

Running head: THE HIDDEN SIDE OF BULLYING

The Hidden Side of Bullying:

A Study and Intervention of Relational Aggression

Anna Martinez Capolino

State University of New York College at Brockport

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## Abstract

By its very nature, relational aggression is about relationships. Human relationships are incredibly complex and multifaceted and are influenced not only by the individuals involved in the relationship but also the context and culture in which these relationships exist. The purpose of this study was to create a group that could help adolescent girls to identify and to challenge gender-role stereotypes, and maximize the potential for individual socialization. The Go Grrrls Program was implemented to help the girls learn skills they could utilize to change the way they interact with the world. A pre and posttest questionnaire was given to a sample of six ninth grade girls at a Western New York High School. The sample included six females who were selected at random. Each student completed thirteen sessions of group counseling. Results for each student are reported. The study demonstrated that the girls had a 1.1 percent change in the category of self-efficacy and a 5.2 percent increase in the category of self-esteem. Limitations of the study are discussed. Implications for counselors are presented.

## The Hidden Side of Bullying:

### A Study and Intervention of Relational Aggression

Studies conducted in the United States confirm that bullying is a pervasive problem in our schools (Hienrichs, 2003; Barton, 2003). Findings from three studies reported at the 107<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (APA) led the APA to release a statement that: “Bullying is a pervasive problem, with estimated world wide rates of 5 to 15 percent. Bullying occurs more frequently and with greater lethality today than in the 1970s and 1980s (Fried & Fried, 2003, p.2).” In fact, the number of children, who have committed serious and lethal mass attacks on school with multiple victims, is increasing (Orr, 2003). School bullying gained increased attention in the United States due to media attention on homicide and suicide cases where bullying was a precipitated factor ( Dake, Price, & Telljohan, 2003). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) reported that in the United States, approximately one in seven schoolchildren is a bully or a victim and the problem directly affects about five million elementary and junior high students (Beane, 2005). Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) wrote in their article that one in three children is affected by some form of bullying. Also, a recent national study conducted in the United States of over 15,000 junior high and high school students found that 8.4% of those surveyed reported being bullied at least once a week. The study purported that maltreatment by peers was detected as early as kindergarten (Dill, Vernberg, Fonagy, Twemlow, & Gamm, 2004, p. 159). Also, a survey conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in April 2001, reported that almost a third of American children in grades 6 – 10 are directly involved in

serious, frequent bullying (which includes many form of harassment, intimidation, and emotional violence) – 10 percent as bullies, 13 percent as victims, and 6 percent as both. Other national surveys report even higher figures (Garbarino & deLara, 2002; Packman, Lepkowski, Overton, & Smaby, 2005).

Reports are constantly being made by different organizations and groups about school violence. Here are some figures to consider:

- Every seven minutes a child is being bullied. Four percent of the time, an adult intervenes. Eleven percent of the time, another student comes to help. Eighty-five percent of the time, there is no intervention whatsoever (Bureau of Justice).
- Forty percent of students fear bullying of some kind when they use the school bathroom (Bureau of Justice).
- Teachers are bullied and robbed – an average of 84 crimes per 1,000 teachers each year (Bureau of Justice).
- According to a study conducted by the National Education Association, 6,250 teachers are threatened with bodily injury on a daily basis, and 260 are physically attacked. In an average month in public secondary schools, 5,000 teachers are actually harmed (Fried & Fried, 2003).
- Almost 3 million crimes occur on or near school property every year (U.S. Department of Justice).
- Twenty percent of high school students reported they had carried a gun during the preceding thirty days (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).
- One in five high school boys reported taking a weapon of some kind to school (Josephson Institute of Ethics).

- Seventy five percent of boys and almost 60 percent of girls reported hitting someone in the past twelve months because they were angry (Josephson Institute of Ethics) (Orr, 2003).

Researchers posited that peer aggression and victimization in schools are a significant threat to the development of mental and social well being among children and adolescents, particularly if endured over time. It was found that repeated victimization produced insidious, potentially debilitating effects, including increased anger and depression, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal (Stevens, Bourdeaudhuij, & Van Oost, 2002; Dill et. al., 2004; Olweus, 1993). Victims, compared to their nonvictimized peers, experienced higher levels of peer rejection, delinquency, school avoidance, and dissatisfaction with school (Cullerton-Sen & Crick, 2005, p. 149). It is hardly surprising, then, that the National Education Association reported an estimated 160,000 students missing school every day specifically to avoid bullying (Sheras, 2002, p.17). Given the negative consequences of bullying, it can no longer be minimized and trivialized by adults, taken lightly, brushed off, or denied. Thousand of children go to school every day with fear and trepidation; others feign illness to avoid being taunted or attacked on the way to school or in the school playground, hallways, and bathrooms; still others manage to make themselves sick at school as to avoid harassment in the locker room. Bullying in some cases has become a life and death issue. Some victims, whose cries went unabated and unrelieved, have struck back with incomprehensible violence. Others who reached what they felt were an utterly hopeless and irretrievable point, have turned the violence inward and killed themselves (Coloroso, 2003; Fried & Fried, 2003).



*I shall remember forever and will never forget*

*Monday: my money was taken.*

*Tuesday: names called.*

*Wednesday: my uniform torn.*

*Thursday: my body pouring with blood.*

*Friday: it's ended.*

*Saturday: freedom.*

The final diary pages of thirteen-year-old Vijay Singh. He was found hanging from the banister rail at home on Sunday (Coloroso, 2003).

- January 1999; Manchester, England: Eight-year-old Marie Bentham hanged herself in her bedroom with her jump rope because she felt she could no longer face the bullies at school.
- January 2001; Holyoke, Colorado: Fourteen year old Miranda Whittaker killed herself with a gun in her family's home. Her parents have filed a suit against local school officials for their failure to deal seriously with the aftermath of the sexual assault of their daughter. They accused the school district of failing to provide their daughter with a safe and secure learning environment free of sexual harassment. According to the suit, Miranda was a twelve-year-old student when she reported that a sixteen-year-old popular student athlete in this small community had raped her. The sixteen-year-old pleaded guilty to second-degree sexual assault and was sentenced to four years of probation and a deferred judgment. (He was later accused of raping and impregnating another girl. Paternity tests concluded he was the father of the child).

- March 7, 2001; Williamsport, Pennsylvania: Elizabeth Bush, a fourteen-year-old eight grader, brought her father's gun to school and shot and wounded a friend who allegedly turned on her and joined in with her tormentors, who often called her "idiot, stupid, fat, and ugly" (Coloroso, 2003, p. xxi).
- April 8, 2002; Halifax, Nova Scotia: A popular and outgoing student, fourteen-year-old Emmet Fralick shot and killed himself in his bedroom. He left behind a suicide note saying he could no longer take the bullying from his peers. It was reported that Emmet faced extortion, threats, and beating from other teenagers (Coloroso, 2003).

The list could go on for many more pages. The common thread in all of these accounts is that these children were bullied relentlessly and in most cases, the bullying went on without substantial objections, indignation, adequate intervention, or outrage (Coloroso, 2003). Consequently, it is critical that adults create an environment in schools where bullying is not tolerated under any circumstances and where prevention and intervention programs can diminish or eradicate such harmful behaviors.

### *What Is Bullying?*

In order to solve or to prevent a problem, it needs to be defined. Researchers have offered several definitions of bullying as a basis for developing prevention and intervention programs.

In 1989, Askew defined bullying as a continuum of behavior that involves the attempt to gain power and dominance over another. That same year, Besag maintained that bullying is the repeated attack – physical, psychological, social, or verbal – by those

in a position of power on those who are powerless to resist, with the intent of causing distress for their own gain or gratification.

In 1993, Farrington asserted that bullying is repeated oppression, psychological or physical, of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group of persons.

Smith and Thompson (1991) posited that bullying intentionally causes hurt to the recipient. This hurt can be either physical or psychological. In addition, three further criteria particularly distinguish bullying: It is unprovoked, it occurs repeatedly, and the bully is stronger than the victim or is perceived to be stronger (Ross, 2003).

Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) defined bullying as a form of aggression in which one or more children intend to harm or disturb another child who is perceived as being unable to defend himself or herself (p. 101).

Olweus (1993, p.4) defined bullying or victimization in the following general way: “A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students”. Negative action, according to Olweus, occurs when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another. Included under the rubric of negative actions is a broad spectrum of behaviors ranging from low-level nonverbal harassment such as stares and glares, through cruel teasing, social ostracism, malicious gossip, sex harassment, ethnic slurs, unreasonable territorial bans, destruction of another’s property, extortion, and serious physical assault (Besag, 1989; Olweus, 1993; as cited in Ross, 2003).

According to Wheeler (2004), a bully attempts to establish superiority and to exclude others, especially on the basis of differences in color, language, class, or physical differences, including size and disability. Typically, a power of imbalance exists between

the bully and the victim, with the bully being either physically or psychologically more powerful. The bully can be older, bigger, stronger, more verbally adept, higher up on the social ladder, of a different race, or of the opposite sex. Sheer number of kids banded together to bully can create this imbalance. Bullying is not sibling rivalry, nor is it fighting that involves two equally matched children who have a conflict (Coloroso, 2003; Ross, 2003). Both the bully and the bullied know that the bullying can and probably will occur again. This is not meant to be a one time event. When bullying escalates unabated terror is created. The bully can act without fear of recrimination or retaliation. The bullied child is rendered so powerless that he is unlikely to fight back or tell someone about being bullied. The bully counts on bystanders becoming involved in participating or supporting the bullying or at least doing nothing to stop it. Thus the cycle of violence begins (Coloroso, 2003).

Young children are confronting bullying more than many of us realize or are willing to admit. Children, parents, and educators need to feel more comfortable talking together about what is really going on in children's lives. In order to do that, we need a common language and an understanding of the dynamics of bullying (Coloroso, 2003; Gubler & Croxall, 2005). We must pay closer attention to the insidious role played by bullying, harassment, and other forms of emotional violence in our children's lives. Even those of us, who thought we knew how truly scary school could be, have been surprised to discover the extent to which bullying and its companion problems influence our children's everyday lives (Garbarino & deLara, 2002).

*The Hidden Side of Bullying*

Bullying occurs in different forms (Xie, Swift, Cairns, & Cairns, 2002). Bullying can be direct, through verbal or physical attacks (e.g., hitting, shoving, threatening or beating up a peer), or indirect, through exclusion or rejection (e.g., name calling, insults, writing hurtful graffiti, encouraging others not to play with a particular child, giving a peer the silent treatment, maliciously spreading lies and rumors about a peer to damage the peer's group status) (Whitted & Dupper, 2005, p. 168). In studying the aggressive behavior in children of different sexes, researchers have found that males had been more involved in physical bullying. Olweus (1993, p. 19) stated that "boys were more often victims and in particular perpetrators of direct bullying". It was, also, documented that relations among boys are by and large harder, tougher, and more physically aggressive than among girls. Females, however, were found to use more indirect and subtle forms of bullying than bullying with open attacks (Prothrow-Stith & Spivak, 2005; Ross, 2003). This covert or hidden side of bullying has been referred to as "relational aggression".

*Relational Aggression*

Relational aggression is a psychological term that signifies the use of relationships to hurt peers (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003). In 1995, Crick and Grotpeter defined relational aggression as "harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships" (p. 711; as cited in Underwood, 2003). Relational aggression (including socially and direct aggressive behavior) can encompass a range of emotionally hurtful behaviors. Socially aggressive behaviors include gossiping (e.g., writing notes or talking about someone) or alienation (e. g., social exclusion, isolation) and stealing friends or romantic partners. Direct relationally aggressive behaviors, defined as the use of

confrontational strategies to achieve interpersonal damage, include not talking to or hanging around with someone from a group by informing her that she or he is not welcome (Crothers, Field, and Kolbert, 2005; Simmons, 2002).

Acts of relational aggression are very common among girls in American schools (McKay, 2003; Skowronski, Weaver, & Kelly, 2005). These acts are powerful strategies implemented by girls who are expressing anger and pursuing social goals such as dominance or status by covertly harming and damaging their relationships (Underwood, 2003). When adolescent girls engage in acts of relational aggression, they are enacting their wrath by hurting what other girls strongly value within their domain that is often their own focus of concern (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; cited in Underwood, 2003). These acts include rumor spreading, secret-divulging, alliance-building, backstabbing, ignoring, excluding from social groups and activities, verbally insulting, and using hostile body language (i.e., eye rolling and smirking). Other behaviors include making fun of someone's clothes or appearance and bumping into someone on purpose. Many of these behaviors are quite common in girls' friendships, but when they occur repeatedly to one particular victim, they constitute bullying (Crain, Finch, & Foster, 2005; Grotpeter & Crick, 1996; McKay, 2003; Skowronski et al., 2005).

In their important book *Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social Lives of Children*, Michael Thompson and colleagues point out that every child wants three things out of life: connection, recognition, and power (as cited in Simmons, 2002, p. 9). The desire for connection propels children into friendship, while the need for recognition and power ignites competition and conflict (Simmons, 2002, p. 9). Therefore, the motivation behind acts of relational aggression is to socially isolate the victim while also

increasing the social status of the bully. Perpetrators might be driven by jealousy, need for attention, anger, and fear of (or need for) competition (Skowronski et al., 2005).

Girls, who tend to be more emotionally intimate in their friendships than boys, are able to use females' strong desire for connectedness as leverage against one another (Crothers, et. al., 2005). One reason girls choose this type of bullying rather than more direct acts of harassment is that the bully typically avoids being caught or held accountable. Girls who appear the most innocent may indeed be the most hostile in their actions. These bullies are often popular, charismatic girls who are already receiving positive attention from adults ( Garbarino, 2006; Skowronski et al., 2005). Because of their positive reputations, these girls may be the least likely suspects. Thus, it can be very difficult to identify the perpetrators of acts of relational aggression, and victims can suffer for long periods of time without support (Skowronski et al., 2005). Covert aggression isn't just about not getting caught; half of it is looking like you'd never mistreat someone in the first place. The sugar-and-spice image is powerful, and girls know it. They use it to fog the radar of otherwise vigilant teachers and parents (Simmons, 2002, p. 23). In fact, teachers and parents may not be looking or listening for signs of a problem behind the facade of friendship and play. Nothing looks wrong (Simmons, 2002).

Another way in which girls can aggress against one another and remain anonymous is through the use of technology. Computers have offered girls yet another venue to communicate with one another. E-mails, instant messages (IMs), and chat rooms are now channels through which hurtful interactions can and do occur (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003). Children are now using Websites to mock, harass, and torment others. Bullies post slurs on Websites where children congregate, or on personal on-line journals, called Web logs

or Blogs. They can post pictures of girls they don't like or create on-line voting booths (Keith & Martin, 2005, p. 226). Despite the fact that girls cannot see one another, the messages they receive via computer can be as damaging, if not more so, than those received in live interactions. Anonymous aggression can leave a girl feeling even more vulnerable and scared than having to face her tormentors (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003). On-line bullying has become very common and is particularly easy for girls to do. It can be much more difficult to identify bullies in cyberspace. On-line screen names and e-mail addresses can hide a person's true identity. It's easier to bully someone you don't have to face (Keith & Martin, 2005). A survey of girls ages 12 to 18 found that 74% of adolescent girls spend the majority of their time on-line in chat rooms or sending instant messages and e-mail (Migliore, 2003; cited in Keith & Martin, 2005).

The computer is not the only way in which girls can indirectly conduct acts of relational aggression. The newest forms of cell phones include the ability to send text messages, pictures, and even live video (Keith & Martin, 2005). In the past several years, parents have provided cell phones for their children in order to keep track of them and to keep them safe. The same cell phones that make parents feel more connected to their children have become tools of harassment (Keith & Martin, 2005). "Three-ways" or calling one girl on the phone and getting her to talk about another girl who is actually listening to the conversation is yet another method used to deliver hurtful behavior (Dellasega & Nixon, 2005).

Relational aggression can be devastating. Girls are particularly vulnerable because of the high value they typically place on friendships (Garbarino & deLara, 2002; Pipher, 1994; Skowronski et al., 2005; Simmons, 2002). According to Grotper and Crick



(1996), relational aggressive girls are disliked more than most children their age. They exhibited adjustment problems and reported higher levels of loneliness and depression and these girls often have difficulty creating and sustaining social and personal bonds. Victims of relational aggression often experience a range of difficulties in school, where much of the harassment takes place. Seemingly harmless school activities become painful experiences. Victims may struggle to find a seat in the lunchroom, participate in team projects, work with a partner in science, or join a team in gym class. These students feel vulnerable, and the problem is invisible to school faculty. Hallways, cafeterias, buses, and locker rooms all are places that may cause anxiety. Students may become so anxious that worries about being harassed and excluded replace concern for academic achievement. In fact, it has been reported that 160,000 students each year fail to attend school out of fear of relational aggression (Skowronski et al., 2005).

Given the serious effects relational aggression has on girls, it can no longer be dismissed or ignored. Adult support is needed to address this problem. Girls are seldom willing to stand up for themselves out of fear of further harassment and isolation. Therefore, activities to prevent victimization need to be encouraged. The focus of this project is to increase adolescent girls' self-esteem and to enable girls to reach a higher level of self-efficacy in order to counteract the impact of relational aggression.

#### *The Bully, the Victim, and the Bystander*

Researchers have identified the characteristics that make the child take on the role of a bully, a victim, or a bystander. In the next sections these roles will be discussed in order to gain a better understanding of the reasons children become a bully or a target of a bully, as well as the role bystanders play in perpetuating the bullying cycle. Once these

roles are understood and analyzed, adults can become active participants to find ways which will help break the cycle of violence and create circles of caring where all children can thrive.

*The Bully.*

A Native American grandfather was talking to his grandson about how he felt inside:

“I feel as if I have two wolves in my heart.

One is vengeful, angry and violent.

The other is loving and compassionate.”

The grandson asked,

“Which wolf will win the fight in your heart?”

The grandfather answered,

“The one that I feed.”

Author unknown (Gubler & Croxall, 2005)

What causes children to become bullies? In the past, harsh discipline and punishment strategies at home and at school were blamed. Dan Olweus, Ph. D., one of the earliest researchers in this field, stated that, “Too little love and care and too much freedom in childhood...contribute strongly to the development of an aggressive behavior” (Fried & Fried, 1996, p. 90). Contemporary explanations are much more complex:

- Negligent administrators ignoring early signs of problem behaviors.
- Poor parenting-running the gamut from abusive to permissive.
- Media influences such as movies, TV, and video games.
- Lack of moral and emotional education.

Bullying and violent behavior are not the results of one factor alone. There is increasing evidence linking bully behavior to the theory of nature versus nurture. Also, a traditional concept of behaviorism indicates that anything that is reinforced is likely to be repeated or become stronger (Barton, 2003; Gubler & Croxall, 2005).

According to researchers, bullying behavior takes many forms, and children who participate in bullying behavior are all different. In fact, bullies come in all different sizes and shapes: some are small; some bright and some not so bright: some attractive and some not so attractive; some popular and some absolutely disliked by almost everyone. Bullies cannot always be identified by what they look like; they can be identified by how they act (Coloroso, 2003; Barton, 2003). Although bullies may differ in the type of aggression they use, most bullies share common characteristics (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). According to the National School Safety Center (2003), bullies are overly aggressive, destructive, and enjoy dominating other children. They, also, tend to be hot-tempered, impulsive, and have low tolerance for frustration (Olweus, 1993). The central issue for all bullies is their inability to channel their anger and frustration in acceptable ways (Sheras, 2002).

Many people assume that bullies behave as they do out of a deep sense of inferiority of low self-esteem. Much research has shown, however, that this is not the case (Sheras, 2002). On the contrary, some bullies have been shown to have better than average self-esteem and to enjoy average or better than average popularity with both teachers and classmates, and may also do well in school. It is this strength that allows them to pick on those whose self-esteem is lower or have less power and are thus vulnerable to abuse (Sheras, 2002; Underwood, 2003). In fact, bullying behavior has little to do with the

child's level of confidence. The bully means to inflict emotional and/or physical pain, expects the action to hurt, and takes pleasure in witnessing the hurt. Both the bully and the bullied know that the bullying can and probably will occur again. This is not meant to be a onetime event (Coloroso, 2003).

According to the National Mental Health Information Center (2005):

- Bullies view violence more favorably than most students do.
- They are often aggressive toward adults, both parents and teachers.
- They have a marked need to dominate and suppress other students and assert themselves by means of force and threats, and to get their way.
- Boys in this group are often stronger than their peers and, in particular their victims.
- They appear to be tough and show little sympathy toward students who are bullied.
- They are good at talking their way out of difficult situations.
- They use blame, criticism, and false allegations to project their own inadequacies onto their target.
- They refuse to accept responsibility for their actions.
- They lack foresight- that is, the ability to consider the short-term, long-term, and possible unintended consequences of their current behavior.
- They crave attention.

Barton (2003) describes two different types of bullies, the effectual bully and the ineffectual bully.

The effectual bullies are characterized by children who are highly aggressive during conflict situations and tend to resolve the conflict on their terms. These bullies deal unemotionally with their victims and are more likely to initiate and actively play a role in the bullying episode. They usually encounter little resistance from their victims. This is the most common form of bullying (Barton, 2003).

Ineffectual bullies, instead, are often unsuccessful in their bullying behaviors. They frequently participate in conflicts, yet are often are not effective in resolving the conflict. Unlike the effectual bullies, the ineffectual bullies do not carry out the bullying behavior quickly and unemotionally. Instead, they continue to jab at their victims. Their ineffectiveness in carrying out the bullying behavior, places them at risk of becoming the victims themselves (Barton 2003).

Research found that children involved in bullying are at risk for a variety of mental health problems, the most common being depression (Dake et al., 2003). According to the Journal of the American Medical Association (2001), bullies are more likely than other children to demonstrate antisocial and rule-breaking behaviors. They also demonstrated poorer school adjustment, including lower academic achievement. Olweus found bullies were four times more likely to be involved with criminal behaviors at the age of 24. Although, children who served both as a bully and a victim demonstrated poorer adjustment across socioemotional dimensions (Barton, 2003; Dake et al., 2003; Ross, 2003).

#### *The Victim.*

Just like the bully, children that are bullied come in all sizes and shapes. The only thing that all children who are bullied have in common is that they were targeted by a

bully (Coloroso, 2003; Ross, 2003). When looking at possible antecedents to peer maltreatment, evidence suggests that nonassertive behavioral styles may be present before becoming a target of victimization (Dill, Vernberg, Fonagy, Twemlow, & Gamm, 2004). Children who tend to withdraw from other children and to be less assertive in their interactions with others are believed to be at an increased risk to be chosen as targets of aggression. Withdrawal and low assertiveness may set the stage for social rejection and friendlessness, weakening a potential source of protection against aggressive peers (Dake et al., 2003; Dill et al., 2004). Victims also tend to be more quiet, cautious, anxious, insecure and sensitive than most other children and have rather poor communication and problem-solving skills (Smokowski & Kopsaz, 2005). When victimization does occur, a 'vicious cycle' may be set in motion, in which repeated victimization amplifies behavioral and psychological features that invite further victimization (Barton, 2003; Beane, 2005; Dill et al., 2004, p. 160). Consequently, many victims are abandoned by other children, have few friends, and are often found alone on the playground or at lunchtime (Olweus, 1993). One study found that victims of bullying demonstrated poorer social and emotional adjustment, greater difficulty making friends, fewer relationships with peers, and greater loneliness (Smokowski & Kopsaz, 2005). In addition, victims tend to suffer from poor self-esteem. They often see themselves as failures-unattractive, unintelligent, and insignificant. Because of these negative cognitions victims may wrongly blame themselves for the bullying. Victims are afraid to stand up for themselves and are not willing to report being bullied for fear of retaliation (Dake et al., 2003; Coloroso, 2003). Victims of bullying often suffer from one or more of the following: chronic absenteeism reduced academic performance, increased

apprehension, loneliness, and feelings of abandonment (Barton, 2003; Orr, 2003; Smokowski et al., 2005). Because the bullying most often occurs at school, many victims are reluctant or afraid to go to school and may develop psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches or stomach pains in the morning. Victims are more likely than non-victims to bring weapons to school to feel safe or to retaliate (Smokowski et al., 2005). It is more common, however, for victims to internalize their problems. Depression and loss of interest are common, as are anxiety, tension, and fear. As a result of bullying, suicidal ideation is high among victimized children (Barton, 2003; Olweus, 1993; Ross, 2003).

Long-term effects of victimization are evident. Individuals formerly bullied were found to have higher levels of depression and poorer self-esteem at age 23, and they were more harassed and socially isolated than comparison adults (Olweus, 1994; as cited in Barton, 2003). This may result from an internalization of perceptions that they are worthless or inadequate. Farrington cited that victims were less likely to be involved with delinquent behaviors than bullies (1996; as cited in Barton).

#### *The Bystander.*

Bystanders are the supporting cast who aid and abet the bully through acts of omission and commission (Coloroso, 2003; Fried & Fried, 2003). Bystanders, whom often comprise the largest number of students, are also affected (Packman, et. al, 2005). Students who observed bullying reported that witnessing bullying was unpleasant, and many reported being severely distressed by bullying (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Witnesses of bullying are frequently left feeling afraid and not wanting to get involved for fear of a possible loss of status or retaliation from the bully (U. S. Department of Education, 1998; cited in Packman et al., 2005). Witnesses of bullying may perform

poorly in the classroom because their attention is focused on how they can avoid becoming the targets of bullying rather than on academic tasks (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). A study of bullying incidents on playgrounds found observers present in 88% of bullying situations but intervening in only 19% (Packman et al., 2005). In 1994, Slee (as cited in Packman et al., 2005) reported 49.4% of students surveyed felt it was “none of their business” in indicating why they would not help a fellow student who is being bullied, and 20.6% of students reported fearing retaliation as inhibiting their defending a victim. Other researchers suggested that some of children may experience a vicarious thrill when watching the event take place, which may encourage the bully further. With the impact it has on victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, bullying can no longer be overlooked as just an inevitable part of childhood (Packman et al., 2005).

#### *Is It Human Nature?*

The teens are by their very nature a time of change and transition, both physically and socially. Only infancy involves more physical and mental growth than the preteen and teen year! This transitional process has the potential to be both exciting and stressful to a girl; the more changes she has to deal with, the more stress she is likely to experience (Dellasega & Nixon 2003). Also, girls at this stage are naturally egocentric. To their preoccupied way of thinking, everyone else is observing and reacting to them, which means that even the slightest social gaffe on their part will take on enormous significance (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003). Girls, also, become acutely aware of how they appear (LeCroy & Daley, 2001). This concern often directs their attention more intensely to images and gender stereotypes portrayed in the media. The messages adolescent girls receive from the mass media have a significant influence on their gender development



(LeCroy & Daley, 2001). Phipper (1994) describes how girls experience a conflict between their autonomous selves and their “need” to be feminine. Studies have found that early adolescence is a period of heightened sensitivity to television messages about gender roles (LeCroy & Daley, 2001; Prothrow-Stith & Spivak, 2005). Girls who watch prime time are “likely to see a beautiful, young, thin, woman who is intelligent and independent but at the same time adheres to traditional gender stereotypes such as focusing on appearance and being motivated by a desire for a romantic relationship” (Brown, 2003, p. 26). What girls will do to fit a homogenized ideal of femininity is seemingly endless. And if changing their body doesn’t work, going after other girls to elevate their chances just might. In a culture that tells girls and women that meeting a beauty ideal is all-important and they can willfully re-create their bodies, it’s no surprise that they would use body gossip-judgments about failures to meet such physical ideals, as a weapon to undermine or control other girls ( Brown, 2003).

Girls often feel pressured to be compliant and not to show negative emotions. When they cannot assert their true feelings directly, resentment lingers and their anger manifests itself indirectly. Developing power through voicing one’s feelings may result in hurting others. Girls are expected to maintain harmonious relationships with others, and if they are concerned about the potential negative impact of expression of anger on others, they will likely temper their reactions (Crothers, et. al, 2005; Garbarino, 2006; Underwood, 2003). Thus, because directness and overt confrontation are not consistent with a feminine gender identity, girls adhering to such standards are forced to use more manipulative and covert means of expressing anger, resolving conflict, and establishing dominance (Crothers, 2005). Excessive relational aggressiveness can become a habit that

can cause a lifetime of problematic relationships. Therefore, a girl who exhibits this behavior needs adult intervention and guidance. It should be stressed that these girls often have leadership ability, but they need assistance to channel it in a positive direction. Adolescent girls need to understand how to cope with life as a girl in today's society.

During adolescence, the process of establishing and maintaining friendships with other girls is a crucial aspect of their psychosocial development (Phipper, 2002). These relationships assume an increasing amount of importance, potentially assisting with adjustment and a sense of well being (Crothers et al., 2005). Girls' morality and sense of self are based on the connectedness and interdependence with others and that affiliation with and acceptance by other girls becomes an essential element of identity. Girls who do not develop positive peer relationships are at greater risk for developing problems like delinquency, substance abuse, and depression (LeCroy & Daley, 2003). Also, adolescence is the time when the greatest degree of conformity and susceptibility to peer pressure occurs. Even with good peer relationships and friendships young people must learn to confront peer pressure as their exposure to social problems increases.

Another critical developmental task for adolescent girls is to achieve a positive self-image in response to the many biological, psychological, and social changes they are confronting. Adolescent girls need to develop acceptance of the self as a stable person of worth (Cohen-Sandler, 2005; Garbarino & deLara, 2002; LeCroy & Daley, 2003). But many girls set themselves up for failure by aspiring to unattainable goals and self-criticism. While it seems to be culturally acceptable for girls to put themselves down, many girls believe that if they speak highly of themselves they will be seen as "stuck-up". Sadly, during adolescence many young girls experience a "crisis in confidence" that can

seriously undermine their chances for educational and career success later in life (Cohen-Sandler, 2005; LeCroy & Daley, 2003, p. 8).

Insecurity and fear are fertile grounds for growing relational aggression behaviors. Whether a girl is a victim, a bystander, or an aggressor, she feels isolated and alone. Therefore, identifying and celebrating girls' strengths can make a difference between her being overcome when targeted by relational aggression and her growing stronger. Concerned adults need to provide girls with the emotional support they need and address both their low self-esteem and their sense of being different from others (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003; Garbarino, 2006). The goal of this project and research is to implement a prevention program intended to promote positive social competence and resistance to internal and peer pressure, to increase adolescent girls' self-esteem, and to enable girls to reach a higher level of self-efficacy.

### *Programs*

Relational aggression matters because relational aggression hurts, just as much if not more than physical aggression, especially for girls. The damage relational aggression causes can be devastating. This fact has naturally led to calls for developing prevention and intervention programs to reduce the problem. However, because of the subtle and covert nature of relational aggression, the programs that have been established are concerned more with the development of girls' positive self-identities, in order to encourage girls to form more positive relationships with others.

One popular program is The Ophelia Project. It is a national program designed to combat relational aggression several different ways. They offer a Creating a Safe School Program (CASS) which supports schools' efforts to curb relational aggression. The

program does charge for its use but provides services of national consultants who visit the school, educate faculty about relational aggression, and offer other support programs.

CASS also includes program that trains older (high school) students to mentor younger (middle school) students is also available (Skowronski et al., 2005).

The GENAustin Organization offers the “Girl Power” program which focuses on improving girls’ self-esteem and helps them learn more positive ways of interacting. The organization, also, provides presentations for school faculty, reading lists and other resources developed to help girls with a variety of problems and situations (Dellasega & Nixon. 2003, p. 4).

Another program is the Empowerment Program which runs a School Violence Institute that tries to prevent bullying, gossiping, dating violence, homophobia, cliques, and sexual harassment. They work equally with young men and women through school and youth service based programs (Garbarino, 2006).

Girls Incorporated is an intervention program for girls ages six through eighteen. It provides packaged programs for healthy peer relationships, pregnancy prevention, and academic encouragement (Garbarino, 2006).

The Female Intervention Team is a program for adjudicated delinquent girls ages eleven through eighteen. Case managers direct girls toward gender specific activities such as mentoring by older women and Girl Scouts, as well as community service and recreational activities (Garbarino, 2006).

For the purpose of this study the Go Grrrls Program will be implemented. The Go Grrrls is a program created by Craig Winston LeCroy and Janice Daley. The focus of the program is to empower adolescent girls in order to promote positive development. The

intent of the program is to encourage girls appreciate themselves for their unique characteristics and to support their cultural differences (LeCroy & Daley, 2001). Involvement in the program will help girls develop a lifelong perspective about living as female in society and will provide a lasting base of information for girls transitioning from adolescent to adult life.

## Method

### *Participants*

The study was conducted in a large urban school in Upstate New York. The school houses approximately 2,000 students of which over 65% are African-American, with a considerable number of Hispanics, and a small percentage of students who are of Asian and European descent. The ninth grade class is comprised of approximately 400 students with an almost equal number of males and females. Over 65% of the ninth grader girls are African-American, about 20% are Hispanic, approximately 13% of European descent, and 2% Asians and Native Americans. Nine ninth grade girls began the study but only six completed both the pre and posttest. The participants (n=6) were African-American. The sample was randomly selected from the ninth grade girls' alpha list. Every fourth girl on the list was contacted by the school counselor and asked to be a volunteer in the study. The students who participated did so by choice and were not compensated or given any high school credit.

### *Procedures*

The "Go Grrrls" program was implemented for this study. The authors, LeCroy and Daley, have tested this program on 60 groups of girls and revised each time based on the results. Each session was designed to build on the skills and knowledge learned in

the previous session. This program is a curriculum-based approach to prevention. As such a described model was followed. Discussions, role-play, and games were used to get the point across. The purpose of the games is a sort of “reward” to girls for having given their attention to more serious subject matter earlier in the meeting. Each session will focus on a specific category. Each category constitutes a curriculum section in the Go Grrrls program:

1. Achieve competent gender-role identification.
2. Establish an acceptable body image.
3. Develop a positive self-image.
4. Develop satisfactory peer relationships.
5. Establish independence through responsible decision making.
6. Understand sexuality.
7. Learn to obtain help and find access to resources.
8. Plan for the future.

As soon as all the girls selected for the group returned all the consent forms (see Appendix A), the facilitator met with them in a classroom that was not being used for instructions, after securing teacher permission. The class was conducive to group work because the girls could sit in a circle; it was quiet and private, and free of interruptions. The girls met for a total of thirteen sessions for an entire class period. The facilitator ensured that the class time was a free period for the girls and they would not be missing any instructional time. Each girl was asked to fill out the “Go Grrrls” pre and posttest questionnaire (see Appendix B). The delivery of the program had to be condensed and revised because the GO Grrrls group could meet for only 50 minutes each session.

Dittoes (see Appendix C) were filled out by the girls to use for discussions. Role-plays and games were implemented to help get the point across.

### *Session One*

#### *Objectives.*

1. To introduce the Go Grrrls Program.
2. To create a comfortable and supportive atmosphere.
3. To play a game “Two Truths and a Lie”.

#### *Process.*

The group began with the facilitator welcoming all participants to the Go Grrrls Club. After, the facilitator introduced herself and gave some basic background information, the other members of the group introduced themselves. Attendance was then taken, which was followed by the discussion and writing of group rules. Lastly, the facilitator asked the girls to write two truths and one lie about themselves. When the facilitator read the statements the girls had written out loud, they had to guess which of the statement was a lie.

### *Session Two*

#### *Objectives.*

1. To administer pretreatment measures for program evaluation.
2. To identify pressures society places on girls through media messages.
3. Have students share their thoughts with the group.

#### *Process.*

The facilitator welcomed the girls; then handed out the questionnaire. After, a discussion began about the messages girls are receiving through the media (i.e.,

magazines, television) sexual harassment was defined. Girls gave examples of what they believed to be acts of sexual harassment and to whom they would go if such a situation should arise.

### *Session Three*

#### *Objectives.*

1. To help girls develop a positive body image.
2. To help girls understand that being attractive is not just based on physical looks.
3. To help girls focus more on their personal qualities than their physical looks.

#### *Process.*

The session began by discussing what is meant by “positive body image”. The facilitator passed out a ditto. The girls had to write five positive aspects of their bodies. The facilitator gave an example to demonstrate the exercise. After filling out the ditto, each girl had to share three out of the five positive aspects they wrote about their bodies.

### *Session Four*

#### *Objectives.*

1. To review the concept of a “positive body image”.
2. To define attractiveness.
3. To help girls become aware of negative self-statements and how self-criticism can lead to depression.

#### *Process.*

The facilitator asked the girls to give examples of a statement regarding a “positive body image”. After, the facilitator wrote on the board the word



“attractiveness”. The girls had to list some qualities they find attractive in a person.

Next, the facilitator discussed the meaning of self-criticism and self-negative statements.

#### *Session Five*

##### *Objectives.*

1. To move girls away from their focus on popularity and toward developing intimate friendships.
2. To give girls practice in identifying healthy qualities in a friend.
3. To emphasize the importance of friendship as support and how it contributes to girls' well-being.

##### *Process.*

The facilitator began the session by reviewing the meaning of negative self-statements and self-criticisms. Then, the girls played the Spiral Game. The girls did the exercise on the handout titled “I Should Statements” (see appendix ). After, they wrote on chart paper the qualities they want in a friend and shared stories about one good friend they have.

#### *Session six*

##### *Objectives.*

1. To review group rules.
2. To give girls practice in utilizing friendship skills.

##### *Process.*

Group rules were reviewed. Two girls were absent today. A list of friendship skills was written on the board and a discussion on “friendship friction’ was initiated by

the facilitator and the girls were asked to provide ideas. Then they were asked by the facilitator to describe what types of problems they may have with a friend.

*Session Seven*

*Objectives.*

1. To continue the discussion on friendship problems.
2. To give the girls time to share their concerns.
3. To give each other support.

*Process.*

The girls were encouraged by the facilitator to continue their conversations regarding the problems they have or have had with friends and to share their ideas or thoughts with the group.

*Session Eight*

*Objectives.*

1. To teach girls when and how to use problem solving skills.
2. To teach girls how to use problem solving skills in everyday life and to resist involvement with risky behaviors.

*Process.*

The facilitator introduced problem solving skills to the group. She, also, explained how different problems could be. Then, she asked the girls if they would be willing to share a problem they are having.

*Session Nine*

*Objectives.*

1. To teach girls the difference between assertive, aggressive, and passive actions and words.
2. To give girls actual practice in being assertive.

*Process.*

The facilitator asked the girls to define the terms assertive, aggressive, and passive. The girls provided examples of behaviors that might be considered assertive, aggressive, or passive.

*Session Ten*

*Objectives.*

1. To review the consequences of aggressive behavior.
2. To help girls explore their own values and broader societal attitudes about sexuality.
3. To give girls practice and build confidence in their right to decline unwanted sexual activity.

*Process.*

Aggressive behavior was reviewed. After, the facilitator introduced the topic of sexuality and how it relates to STDS.

*Session Eleven*

*Objectives.*

1. To teach girls how to avoid using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs and to give them practice in refusal skills.
2. To play the “Handshake” game.

*Process.*

The girls talked about what to do to avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

*Session Twelve*

*Objectives.*

1. To prepare girls for the ending of the group.
2. To encourage girls to establish educational, vocational, and other healthy goals.

*Process.*

The facilitator reminded the girls that the sessions were coming to an end. Also, the girls discussed their plans for the future.

*Session Thirteen*

*Objectives.*

1. To collect final data for program evaluation.
2. To bring the group to closure.

*Process.*

The facilitator gave the girls the questionnaires to complete in order to evaluate the success of the program. Also, thanked and congratulated the girls for participating, and emphasized the importance of making good life choices.

*Instrument*

The questionnaire that the facilitator used was reproduced from the book "Empowering Adolescent Girls". The authors, Craig Winston LeCroy and Janice Daley (2001), gave permission to any one interested to use it. The facilitator added six questions as part of the pretest and posttest questionnaire to address the problem of self-esteem and self-efficacy as it relates to the study of relational aggression. The

questionnaires also included a confidential tracking system. Each girl was assigned a letter from the alphabet. This information was used to match pretest and posttest questionnaires.

The Go Grrrls Questionnaire evaluation instrument included eight subscales that measured different aspects of the Go Grrrls program:

- The body-image scale: based on previous measures (Simmons and Blyth, 1987; cited in LeCroy and Daley, 2001). It includes five items that measure satisfaction with body image.
- The assertiveness scale: eight items that measure anticipated assertiveness.
- The peer self-esteem scale: (Hare, 1985; cited in LeCroy and Daley, 2001) ten item scale that measures self-esteem by asking subjects to assess their friendships.
- The attractiveness scale: eight items those measure girls' perceptions about attractiveness.
- The self-efficacy scale: a nine-item scale that measures girls' perceived gender role efficacy.
- The self-linking and the self-competence scale: (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995; cited in LeCroy and Daley, 2001) measures perceived personal efficacies and self-esteem.
- The hopelessness scale: (Kazdin, 1993; cited in LeCroy and Daley, 2001) measures hopelessness/helplessness.

The authors, LeCroy and Daley (2001), decided to use multiple measures to tap into the various aspects of the program. In fact, they were satisfied with their questionnaire because most of the measures selected reflected specific program content.

Each measure was tested for reliability and the results are presented in the following table:

RELIABILITIES FOR GO GRRRLS MEASURES

| Measures                       | Pretest |
|--------------------------------|---------|
| Satisfaction with body image   | .72     |
| Assertiveness                  | .72     |
| Friendship esteem              | .80     |
| Attitude toward attractiveness | .76     |
| Self-efficacy                  | .92     |
| Self-esteem                    | .89     |
| Hopelessness                   | .80     |

The questionnaire was scored in the specified manner:

Body-image scale: Add scores from questions 1-5 together. Higher scores indicate higher positive body image.

Assertiveness scale: Add scores from questions 1-7 together. Higher scores indicate greater assertiveness.

Peer self-esteem scale: Reverse the score for negatively worded questions 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 (e.g., 1=4, 2=3, 3=2, 4=1). Higher scores indicate greater peer self-esteem.

Value of attractiveness scale: Reverse the score for questions 3, 4, 8 (4=1, 3=2, 2=3, 1=4). Add items together. Lower scores indicate a decrease in the value of attractiveness.

Self-efficacy scale: Add scores from items 1-9 together. Higher scores indicate a positive sense of efficacy about being a girl.

Self-liking and self-competence scale: Reverse the scores for negatively worded questions 3, 6, 7, 9, 11, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20 (1=5, 2=4, 3=3, 4=2, 5=1). Add items together. A higher score indicates positive self-liking and competence.

Hopelessness scale: items are true or false. True questions are 2, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 17. Remaining items are keyed "false." Scoring is based on the number of items answered in agreement with the key. Higher scores equal greater hopelessness (LeCroy and Daley, 2001, p. 208).

The relationship scale: Add scores from 1-5 together. Lower scores indicate an increase in self-esteem and self-efficacy as it relates to relational aggression.

## Results

The results of this study can be characterized in two different ways. First, an analysis of the girls' active participation in the group, their willingness to self-disclose, and their experiences in relation to others are presented. Second, the effectiveness of the program is calculated by examining the differences in change on the scores between the pretest and posttest.

### *Group Process*

#### *Session 1.*

The group started later than expected because some of the girls arrived late. Once everyone was in the classroom, the girls became very lively and began talking regarding topics not related to the objectives of the session. The group members seemed very comfortable with each other. One particular member of the group had to be reminded continuously not to interrupt and to follow the rules that had prior been written on chart paper. This particular individual was not taking the experience seriously. A lot of humor

and laughter was observed. The facilitator realized that the girls were in some way testing her and her main task for the following session would be to maintain the group on task.

*Session 2.*

The girls filled out the questionnaires. During this session, they were more willing to participate and to express their opinions and thoughts about the topic that was presented. They were very engaged in the conversation. Some were still a little apprehensive about disclosing personal information.

*Session 3.*

Two girls were absent from the session. When the rest of the girls came into the classroom, they were very talkative. It took a little while to settle down and begin the activity. A couple of the girls could not think of anything positive to write about their bodies. Eventually with the help of the facilitator, they were able to complete the assignment. There was a lot of interrupting and chatting during the session. Again the girls had to be continuously reminded to stay on task. Two girls in particular seemed unable to stop interrupting and listening to others. A lot of time was spent waiting for some of the girls to stop talking to each other and to listen to their group members.

*Session 4.*

Two other girls were absent today. The facilitator began the session by reviewing the topic discussed the prior day. The girls seemed more attentive during this session. Encouraged by the facilitator to follow the “respect each other” rule, they seemed to be listening to each other more. When one of the girls mentioned that she still could not think about anything positive to say about herself, all the other girls in turn gave her some



very positive feedback. Some self-disclosure from the girls was beginning to surface. It seemed the girls were beginning to trust each other and the facilitator more.

*Session 5.*

Some of the girls are slowly changing their attitudes and seem more willing to express their feelings. In fact, it seems that the girls are beginning to enjoy coming to the group; whereas in the beginning they came because they were asked to participate. The interaction between the girls is becoming more personal. At times, they still need to be reminded not to interrupt and to listen when someone is talking

*Session 6.*

After reviewing the rules the girls seemed to listen and respect each other more. They became very animated during the conversation when the issue of friendship friction was being discussed. They, also, willingly shared some of the problems they had previously experienced with their friends. Except for one of the girls, she remained very quiet throughout the whole session.

*Session 7.*

The same two girls were absent today. It seems that they may not return. The girls in the group, instead, seemed much focused on talking about the problems they are having with friends. The girl, who had been quiet during the last session, when she came in the room she turned her chair away from the other girls. She still did not seem interested in participating in the discussions. The facilitator tried to get her involved in the conversation; unfortunately, she still did not participate. The facilitator is very concerned about this girl and will try to talk to her alone.

*Session 8.*

Only one girl was on time today. It was the girl that had been very quiet for the past two sessions. She had a big smile as she walked into the classroom. The facilitator was pleased to see this girl smile. She, then, decided to try to engage this girl in a conversation while waiting for the other group members. The girl seemed eager to talk to the facilitator, but as soon as the other girls walked in the room, she became very silent again. The other girls were very active and very lively today. There was again a lot of interrupting, they needed to be reminded to use I statements again, and to stay on task. One girl shared a problem she was having with a boy and the other girls offered some suggestions. Another girl joined us half way through the session.

*Session 9.*

The girls were a few minutes late today and only three of them attended the group meeting. The facilitator asked how the girls felt the group was progressing and what they thought of the sessions. The girls stated that they enjoyed being in the group. After, the terms assertive, aggressive, and passive were defined and examples of each behavior were discussed. One of the girls mentioned that she felt like fighting with someone. When asked what was causing her to feel that way, the girl simply said that she was “having an itch”. Then with the help of the facilitator she thought of ways she could positively direct her energy. The topic of fighting was, consequently, discussed. At the end of the session shortly after the girls left the classroom, a huge fight broke out in the school, which had to be stopped with the intervention of police officers. Luckily, none of the girls in the group were involved.

*Session 10.*

At the beginning of the session, the girls talked about the fight that had developed on school grounds the prior day. Also, the consequences that the students who were involved in the fight had to face. Some were hand cuffed by police officers and brought downtown. Many of the students who had gotten in trouble were girls. The girls in the group stated their opinions on this matter. Then, the facilitator introduced the topic of sexuality. She read a vignette from the book and asked the girls to respond to it. Some of the girls started chatting with each other, therefore it was difficult to hear what was being said and things had to be repeated more than once. Toward the end of the session, a lot of talking and interrupting began. Some of the girls began to giggle and didn't seem interested in sharing with the group. The girls became disruptive and rude. The facilitator had to continuously remind the girls to listen and stay on the subject. Also, the facilitator detected some antagonism from one girl toward two other girls in the group.

*Session 11.*

Only two of the girls attended the group meeting today. Two girls were absent from school and the other two simply decided not to come. The girls gave their ideas and opinions about the use of drugs and alcohol. The session was more subdued today.

*Session 12.*

Two girls were absent today. The girls present were very interested in listening to each others' future goals. They also, expressed their feelings about the termination of the group. The girls seemed more respectful toward one another today. Less interrupting and more listening occurred.

*Session 13.*

The girls filled out the posttest questionnaires. Then, they told the facilitator that they really enjoyed coming to the group and wanted to continue. The facilitator told them that she would be happy to continue the sessions. Days, time, and place were established for the continuation of the meetings.

*Pre and Posttest Statistics*

The charts and graphs below represent the data taken from the pre and posttest questionnaires given to the girls. The first chart is a numeric representation of the scores obtained on the questionnaire. The second chart is a statistical representation of the mean score for each category; the percentage range between the pre and posttest scores is also reported. The results for the assessments were as follows:

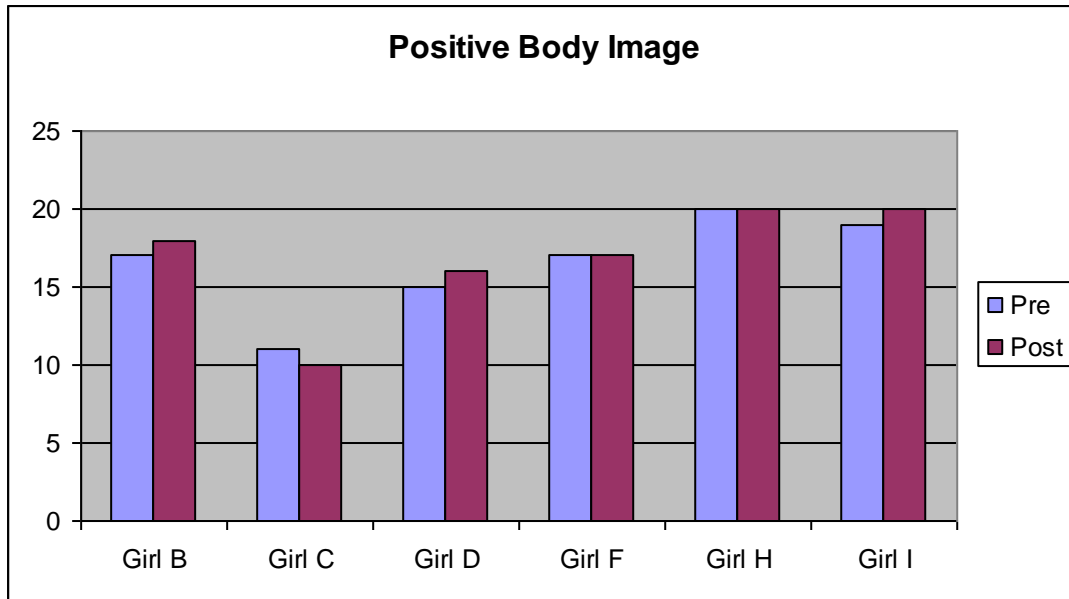
Chart 1; Go Grrrls Questionnaire Pre and Posttest Results

|                         | Girl B |      | Girl C |      | Girl D |      | Girl F |      | Girl H |      | Girl I |      |
|-------------------------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|
|                         | Pre    | Post | Pre    | Post | Pre    | Post | Pre    | Post | Pre    | Post | Pre    | Post |
| Positive Body Image     | 17     | 18   | 11     | 10   | 15     | 16   | 17     | 17   | 20     | 20   | 19     | 20   |
| Increased Assertiveness | 28     | 28   | 22     | 22   | 22     | 25   | 24     | 27   | 22     | 26   | 27     | 27   |
| Peer Self-esteem        | 35     | 36   | 19     | 20   | 28     | 28   | 18     | 23   | 28     | 29   | 32     | 35   |
| Value of Attractiveness | 9      | 10   | 21     | 20   | 13     | 16   | 12     | 11   | 24     | 17   | 12     | 8    |
| Enhanced Self-efficacy  | 36     | 36   | 21     | 23   | 24     | 26   | 29     | 23   | 31     | 33   | 34     | 36   |
| Increased Self-esteem   | 91     | 94   | 50     | 50   | 72     | 74   | 64     | 64   | 60     | 67   | 83     | 93   |
| Sense of Hopelessness   | 0      | 0    | 12     | 15   | 6      | 3    | 9      | 9    | 9      | 5    | 6      | 5    |
| Social Relational       | 6      | 6    | 21     | 21   | 17     | 20   | 20     | 21   | 9      | 7    | 9      | 7    |

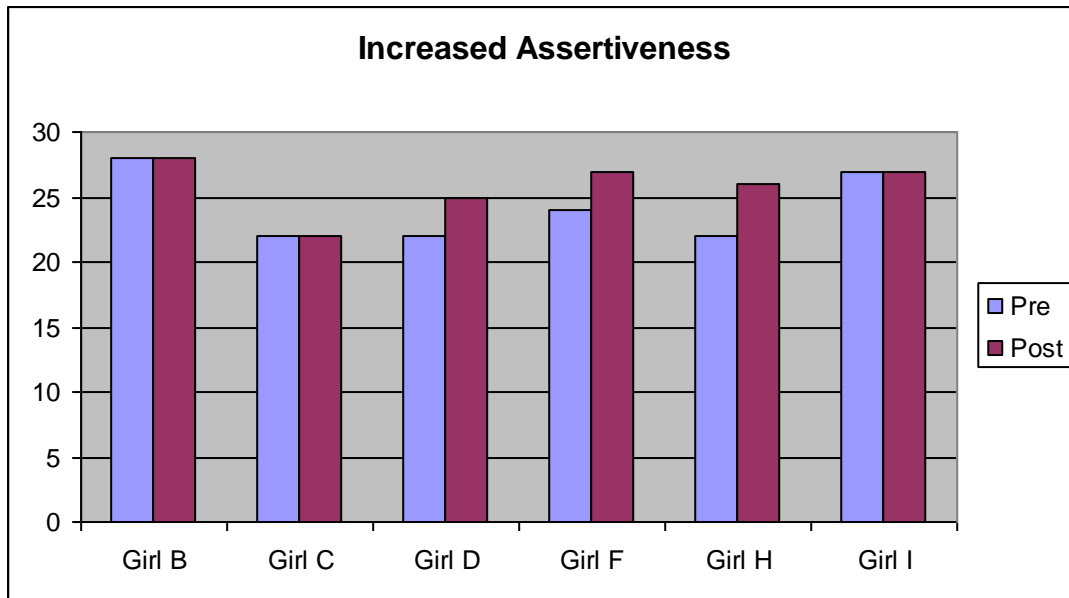
Chart 2; Statistical Changes

|                         | Pre  | Post | Change | % Change |
|-------------------------|------|------|--------|----------|
| Positive Body Image     | 16.5 | 16.8 | 0.3    | 2.0      |
| Increased Assertiveness | 24.2 | 25.8 | 1.7    | 6.9      |
| Peer Self-esteem        | 26.7 | 28.5 | 1.8    | 6.9      |
| Value of Attractiveness | 15.2 | 13.7 | -1.5   | -9.9     |
| Enhanced Self-efficacy  | 29.2 | 29.5 | 0.3    | 1.1      |
| Increased Self-esteem   | 70.0 | 73.7 | 3.7    | 5.2      |
| Sense of Hopelessness   | 7.0  | 6.2  | -0.8   | -11.9    |
| Social Relational       | 13.7 | 13.7 | 0.0    | 0.0      |

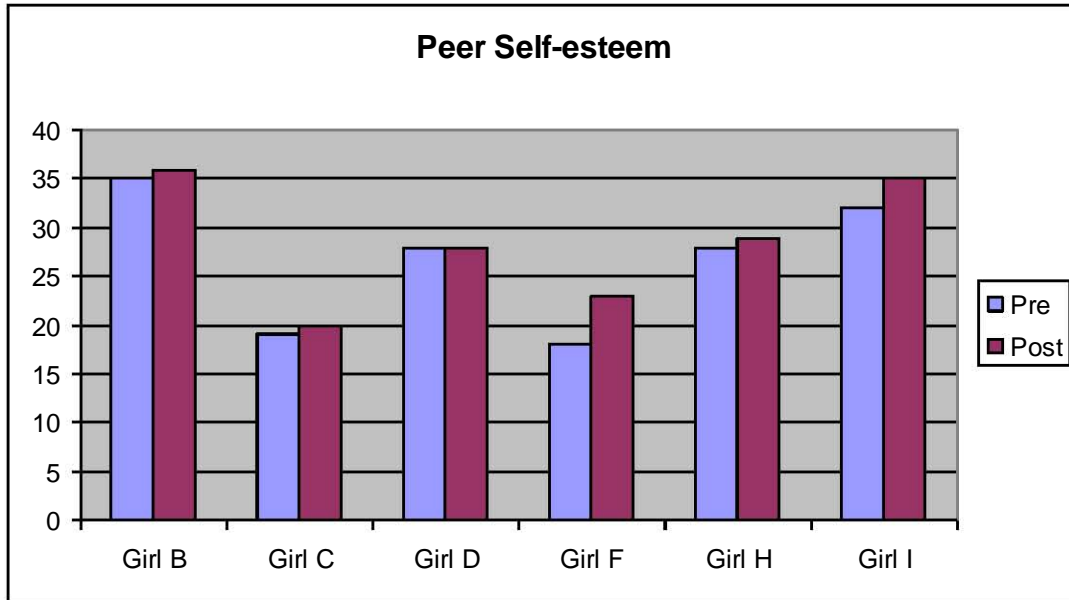
The following graphs depict the results for each category of the questionnaire.



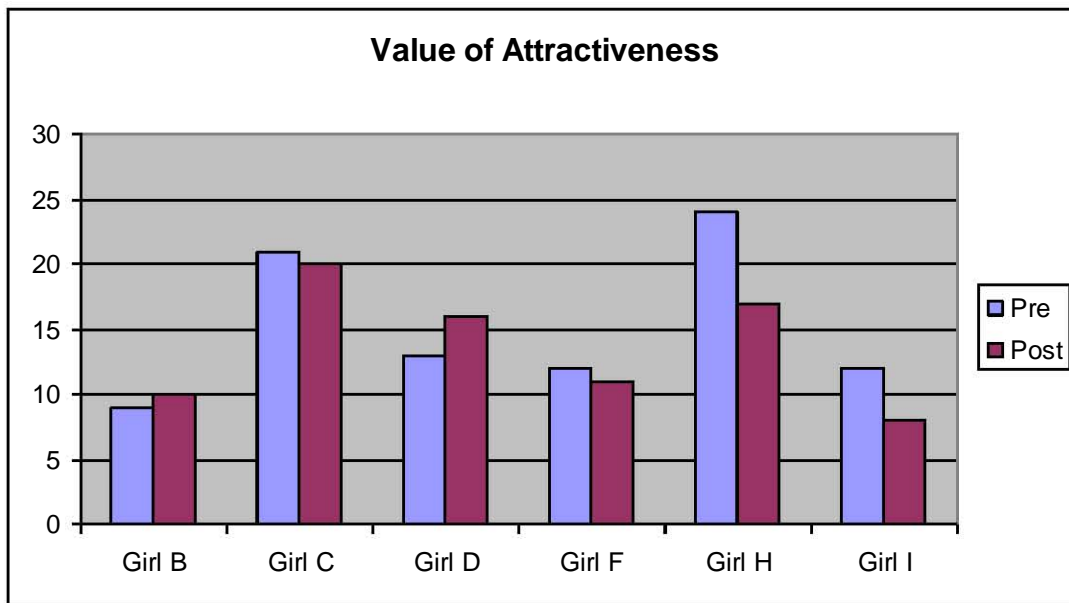
This scale indicates a slight increase in the girls' perception of their physical appearance.



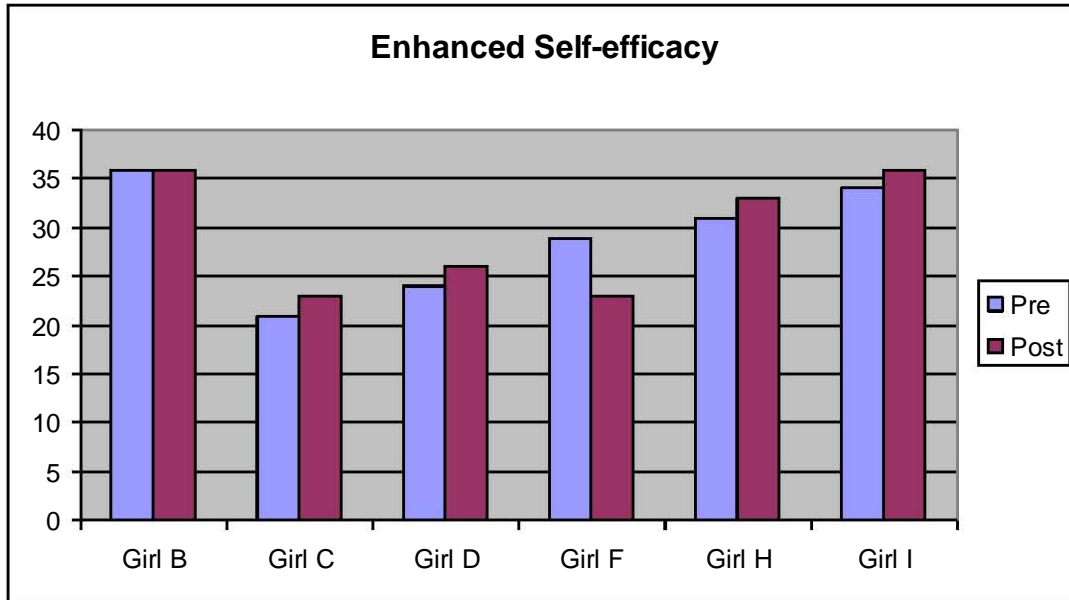
Three of the girls showed an increase in levels of assertiveness.



This scale indicates a slight increase in self-esteem related to friendships.



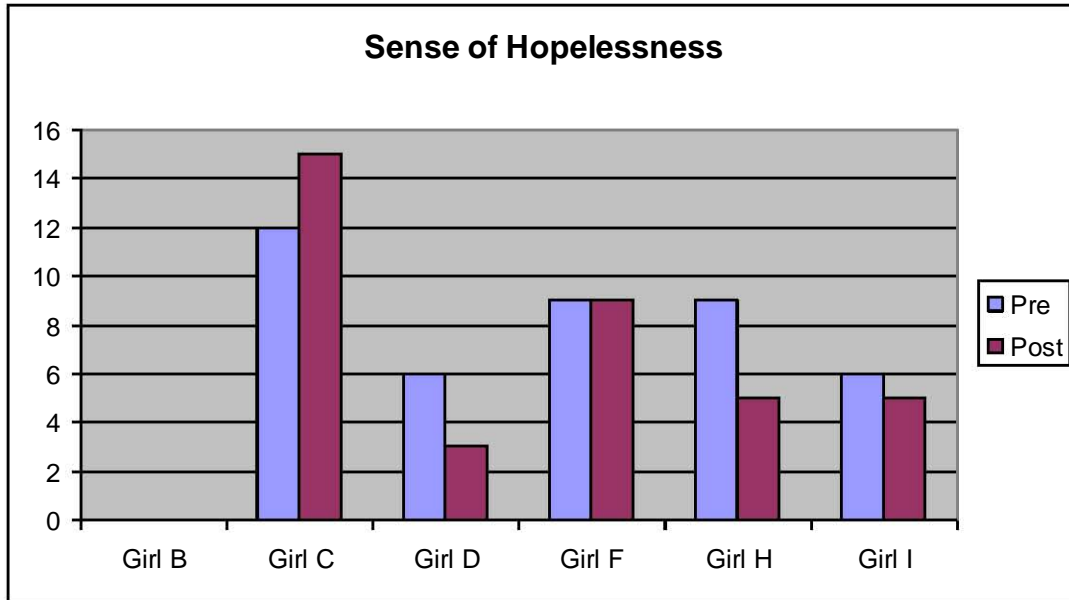
Lower scores on this scale indicate a decrease in the value the girls place on attractiveness.



In this scale higher scores indicate that some of the girls experienced a positive sense of self efficacy.

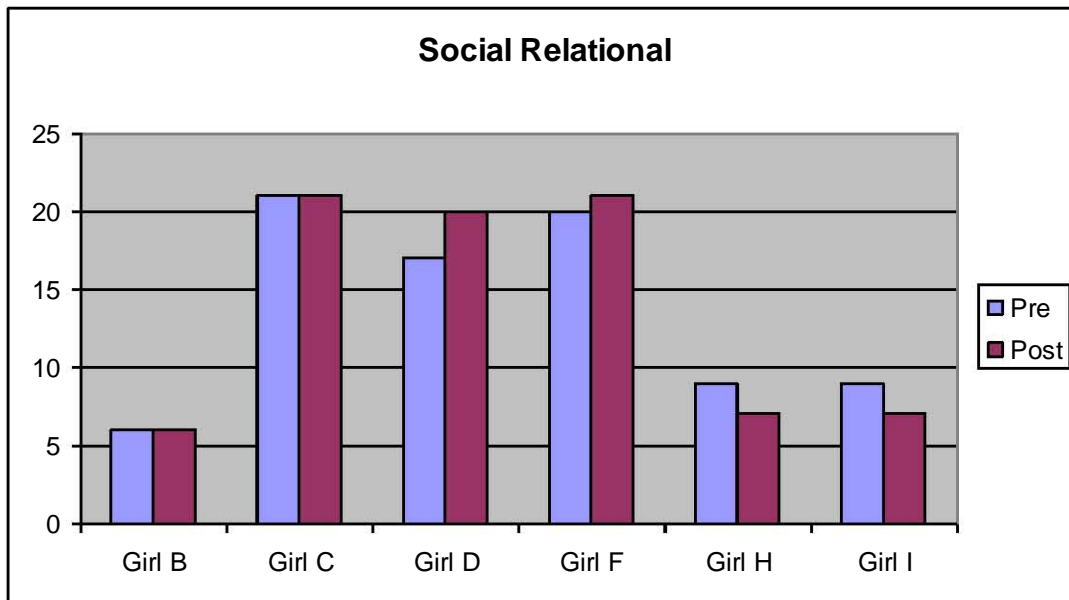


Higher scores on this scale indicate positive self-liking and competence.



Higher scores on this scale represent a greater sense of hopelessness or helplessness.

The scores of 0 for girl B remained similar on the pre and posttest.



The lower scores on the posttest in this scale indicate that there was only a slight increase by two of the participant on this scale.



Overall according to this data the participants experienced some growth in most of the categories tested on the questionnaire except in the area of hopelessness. The category to display the highest percentage of increase was peer self-esteem. The areas to demonstrate the least amount of increase were self-efficacy and positive body image.

### Discussion

Evaluation of the Go Grrrls Program did not show a statistically significant increase in the measure of self-esteem between pre and posttest scores. Although a slight increase in self-efficacy was reported, according to pretest scores, the girls seemed to present a high level of self-esteem prior to the beginning of the study. The factor that may have influenced these results may have been the lack of trust the girls were experiencing toward one another and the facilitator at the beginning of the study. They seemed very fearful that whatever they had written on the questionnaire may somehow be read by someone else besides the facilitator. Also, as it was reported in the results of the beginning sessions, the girls were very cognizant to disclose any information about them at all. The trust factor had such a powerful influence on the progression of the group, that it may have been the main cause for some of the girls to stop coming to the sessions.

Yalom (1995) stated that research overwhelmingly supports the conclusion that successful group therapy is characterized by a relationship among group members based on trust, warmth, empathic understanding, and acceptance. In fact, Yalom (1995) refers to group cohesiveness as the primary force for all the members to remain in the group. Cohesiveness, he maintained, refers to the condition of the members feeling warmth and comfort in the group, feeling they belong, valuing the group and feeling, in turn, that they

are valued and unconditionally accepted and supported by other members. Sadly, the establishment of a sense of trust and acceptance among group members is a slow process, especially among adolescent girls. The girls in the group were specifically afraid that some of the members would not maintain the information they learned in the sessions confidential and possibly would use it as a source of gossip and ridicule; in affirmation to all that the literature states regarding relational aggression. In fact, relational aggression is a particular vicious kind of behavior that focuses on the basic needs of girls; the need to feel accepted, particularly by same-age, same-sex peers (Crain et al., 2005; Dellasega & Nixon, 2003; Dill et al., 2004; Ross, 2003). It is this very need that makes girls easy targets of relational aggressive acts. The fact that it is very difficult to detect and to recognize acts of relational aggression, and it is almost impossible to discover the source, instills a grave sense of insecurity and fear in adolescent girls, which negatively affects the relationships with other girls. When the facilitator asked the girls the reason for joining and staying in the group, some stated that they wanted to be able to connect emotionally with other girls. Hence, when the group sessions were coming to an end and the girls were asked if they wished to continue the meetings, three of the girls affirmed that they really enjoyed the group experience and they would be very interested to continue

#### *Implications for Future Research*

Future studies should continue to examine the effects of relational aggression on the emotional well being of girls and ways to improve young girls' self-esteem and self-efficacy. Psychologically and socially girls need to form good friendships. In fact, some girls and women alike reported that friends, or just one really good friend, had been one

life's greatest gifts. Girls who have been through a terrible time with their peers frequently say that it was the friendship of another girl that kept them going (Fried & Fried, 2003).

For future research, it should be noted that the program that was implemented in this study showed some positive results in increasing self-esteem and self efficacy, although slightly limited. There were several limitations that may have impacted the outcome of the project. One of the most significant obstacles was the ability to recruit the participants. It seemed that there was some reluctance on the part of ninth grade girls to participate in a program in which they had to self-disclose. The girls seemed to fear that if they expressed their feelings, some of the group members may not keep the information confidential; therefore, totally invalidating the purpose of this project. Secondly, finding a common time, when all the girls chosen for the project could be available to meet, became an overwhelming task. Most of the ninth grade girls were not willing to stay after school hours. Also, they had only one free class period available for the meeting, which unfortunately was scheduled at all different times during the day. It took a long time for the researcher to find girls in a random matter as described in the IRB proposal, who had a common free period during the school day. The researcher, also, had to verify that the free period would not interfere with class work. When the girls were finally recruited, it became another challenging task to have them return the consent forms. The researcher had to contact the girls several times and write letters to parents, in order to inform the parents of the project and have them sign the consent forms. Finally when all was approved, the group was able to begin to meet. When the project started, the researcher found that there was not enough time during the forty five

minute period to complete all the activities suggested by the authors of the “GO Grrrls” program. Therefore, some of the activities or games had to be omitted or rescheduled for the following session. If these roadblocks had not been present, the outcomes of this project may have been much more favorable.

One suggestion is, when using the Go Grrrls Program, to secure the help of the administrators, teachers, and other school counselors. This would help spread the word and aid in the recruitment of the girls. Also, it is important to find enough time for the sessions in order to implement the program as described by the authors, LeCroy and Daley, in order to be most effective.

#### *Implications for Counselors*

Providing counseling for students in relational aggression, both aggressors and their targets can all benefit from this support. The targets of relational aggression may find a network of support in group counseling settings along with opportunities to make friends with others who are facing the same kinds of problems. Victims, also, need to know that bullying will end eventually, that they are not the only ones experiencing this, and that they can get help. Bullies may benefit from individual counseling in which they are encouraged to take responsibility for their aggressive actions and to understand that friendships are more than a way of controlling others.

#### Conclusion

Given the serious effects that relational aggression has on both students and schools we cannot simply ignore it. Administrators, counselors, and teachers need to be aware of the effects of relational aggression on girls’ psychosocial development. They should encourage and be part of the implementation of intervention programs to help

adolescent girls. Students who are depressed, anxious, or have low self-esteem, and feel unsafe in school have difficulty learning. Long term effects of relational aggression on girls who bully, such as aggressive behavior into adulthood, cannot be dismissed either. Students of all ages deserve to feel safe and supported at school. Taking relational aggressive behavior seriously is an important step in working toward safe and effective schools. Through training, collaboration, and carefully designed programs, educators, policymakers, parents, and students can work together to ensure that schools are a place where students feel welcome, included, and ready to learn.

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Appendix A

Statements of Informed Consent

Appendix B

Go Grrrls Questionnaire

Appendix C

Dittoes