaire as a post-test assessment.

Relational Aggression Questionnaire

The "What's Your RA Quotient?" questionnaire was developed and published in *Girl Wars* by Dellasega and Nixon (2003). This researcher has permission from the author to use and reproduce the questionnaire, which is located in Appendix D. The questionnaire is composed of different questions regarding aggressive, bystander, victim, and prosocial behavior. The questionnaire focuses on the behaviors that occurred in the past week. The questionnaire consists of 50 questions pertaining to aggressive, bystander, victim, and power behaviors. to protect identity of the group members, names were not used on the questionnaire and numbers were randomly picked at the first session.

Table 1

Examples from "What's Your RA Quotient?" Questionnaire

Behavior	No. of Items	Sample Questions: Check off behaviors that you have done in the past week:
Aggressive Behaviors	23	Said something about someone else that you knew wasn't nice? Looked at or gestured at someone in a way meant to insult? Made up something to get a former friend in trouble?
Bystander Behaviors	8	Wanted to defend a girl, but didn't because you were afraid? Been part of a crowd who watched as someone was made fun of? Listened to gossip about another girl?
Victim Behaviors	9	Been teased by someone else about the way you look? Received a message that hurt your feelings? Been the target of a rumor?
Power Behaviors	10	Forgiven a friend who hurt your feelings? Given a friend a compliment? Asked your friends to stop talking about someone who wasn't there?

Results

Table 2

Aggressive Behaviors- 23 Questions

Participant	Pre-test	Post-test	Change
1	9	0	-9
2	2	1	-1
3	9	1	-8
4	12	7	-5
Group Averages	8	2.25	-5.75

The pre-test of aggressive behaviors showed that all participants reported some aggression against others within the past week. The group average was 8 out of 23 questions that related to aggressive behaviors. The post-test was given approximately two weeks after group counseling ended. According to the results, each participant reported less aggressive behaviors in the week prior to the post-test. The group averages decreased by 5.75, meaning that the group answered approximately six questions less relating to aggressive behaviors than the pre-test.

Table 3

Bystander Behaviors That Support Aggression- 8 Questions

Participant	Pre-test	Post-test	Change
1	1	2	+1
2	3	0	-3
3	4	2	-2
4	2	1	-1
Group Average	2.5	1.25	-1.25

All participants reported bystander behaviors that support aggression on the pre-test. Out of the eight questions that assess bystander behaviors, the group average was 2.5. Three out of the four participants reported decreased bystander behaviors in the post-test, while one student's bystander behaviors increased by one question. The group average decreased to 1.25 questions, which was a decrease by 1.25 questions out of the eight on the questionnaire.

Table 4

Behaviors Checked Off By a Victim- 9 Question

Participant	Pre-test	Post-test	Change
1	2	3	+1
2	5	2	-3
3	6	4	-2
4	2	2	0
Group Average	3.75	2.75	-1

All four group members reported behaviors of a victim during the pre-test. The group average was 3.75 out of nine questions. After cessation of groups, three out of the four participants reported lower behaviors checked off by a victim. The average group change decreased by one question out of the nine questions that assessed victim behaviors. One student reported an increase of one question in the post-test, but overall the group's victim behaviors decreased.

Table 5

Power Behaviors- 10 Questions

Participant	Pre-test	Post-test	Change
1	7	7	0
2	6	8	+2
3	5	6	+1
4	2	5	+3
Group Average	5	6.5	+1.5

Power behaviors are prosocial behaviors, which a higher score is better, rather than a lower score as with the previous categories. At the pre-test the group average for power behaviors was five out of ten questions. All of the participants' power behaviors increased after group sessions, except for one that did not change. The group increased an average of 1.5 questions on the post-test.

Discussion

Interpretations

As expected, the group did report less aggressive behaviors after participating in group counseling for six sessions. All participants reported aggressive behaviors and all students aggressive behaviors decreased.   Three out of the four students reported one or none in response to aggressive behaviors in the post-test. The participant that reported the most aggressive behaviors in the pre-test, also reported the most aggression in the post-test, although there was a decrease of five questions relating to aggression. One explanation as to why one member's aggression did not decrease as much as the rest of the group may relate to research that suggested relational aggression can be positively reinforced if it is helping to achieve social goals and that relational aggression may be promoted within the friendships context (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Cillessen et al., 2006; Werner & Crick, 2004).

It was also expected that bystander behaviors would decrease as the girls learned different strategies to help victims or decrease relational aggression. All of the participants, except for one, reported less bystander behaviors. Overall, the group did not report many bystander behaviors during the pre-test or post-test.

According to the questionnaires, students reported more aggressive behaviors than behaviors by a victim. This may also be due to the questionnaire since there were 23 items

related to aggression and only nine related to victim behaviors. It was expected that participants would check off less items related to being victimized. Overall, the group average did change by one question. However, one member's victim behaviors remained the same and one increased by one. Therefore, the group counseling was more effective in reducing aggressive behaviors, as opposed to help victims deal with relational aggression. This may be important for further research.

As the group members learned empathy and gave each other support, it was expected that power behaviors would increase after group counseling. As expected, three out of the four members reported increased power behaviors in the post-test. One member's results did not change from pre-test to post-test. This shows that the group counseling contributed to increasing power behaviors amongst participants.

Several themes emerged throughout the counseling session that supported the researcher's review of the literature. Consistent with some research, the girls seemed to express feelings of helplessness regarding relational aggression and fear of telling an adult. The group seemed to agree that relational aggression is just the way girls are and nothing was going to change (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001). Although the girls reported numerous instances of using relational aggression according to the questionnaire, they seemed to consider themselves more as victims throughout the sessions. Group members used a significant amount of time during sessions to support each other and discuss relationship problems pertaining to relational aggression. According to research, close relationships can help victims deal with relational aggression and the use of the group for support may have been a benefit to the members (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996; Prinstein et al., 2001).

Because the group only consisted of four members, the most valuable information about relational aggression came from the girls themselves, and not assessments and statistical analysis. Several themes emerged throughout group discussions that are consistent with research. For example, the topic of popularity was discussed many times. Members reported that the most popular girls were sometimes the most aggressive, although the popular girls were not always the most-liked. This is consistent with the research of Rose et al. (2004) and Schwartz et al. (2006). Also, although the members all reported relationally aggressive behaviors, it was viewed more negatively outside of the group, which was consistent with the findings of Archer and Coyne (2005).

They also discussed different experiences they had with relational aggression and how they felt when it occurred. The members' experiences were similar to qualitative research by Owen, Shutes, and Slee (2000abc). Participants reported feeling confused and hurt when faced with relational aggression. The initial reactions that group members reported were consistent with previous findings (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Coyne et al., 2006; Owens et al. 2000abc)At times, girls began to believe what their peers were telling them, even if they knew it was not true, particularly in regards to physical appearance. Coyne et al. (2006) also found that victims of relational aggression sometimes internalized negative comments, which sometimes led to negative self-talk and self-image, even if they knew the comments were only meant to hurt.

Common relationally aggressive behaviors that members reported were girls talking loud enough behind their back so that they could hear and group exclusion. The girls reported different coping strategies that they used to deal with being victims of relational aggression. Coping strategies that the girls initially discussed were avoidance, retaliation, and letting out emotions at home. These coping behaviors are similar to findings of Gamliel et al. (2003).

Some of the relationally aggressive behaviors of the participants may have been in retaliation from aggressive peers. Therefore, as counseling continued and members were educated about coping strategies, empathy, and conflict resolution, aggressive behaviors decreased significantly as they learned different ways to handle aggressive peers.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study was the small group of girls. It was the researchers goal to work with seven to ten group members. However, of the fourteen girls that were invited to join the group, only four volunteered. Rose et al. (2004) suggested that because relational aggression is associated with popularity and social goals, there might be little motivation to change. Also, adolescents may be hesitant to talk about relational aggression with adults. With only four group members, it is difficult to prove statistically that the group counseling program was effective in reducing relational aggression. Furthermore, there was no control group to compare the results with.

Another limitation of the study was that self-report measures were used. Most assessments of relational aggression are self-report or peer nominated. With a small group of participants, they might have felt uncomfortable being honest. Because they were aware of the purpose of the group, they may have wanted to meet the researcher's expectation, even though the questionnaire was anonymous.

Recommendations

One recommendation in using this program in the future would be to invite more participants in order to get a larger group to participate. Using a larger group would give more anonymity to students completing the questionnaire and provide more interactions within the group. Having more participants would make the assessments more meaningful in regard to

statistical significance. Another recommendation would be having a control group that did not receive group counseling, but completed the same questionnaire at the same times. Control group. Continue research on relational aggression and effects of group counseling. It would be useful if participants completed the questionnaire later in the year, as well. A longitudinal study would be important to determine the lasting effects of group counseling.

<div align="center">Implications for Further Research</div>

Peer relationships help adolescents develop their own personalities, as well as social development (Berndt, 1982). Because adolescents learn so much about themselves through peers relationships, it only makes sense that group counseling may be effective in reducing relational aggression. With all of the negative effects of relational aggression, it is imperative that we continue to search for ways to intervene. The findings of this study suggest that group counseling may be an effective tool in reducing relational aggression. Schools may need to implement programs over a long period of time or a program each year so students are continuously learning how to deal with aggression and continue to assess the prevalence in schools.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

This researcher has encountered numerous instances of relational aggression among students at Byron-Bergen in the middle school and high school setting. Seeing the hurt, confusion, sadness, and array of other emotions of victims of peer victimization, provided inspiration to study this subject further, along with strategies to intervene in this hidden form of bullying. Relational aggression is not only a problem in Byron-Bergen. Increasing research suggests that relational aggression has many negative effects on female students and is prevalent in schools.

There is not much research on the effectiveness of programs that specifically target relational aggression. Many people may not realize how harmful this indirect aggression can be. Therefore, it was this researcher's goal to implement a group counseling program, which dealt with educating about relational aggression, learning empathy, conflict resolution, and coping strategies. The results showed a decrease in aggressive behavior and an increase in prosocial behaviors at the conclusion of group counseling. This study indicates that the group counseling program contributed to the decrease in aggression and increase in power behaviors. The group averages also showed small decreases in bystander behaviors and behaviors checked off by a victim.

With increasing research on indirect aggression and its effects, it is no longer acceptable for students, parents, and school staff to maintain a "girls will be girls" attitude. Prevention programs should be implemented in early adolescence that educate about the negative effects of bullying and coping strategies. Schools must provide a safe atmosphere that promotes academic, social, emotional, and behavioral development. The school climate should be a caring community where bullying of any kind is not tolerated.

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Appendix A:

Permission to Implement Thesis Project

BYRON - BERGEN CENTRAL SCHOOL
MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL
6917 West Bergen Road
Bergen, New York 14416-9747

Superintendent - Gregory C. Geer, Ph.D.
Middle School Principal - Daniel L. Bedette
High School Principal - David R. Pescrillo

(585) 494-1220
Fax Number: (585) 494-2613

Memo:
To: Mr. Pescrillo
From: Sarah Blencowe
Re: Thesis Project
Date: November 15, 2006

I would like to formally submit a request granting me permission to implement my thesis
project at Byron-Bergen High School.

My thesis is a study of group counseling and its effects on female relational aggression. I
will work with a group of Junior Varsity basketball players who volunteer for the group.
The students will be asked to complete a survey regarding relational aggression. A
number will identify each student when completing the survey to protect her
confidentiality. All materials from students will be stored in a file cabinet at school.

I will be the leader of the counseling group, which will be primarily process-oriented.
Some topics for group discussion include conflict resolution, problem-solving, and
prosocial behaviors.

The risk of participation in the program is minimal. As a researcher, I will guide the
students through their group processes and help them manage their peer relationships.
This program will be beneficial to Byron-Bergen High School as the members learn to
utilize what they learn in group and apply it outside of counseling sessions.

By signing this form, you give me your permission to conduct the study. In addition, you
are fully aware of my research plans and are in agreement with its implementation at our
school.

Name (print): *David R. Pescrill*

Signature: *David R. Pescrill*

Title: *Principal*

Date: *11/15/06*

Appendix B:

Student Statement of Informed Consent

Statement of Informed Consent   DEC 1 2 2005

This form describes a thesis study being conducted with Junior Varsity Basketball players at Byron-Bergen High School. The purpose of the research is to study the effect of group counseling on female relational aggression. Relational aggression is a form of bullying that includes behaviors such as rumor-spreading, group exclusion, and teasing. The researcher will facilitate eight group counseling sessions. Strategies and concepts from the book "Girl Wars: 12 Strategies That Will End Female Bullying" (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003) will be implemented.

This project is being conducted in completion of a Masters thesis in the School Counseling program at SUNY College at Brockport. The person conducting this research is a graduate student at SUNY College at Brockport. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked questions about your feelings and behavior, your family and friends, and school. You will also fill out a questionnaire.

A possible risk of being in this study is feeling that some questions asked are of a personal nature. There are no other anticipated risks. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to. You will have a chance to discuss any questions about the study with the researcher.

The possible benefits from this study could be that information will be learned that would help professionals to better help girls deal with peer relationships and relationally aggressive behaviors. Information from this study might also suggest ways for girls to get along and communicate well.

Any information that you give in this study remains confidential and will be known only to the project researcher. The only exception that there could ever be to this is that if in talking to you, the researcher finds that there is something happening in your life that is an immediate and serious danger to your health or physical safety. In that case, your parents or another professional might have to be contacted. We would always talk to you about this first. Except for this consent for, all questionnaires will be given a code number and your name will not be on them.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to change your mind or stop being in the study at any time during it.

You are being asked whether or not you want to participate in this study. If you wish to participate, and you agree with the statement below, please sign in the space provided. Remember, you may change your mind at any point and withdraw from the study. You can refuse to participate even if your parent/guardian gives permission for you to participate.

If you have any questions you may contact:

Primary Researcher

Faculty Advisor

Sarah R. Blencowe
585-737-3976

Dr. Patricia Goodspeed
Dept. of Counselor Education 585-395-5493

Dr. Thomas Hernandez
Dept. of Counselor Education 585-395-5498

I understand the information provided on this form, and agree to participate as a participant in this project.

Signature of Participant   Date

Birthdate of Participant

Appendix C:

Parental Statement of Informed Consent

Statement of Informed Consent   DEC 1 2 2006

This form describes a program that will be implemented with Junior Varsity Basketball players at Byron-Bergen High School. The purpose of the research is to study the effect of group counseling on female relational aggression. Relational aggression is a form of bullying that includes behaviors such as rumor-spreading, group exclusion, and teasing. The participants will fill out a questionnaire that contains questions regarding aggressive behaviors, bystander behaviors, being a victim, and power behaviors. The researcher will facilitate eight group counseling sessions. The counseling sessions will focus on increasing self esteem, prosocial behaviors, building empathy, and strategies for victims of relational aggression. Strategies and concepts from the book "Girl Wars: 12 Strategies That Will End Female Bullying" (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003) will be implemented.

This project is being conducted in completion of a Masters thesis in the School Counseling program at SUNY College at Brockport. The person conducting this research is a graduate student at SUNY College at Brockport. If you agree to allow your daughter to participate in this study, she will be asked questions about her feelings and behavior, family and friends, and school. She will also fill out a questionnaire and participate in eight group counseling sessions.

A possible risk of being in this study is feeling that some questions asked are of a personal nature. There are no other anticipated risks. She does not have to answer any question she does not want to. Your daughter will have a chance to discuss any questions about the study with the researcher.

The possible benefits from this study could be that information will be learned that would help professionals to better help girls deal with peer relationships and relationally aggressive behaviors. Information from this study might also suggest ways for girls to get along and communicate well.

Any information that your daughter gives in this study remains confidential and will be known only to the project researcher. The only exception that there could ever be to this is that if in talking to her, the researcher finds that there is something happening in her life that is an immediate and serious danger to her health or physical safety. In that case, parents or another professional might have to be contacted. We would always talk to her about this first. Except for this consent form, all questionnaires will be given a code number and your daughter's name will not be on them.

Her participation in this study is completely voluntary. She is free to change your mind or stop being in the study at any time during it.

You are being asked whether or not you want your daughter to participate in this study. If she wishes to participate, and you agree with the statement below, please sign in the space

provided. Remember, she may change her mind at any point and withdraw from the study. She can refuse to participate even if a parent/guardian gives permission for her to participate. These consent forms will be stored in school and kept in a locked cabinet.

If you have any questions you may contact:

Primary Researcher   Faculty Advisor

Sarah R. Blencowe   Dr. Patricia Goodspeed
585-737-3977   Dept. of Counselor Education 585-395-5493

                                                        Dr. Thomas Hernandez
                                                        Dept. of Counselor Education 585-395-5498

I understand the information provided on this form, and agree to allow my daughter
_____ to participate in this project.
Child's Name

_____   _____
Signature of Parent/Guardian   Date

Appendix D:

What is Your RA Quotient Questionnaire and Conflict Resolutions Handout

APPENDIX C

WHAT'S YOUR RA QUOTIENT?

Think about your behavior in the last week. Check off each time you have done the following:

1. ____ Called other kids names that make fun of them?

2. ____ Said something about someone else that you knew wasn't nice?

3. ____ Walked away when your friends started talking about someone else you know?

4. ____ Laughed when someone else made fun of another girl?

5. ____ Written a note or graffiti about someone else that wasn't nice?

6. ____ Felt put down by someone but not spoken up about it?

236   *Wary Mary or Savvy Sue: Which Are You? A Primer of RA Facts for Girls*

A
P   Professionally produced booklet with illustrations containing
P   girls' stories about RA and discussion guide
E
N   "What to Do When Words Become a Weapon"
D   3' x 5' professionally produced poster containing tips from
I   real girls on how to deal with RA
X

B

Source: *Girl Wars: 12 Strategies That Will End Female Bullying.*
Cheryl DellaSega, Ph.D. & Charisse Nixon, Ph.D.

18. _____ Gone to sit with someone who was by herself and sad?

19. _____ Listened to gossip about another girl?

20. _____ Received messages in a chat room that hurt your feelings?

21. _____ Tried to sit with a group of girls at lunch and been told you couldn't?

22. _____ Excluded someone to make her feel bad?

23. _____ Cried or felt sad because of something mean another girl did to you?

24. _____ Helped another girl with her homework, even though your friends say she is stupid and will never be able to understand the assignment?

25. _____ Made a new friend?

26. _____ Been part of a crowd of girls who watched as your leader made fun of another girl?

27. _____ Deliberately done something you knew would hurt someone?

7. _____ Asked your friends to stop talking about another friend who wasn't there?

8. _____ Let someone else talk you into doing something you didn't really want to do?

9. _____ Refused to talk to someone so it would upset her?

10. _____ Invited a new girl to sit with your crowd at lunch?

11. _____ Repeated a rumor you heard about your friend?

12. _____ Started a rumor about a girl who was mean to someone else?

13. _____ Made fun of another girl's clothes, hair, or appearance?

14. _____ Stood up for another girl your friends were making fun of?

15. _____ Sent an e-mail to someone that said something negative you wouldn't say in person?

16. _____ Been the target of a rumor?

17. _____ Threatened someone because she made you mad?

240

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C

28. ____ Took something that belonged to someone else just to bother her?

29. ____ Wanted to speak up and defend another girl, but didn't because you were afraid?

30. ____ Had to sit by yourself in class because your friends decided to move away from you?

31. ____ Complimented a girl you don't know very well on her outfit?

32. ____ Tried to convince others to be mean to someone or to ignore her?

33. ____ Done something to embarrass a girl you don't like?

34. ____ Threatened not to be friends with someone if she didn't do what you wanted her to?

35. ____ Stayed and watched one girl be mean to another?

36. ____ Dared someone to do something she didn't want to?

37. ____ Insulted someone verbally because she looked at you the wrong way?

38. ____ Wrote something unkind about a girl you don't like in a public place, without signing your name?

39. ____ Called a girl you don't like an unkind name when she could hear you?

40. ____ Listened in when a friend called another girl and tried to get her to talk to you?

41. ____ Made up something to get a former friend in trouble?

42. ____ Given a friend a compliment?

43. ____ Teased a girl you know but not very well?

44. ____ Deliberately ignored a girl you don't like when she said hi to you?

45. ____ Stayed friends with someone because you were afraid of what she would do if you didn't?

46. ____ Been teased by someone else about the way you look?

47. ____ Excluded someone from your group because your friends told you to?

48. ____ Looked or gestured at someone in a way meant to hurt or insult her?

49. ____ Been in a chat room but not participated when a girl you know got flamed by your friends?

50. _____ Forgiven a friend who hurt your feelings?

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Chances are you've used some if not all of these behaviors in the past week. Check and see which of the following you used the most.

Aggressive Behaviors:
1, 2, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 22, 27, 28, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 43, 44, 48

Bystander Behaviors That Support Aggression:
4, 19, 26, 29, 35, 40, 47, 49

Behaviors Checked Off by a Victim:
6, 8, 16, 20, 21, 23, 30, 45, 46

Power Behaviors; Congratulations!:
3, 7, 10, 14, 18, 24, 25, 31, 42, 50

APPENDIX D
CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS

The following are selected skills that promote a peaceful resolution of conflict and disagreement. They were adopted from the Conflict Resolution Network, www.crnhq.org.

1. Adopt a win/win approach that respects all parties' needs.

2. Turn problems into opportunities for creative solutions and relationship building.

3. Use empathy to listen, clarify, and signal understanding.

4. Be assertive: discuss the problem, not the person.

5. Express emotions appropriately.

6. Be willing to work on the issue until it is resolved.

7. Identify your issues and allow others to do the same.

8. Brainstorm options; list as many as possible.

9. Try to see the problem from other perspectives.