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A qualitative study of relational aggression in sixth grade girls

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF RELATIONAL
AGGRESSION IN SIXTH GRADE GIRLS

A Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Specialist in Education

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Middle school can be a time of great upheaval and unfamiliar footing for a new sixth grader. When students enter middle school, the peer hierarchy and social dynamics of elementary school are often shifted in ways that can be confusing and intimidating. Many new things are expected of a sixth grader that was not expected from a fifth grader. Suddenly there are different teachers for all the classes. There is a choice of classes to take, homework, there is a schedule to memorize. Students are asked to take the initiative and decide what they want to do, rather than having it decided for them by the adults around them. For many students this transition offers a sense of impending adulthood – *growing-up* – and it is an intimidating time for many.

The bonds of elementary school often help to help buffer that transition. Middle school students may cling even tighter to their friendships in this time of changing identities and expectations. Advice on such weighty matters as hair, weight, make-up, clothes, sports, and – the ultimate – members of the opposite sex, no longer come from mom and dad, the clues are now taken from peer groups. Advice is especially valued from the group that does not seem to need that guidance: the “popular” group. Suddenly there is a group that appears to know all the right things. They know the way to dress, to act, and to talk. It becomes a matter of concern if you are not characterized as part of that group. With the onslaught of social pressure to fit into a “popular” group, issues that did not seem important in fifth grade take on monumental importance in sixth grade. Thus, it

is often bewildering and unsettling when one is snubbed because she/he doesn't dress, talk, act, or interact the way he/she is "supposed" to.

This transition is often a difficult and sometimes painful one. Not many children emerge from this time unscathed by negative peer attention, be it gossip, verbal harassment, or purposeful exclusion. This study is an examination of the motivations and precursors to acts of relational aggression, as defined by Crick and Grotpeter (1995). Some studies have shown that middle school is often where social roles are solidified into the niches that will carry students into high school and to a certain extent, later life (Cleary, 2000). This gives the middle school years an unexpected importance in the development of a young adult. Though this population has been studied in the past, it has rarely been the focus of specific research concerned only with this particular age grouping (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996). This study will attempt to isolate the social importance of acts of relational aggression in an effort to determine what the motivation is in remaining committed to it as a tool for social manipulation.

Relevant Terminology

Aggression

Not a new concept, aggression has many definitions. Aggression has different subsets but in this research three will be addressed: (a) overt aggression, (b) verbal aggression, and (c) relational aggression. These are the three most predominant in schools and thus what this study is concerned with. "Aggression" as defined by this study has two elements: (a) feelings of anger; and (b) intent to hurt or harm (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996).

One concept missing from this definition is mention of a power differential.

Generally when an aggressive act takes place (in school), the aggressor is a person of perceived higher social status than his or her victim, however, this is not always the case. Leckie (1998) argues that aggressive acts between individuals involve a specific intent to harm, but do not necessarily involve a power differential, nor repeated events. Acts of aggression can be considered to involve a two-way process of attack and retaliation, whereby each party has a relatively equal stake in the conflict. This type of aggression is seen when one party aggresses against another party and the first party retaliates in kind, or with more force. A power differential is often seen with the following type of aggression.

Bullying

The term "bullying" describes a one-directional process of attack, whereby the aggressor has more power than the victim who rarely retaliates or feels able to, and is thus an offshoot of aggression. It is not independent of aggression by any means, but it has a specific purpose, usually to damage the social standing of the victim (Leckie, 1998). Additionally, it can be a way the aggressor maintains his/her social standing.

Olweus (1978) defined a bully as a boy who fairly often oppresses or harasses somebody else; the target may be boys or girls, the harassment physical or mental. It is seen here that Olweus excluded girls from his definition of a bully because it was thought that girls do not aggress as boys do, and were thus not as threatening or as immediately dangerous. What is now being seen with current research is that most girls aggress in a completely different way, but with much the same purpose: to lower the social status of a

peer (Crick, 1996). It has also been seen that this type of aggression displayed by girls has many of the damaging effects associated with overt aggression at school, though research for long-term effects has yet to be conducted (Crick, 1996).

Overt Aggression

The term “overt aggression” has been in existence for quite a while: Olweus (1978) made the term a commonly used one with his research when referring to bullies and acts of aggression. “Overt aggression” as used by this study is defined as behaviors that are intended to harm either through physical damage or the threat of such damage (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996).

Overt aggression has been the focus of much research in the past, primarily because it often has been perceived as the most threatening in terms of bodily harm, as well as physical and mental intimidation. Physical aggression is certainly frightening, as are any acts of open hostility, and prior research has established that it is not merely a rite of passage for students, but a serious concern to schools and parents (Brendtro, 2001). Principally as a result of Olweus’s (1978) groundbreaking work in Norway, many schools – rural and urban, large and small – have sought effective and long-range bully prevention and aggression prevention programs. Implementation is sometimes difficult or tedious for these programs and many have flaws, but they are an important step in making schools a safe place to be every day.

Verbal Aggression

A variation of overt aggression, verbal aggression is defined as the specific threat of violence to another peer (Crick & Grotmeter, 1995). It can include anything that is

interpreted by the target as a serious threat of physical harm, as well as vicious name calling or slanders about the target within the target's hearing or perceptive range. This very closely resembles some aspects of relational aggression. The distinction is that the aggressor is open about the name-calling and slanders. There is no attempt to conceal it by spreading rumors or calling names *outside* of the victim's hearing. Also, verbal aggression is associated more with the forms of aggression used by males and it can be a precursor to overt or physical aggression, though females use it as well (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

Relational Aggression

Relational aggression is defined by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) as behaviors that inflict harm on others by manipulating their peer relationships, such as using the "silent treatment" or spreading rumors and lies with intent to damage peer status. For their initial study, Crick and Grotpeter hypothesized that the primary goal of relational aggression was a purposeful intent to damage the social standing of the peer. This is effectively accomplished by targeting the socially desirable characteristics that are typical for female students. This can include the manner of dress, speech, physical characteristics such as weight, height, hair or eye color, and whom the girl (or boy) is friends with. It is this form of aggression that this study is focused on.

Assumptions Underlying Terminology

Some of the above defined terms may carry negative associations, such as the terms bullying or aggression. Recent literature as well as media coverage has solidified such associations, and it has become socially acceptable to correlate bullying and

aggression with undesirable behavior. However, it is rare that in such situations when these terms are used there is only one dimension. There are usually many sides to a story and this study is meant to examine only one aspect of the participants' lives. This study is not prepared to investigate other facets of the participants' interactions, such as home life or relationships outside of school. The author acknowledges that these components may play a significant part in affecting behavior while in school and should be taken into account as possible contributing factors.

The terms bully and aggressor are not used in this paper to induce a negative emotional reaction; they are used to distinguish between the initiator of aggressive actions toward another student and the receiver of those actions. They are not meant to identify a particular child as "bad" or "mean." Conversely, the terms "victim" or "target" are not intended to evoke sympathetic feelings for one student over another. It is a firm belief of the author's that students react to their environment, with maturity and awareness levels coming at different times for different children. Every effort will be made to take this into account and present as unbiased a picture of the participants as possible, especially since the participants are at an age when many personality changes are taking place. It is acknowledged that the interactions with and between students are just a slice of their lives and these glimpses do not denote their personality in its entirety.

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this study will be to gain, through first-hand interviews, knowledge of the provocation and effects relational aggression has on sixth-grade girls.

A secondary purpose of this study will be to gain first-hand interview knowledge of the motivation for utilizing social manipulation as a method to maintain social standing.

An interview procedure was selected in favor of quantitative analysis since the natures of the targeted interactions are somewhat nebulous and imprecise. Qualitative information may present a more complete view of the students interviewed. The dynamics in a peer group, particularly with girls, are especially interesting to the author. Relational aggression is a relatively new form of identified aggression, though it has been around in its unidentified form for a very long time.

Additionally, the interview procedure was selected in favor of quantitative analysis because it is thought that qualitative information may provide a more holistic view of the participants. Social relationships in particular can be difficult to study, especially in middle school when such relationships are so fluid. However, in an effort to explore the motives and consequences of relational aggression, it was felt a case study was more open-ended and thus more informational. The focus of this study will largely be on obtaining a holistic view of the precursors for remaining committed to relational aggression as a method of interaction with peers within the school environment.

With that stated, as researcher and interviewer, personal bias is a concern. Every effort will be made to prevent personal experiences, biases, or prior knowledge from infringing on any discussions with students. The written information in this paper is meant for educational purposes only, and at no time will the identities of any of the participants be exposed. Every effort will be made to submit objective results.

Rationale for Study

Relational aggression in middle school girls has long been a footnote in the aggression literature. Bully prevention programs have rarely addressed this unique and often bewildering social phenomenon. This is a relatively new field of study; the limited amount of research that has focused on relational aggression specifically has been within the last 10 years. Crick and Grotpeter opened the door in 1995 with a groundbreaking study on relational aggression and its independence from overt or verbal aggression. Crick then went on to facilitate many more studies with other researchers to further explore the relational aggression phenomenon. These studies have validated the hypotheses that relational aggression is far more prevalent in girls, has long-lasting psychological effects, and is deleterious to victims while it is occurring. Other studies contributing to this knowledge have also focused on the social ramifications. Whereas Crick and colleague's studies utilized quantitative information gathering methods, it was believed by this author that qualitative research could provide a more holistic view of the participants.

It is difficult to accurately identify a relationally aggressive relationship. It is even more difficult is to identify it as it is happening, since it has not been found to be a static relationship (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000). In this study, the goal is to gain insight into how and why relationally aggressive students "choose" their targets and what their intended outcome is.

When one student becomes hostile to another, the purpose is rarely to get caught. The research on observing bullies and their victims is often supported by covert

observations, taken by video camera without student knowledge. It is often difficult for the attending adults to differentiate between what is friendly sarcasm and something more harmful, even when the students are visibly upset. This study attempts to address overtly rather than covertly the nature of relational aggression by speaking to the students themselves.

Research Questions

1. Do the girls investing in relational aggression as a way to manipulate social relationships view their actions as aggressive behavior? Aggression defined is, “(1) feelings of anger; and (2) intent to hurt or harm” (Crick et al., 1996, p. 1004).
2. Do attributional biases play a part in deciding to utilize relationally aggressive actions? Specifically, do the instigators of relational aggression attribute these same types of behaviors to other girls out of accurate perceptions, or are there situational circumstances that contribute to the assumption that relationally aggressive behaviors are taking place (e.g., a girl hears her name being spoken by another girl in the hallway and assumes that the other girl is spreading rumors).
3. Have instigators of relational aggression at one time perceived themselves as a victim? If once having felt a victim of relational aggression, what is the rationale for perpetrating against others?
4. Do instigators of relational aggression view themselves positively or negatively once they have aggressed? Do they believe relational aggression is an effective method of interaction between peers in order to obtain the desired results?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this review is to examine the literature and recent research on the phenomenon of relational aggression in school-aged girls, specifically in middle school. Relational aggression has always been somewhat of a footnote in the bully/aggression literature, particularly in prevention programs. Usually classified as a subset of verbal aggression, relational aggression has since carved out a niche for itself as a result of its independence from overt aggression and the long-term effects found for victims of relational aggression (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996).

Bullying and aggression have prompted many studies on the longitudinal effects of such abuse. Schwartz, Dodge, and Coie (1993) found that victimization has been related to academic adjustment problems such as avoidance and dislike of school. Victims also tend to display passivity and submissiveness when confronted with others' aggression, being unwilling or unable to defend themselves. The twist with relational aggression is that often there is no one to actually face. Relational aggression comes in the form of nasty notes, vicious rumors, and the backbiting that is so common to middle and high school girls. Graham and Juvonen (1998) found that middle school students who perceive themselves as victimized are vulnerable to adjustment difficulties such as loneliness, social anxiety, and low self-worth. Graham and Juvonen also found that the relation between self-perceived victimization and maladjustment is partly mediated by self-blaming attributions that implicate one's character. Essentially this attributional bias indicates that the victims place some blame on their own shoulders, thinking some

internal trait provokes and encourages antagonism. Graham and Juvonen also found behavioral and characterological self-blame to be highly correlated. Recent research by Egan and Perry (as cited in Graham and Juvonen, 1998) reports that low self-worth is both an antecedent and consequence of victimization over time. Egan and Perry also assert that children who view themselves as socially incompetent behave in ways that encourage hostile acts, this being the antecedent function, and as a result feel worse about themselves over the course of the year: the consequence function.

A study by Oliver, Hoover, and Hazler (1994) found that most participants agreed that victims were at least partly to blame for their social status and provoke their aggressors to some degree simply by being smaller or weaker than their peer counterparts. In his groundbreaking studies from Norway during the 1970's, Olweus found that physical weakness was the most common trait of victims of bullying. Although Olweus's research focused primarily on boys and the effects that physical bullying had on males, Olweus acknowledged that girls had their own special brand of bullying but at the time it was thought that physical aggression was more dangerous, and thus required more immediate study and intervention.

Sixty-one percent of male participants in Oliver et al.'s study (1994) believed that bullying made victims tougher. Both male and female participants of the study thought that bullies enjoyed higher social status than victims. In this particular study, female participants agreed with this viewpoint significantly more than male participants. There is also evidence from this study that bullying serves many social and psychological

purposes. A minority of participants also agreed that bullying toughens weak peer members and can be used to teach what is or is not acceptable to the group.

What does this study tell us? Previous research has already been shown that females are less physically aggressive than males (Cleary, 2000). If females thought that male bullies gained higher social status over their victims by being physically aggressive and intimidating, then as a counterpart to overt male physical aggression, how would females gain that higher status, and still be less physically aggressive?

Within the last decade, a newer form of aggression from girls has come to the attention of researchers that cannot be classified as verbal aggression, due to the general lack of specific verbalized threats, nor as physical aggression, due to the general lack of face to face contact the victim and aggressor have. This form of hostility has been labeled relational aggression and has only recently become a field of study.

There have been a few studies that have dominated the relatively unexplored relational aggression field. What Olweus did for physical aggression and bullying in Norway, Crick is doing here in the United States for relational aggression. In 1995 Crick and Grotpeter hypothesized that the forms of aggression in females were qualitatively different than the aggression displayed by males. Crick and Grotpeter theorized that there are significant gender differences in the way that boys and girls discriminate against their peers.

Previous studies have emphasized and documented that, as a group, boys demonstrate higher levels of aggression than do girls, a distinction that persists as a lifelong difference (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Social concerns or goals were seen as the

instruments for aggression, for example, within peer groups it is generally desirable for boys to be athletic, physically coordinated, and competitive. Thus, physical aggression was seen as the method of intimidation, whereas for girls it is socially desirable to be cooperative and communally minded. Thus, relational aggression becomes the most effective way to damage social status within a female peer group.

Studies in Relational Aggression

Crick and Grotpeter, 1995

While research in this area had been tentatively explored previously, usually as a side effect to a broader study, Crick and Grotpeter's study was instrumental in highlighting gender differences in aggression. Crick and Grotpeter's research focused solely on the fact that girls exhibit a brand of hostility that cannot be called verbal aggression since there are few threats involved and often contact between aggressor and victim is not direct.

In the initial 1995 study, there were four goals:

(1) to develop a reliable measure of relational aggression, one that did not confound relational aggression with other forms of aggression; (2) to assess gender differences in relational aggression; (3) to assess the degree to which relational aggression is distinct from overt aggression (i.e., physical and verbal aggression as assessed in most of the past research in this area); and (4) to assess whether relational aggression is related to social-psychological maladjustment. (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995, p. 711)

There were several expectations associated with this study that have carried over into later research, specifically that relational aggression is related to, but distinct from, overt or physical aggression. Additionally, that girls are more likely to exhibit relational aggression than are boys, and finally that relationally aggressive children are more

socially and psychologically maladjusted than their non-aggressive peers (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

To identify relationally aggressive children, a peer nomination scale was constructed. A peer nomination scale was used primarily because of the rather oblique nature of relational aggression. Teacher nominations, while generally accurate, were still outside of the peer group and thought to be unreliable in terms of observing and evaluating the children in naturalistic interactions (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Peer nominations were judged to be the best method of information gathering, along with the added benefit of collecting multiple behavior assessments, since each student was evaluated by all of his/her peers, rather than just one teacher for every student.

The peer nomination instrument consisted of 19 items, spread across four subscales designed to assess social behavior. The subscales are detailed as: relational aggression, overt aggression, prosocial behavior, and isolation.

In addition to the peer nomination instrument, each student also completed several social-psychological assessments containing items on peer status, depression, loneliness, social anxiety, social avoidance, and perceptions of peer relations. Each of these areas has shown in prior research to be indicators of present or future socio-emotional difficulties (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). By assessing these aspects of socio-emotional development and peer status, an evaluation of the adjustment risk status of relationally aggressive children could be conducted.

Sample and methodology. A total sample of 491 third- through sixth-grade children from four public schools in a moderately sized midwestern town participated as

subjects. The sample is broken down as 128 third (65 girls and 63 boys), 126 fourth (56 girls and 70 boys), 126 fifth (57 girls and 69 boys), and 111 sixth graders (57 girls and 54 boys). Ethnically, the sample was comprised of approximately 37% African-American, 60% European-American, and 3% other ethnic groups. Parental consent was obtained to participate in the study with consent rate above 82% (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

During administration of the peer nomination instrument, subjects were provided with a class roster and asked to nominate up to three classmates for each of the items. The standardized scores for each of the subscales were summed to yield four total scores, one for each of the subscales. These instruments were administered to the students in two 60-minute sessions, Session A and Session B, within the student's classrooms. Both sessions were administered to classrooms randomly and the two sessions were held approximately one week apart. The authors utilized standardized procedures in conducting the sessions (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

In the first session, Session A, participants completed the peer sociometric and behavior nomination measure, with the peer nomination instrument administered first, so the students would not be preoccupied with who they would nominate during the session. During Session B, the participants were administered the remaining four instruments in random order.

Results. One of the factors examined was whether or not relational aggression would emerge as a separate construct from overt aggression. It was found, with a correlation coefficient $r = .54, p < .01$, to be what had been originally hypothesized: a different form of the same general behavior (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). That there was a

moderate association rather than a high or low relationship indicates that relational aggression is indeed a distinct concept, and while related to overt aggression, has been shown relatively independent (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

The next factor to be examined was gender differences in relational aggression. A descriptive analysis was conducted concerning the percentage of boys versus girls for a number of conditions. As a result, it was found that approximately equal percentages of each gender were classified as non-aggressive (73.0% of boys and 78.3% of girls). This was the only condition in which males and females were somewhat equally distributed. The overtly aggressive group was weighted toward males (15.6% of boys vs. 0.4% of girls). The relationally aggressive group showed a similar trend, but in reverse (17.4% of girls and 2.0% of boys). The combined group consisted of both boys and girls (9.4% of boys and 3.8% of girls; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). An implication for such findings is that aggressive boys and girls may be identified with near equal frequency (27% of boys vs. 21.7% of girls in this particular study) providing that relational as well as overt forms of aggression are assessed (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

To assess for the association between relational aggression and social-psychological adjustment two sets of analyses were conducted. First, analyses of covariance were performed in which the relational aggression group with two levels (relationally aggressive vs. non-relationally aggressive) and gender served as the independent variables, overt aggression served as the covariate, and the social-psychological adjustment indices served as the dependent variables (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

Peer nominations of status, prosocial behavior, and isolation. There was a significant main effect yielded from the relationally aggressive group, $F(1, 486) = 12.3$, $p < .01$, for peer rejection, indicating that relationally aggressive children were significantly more disliked by peers than were their non-relationally aggressive peers (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

Self-reports of social-psychological adjustment. There was also a significant main effect of relational aggression and children's loneliness scores, $F(1, 457) = 10.6$, $p < .01$, and a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 457) = 4.3$, $p < .05$, indicating that relationally aggressive children were significantly more lonely than were their non-relationally aggressive peers (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Interestingly, follow-up analysis of the interaction effect showed that the main effect was apparent for girls only.

Sociometric status classification. Sociometric status group has been utilized as an important social adjustment indicator in previous studies, and as such was the focus for a second set of analyses designed to assess the relation between relational aggression and status group membership. Using a analysis of variance, the status group (popular, average, neglected, rejected, controversial) served as the independent variable and the participant's relational aggression scores from the peer nomination instrument served as the dependent variable. There was no covariate. There was a significant effect, $F(4, 362) = 11.6$, $p < .001$. A Student-Newman-Keuls post hoc test ($p < .05$) indicated that the controversial status children were significantly more relationally aggressive than popular and neglected children. Additionally, neglected children were significantly less relationally aggressive than were average status children (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

Discussion. In keeping with the hypotheses of the authors, the results indicated the validity of a relational form of aggression. In addition, it appears to be relatively diverse from overt aggression, and has been found to be significantly related to gender and social-psychological adjustment in consequential ways.

Results indicate that, as predicted, relational aggression seems to be more characteristic of girls than boys. As a group, girls were significantly more relationally aggressive than boys and when relatively extreme groups of aggressive and non-aggressive students were identified, girls were more likely than boys to be characterized in the relationally aggressive group (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

An interesting lateral set of findings was acquired for boys and the overt aggressive characterization. On average, boys were significantly more overtly aggressive than girls and were more likely to be represented in the extreme group of overtly aggressive children. These findings support prior research on gender differences in aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

The self-report measures on the instrument yield that relationally aggressive children experience significant social problems, a finding that is comparable with the research for overtly aggressive children (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Relationally aggressive children were significantly more disliked than their peers. Interestingly, the peer status groups who exhibited the highest levels of relational aggression were the rejected and controversial groups. Additionally, relational aggression was significantly related to social maladjustment, independent of overt aggression, indicating that relational aggression provides distinctive and significant information about children's

social difficulties that cannot be accounted for by overt aggression alone (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

When hypothesizing why rejected and controversial status children have the highest levels of relational aggression, it is postulated that engaging in relationally aggressive behaviors leads to rejection from the peer group. Prior research has supported this relationship for overt aggression (Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983 and Dodge, 1983 as cited in Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Conversely, it has also been theorized that rejection from peers may precede relationally aggressive behaviors. By definition, controversial students are highly disliked by some peers and highly liked by others (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). It is one theory that controversial children direct their relationally aggressive behaviors disproportionately among their peers, with specific children consistently the victim of these behaviors while other children may not ever come into contact with this behavior from these peers.

The authors of this study indicate that the pattern of findings in this study suggests that the controversial status children may play a critical role in controlling the group structure and nature of peer interactions. Their popularity with some, but not all peers, may give these children what is known as “social authority” and allows them to successfully manipulate peer group relationships. That this is an unknown relationship indicates a potential for further research into this group.

Further findings from the self-report social-psychological adjustment instruments indicate that relational aggression is significantly related to social maladjustment. Children who are characterized as relationally aggressive feel unhappy and distressed

about their peer relationships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). It is hypothesized that this relationship is significant because frequent use of relationally aggressive behaviors exacerbates, if not generates, feelings of distress by potentially limiting children's access to different peer relationships.

Crick, 1996

In an effort to measure whether relational aggression is predictive of future, as well as concurrent social-psychological impediments, Crick conducted a study in 1996, following the initial study by Crick and Grotpeter conducted in 1995. The purpose of this study was to assess whether relational aggression is a significant indicator of children's risk status for future social maladjustment. In previous research, longitudinal studies have demonstrated that childhood aggression is the best-known behavioral predictor of future social adjustment difficulties (Coie, Dodge, & Kupersmidt, 1990 as cited in Crick, 1996).

Evidence from prior studies concerning overt aggression and social maladjustment indicates that engaging in overtly aggressive behaviors often results in social maladjustment in situations where students spend increasing amounts of time with the same peer group (Coie et al., 1990 as cited in Crick, 1996). Places such as the lunchroom, classrooms, and playground all become areas that are prone to displays of overt aggression. The assumption then is that the hostile nature of overt aggression leads to rejection of the antagonist.

Based on this prior research it was hypothesized that, similar to overt aggression, relational aggression would become aversive to peers with repeated exposure and would

eventually result in rejection of the aggressor. To test this hypothesis, the association between relational aggression and ensuing social maladjustment within a classroom setting over the course of an academic year was assessed. Of particular interest to the author was whether or not relational aggression information would provide significant insight about subsequent adjustment, beyond that contributed by overt aggression (Crick, 1996). To assess social adjustment, measures of student's peer acceptance and peer rejection were used, indices that have been commonly used in past research and have been shown to be reflective of concurrent as well as future social difficulties (Crick, 1996).

A second goal of this study was to address a limitation of past research on social adjustment, specifically, the tendency to focus solely on the study of negative behaviors, such as aggression (Crick, 1996). In the bulk of prior research, positive or prosocial behaviors have either been excluded or were assessed independently of negative behaviors. To address this drawback, Crick evaluated the role of both aggression and prosocial behaviors in the prediction of social difficulties in students. It was hypothesized that displaying low levels of prosocial behaviors would significantly enhance the prediction of future social adjustment, beyond that accounted for by involvement in negative behaviors, such as overt and relational aggression.

The third and final goal of this study was to assess the stability of relational aggression. It has been shown that, absent any formal or informal intervention, overt aggression remains a stable characteristic for individual children over time (Lumsden,

2000). Therefore a focus of this study was to assess the consistency of relational aggression independent of overt aggression.

To collect information multiple sources of knowledge were used. Specifically, peer- and teacher-based assessments of student's use of relational aggression, overt aggression, and prosocial skills were obtained. In addition, peer-based assessments of social adjustment were used.

Assessments of aggression, prosocial behavior, and social adjustment were conducted three times during the school year: Time 1 in October, Time 2 in November, and Time 3 in April for the students. The teacher assessments were conducted during the weeks between Time 1 and Time 2 assessments for the students. A total of 245 children ranging in grades 3-6 from two elementary schools in a medium sized midwestern town participated.

After analyses, the findings showed the first reliable evidence that relational aggression is relatively stable over time and is predictive of future social maladjustment (Crick, 1996). It was also found that teacher assessments were significantly related to peer assessments and both information sources provide critical insight regarding the potential risk status for children (Crick, 1996).

In a large percentage of past research focusing on relational aggression, teacher informants were not utilized because relational aggression was thought to be too subtle and dependent primarily on "insider knowledge" to be reliably assessed by a teacher. However, the relationship of peer and teacher reports have proven to be closely related and has provided encouraging results that teachers do in fact accurately recognize

relational aggression in individual students (Crick, 1996). However, Crick cautions that there is some discrepancy, so teacher assessments may not be preferable when student and peer assessments are available. Crick also mentions that this could be due to the different methods of accessing the relationally aggressive behaviors, since students often have greater opportunity to observe the behaviors taking place, and teachers may hear it secondhand. As such, the discrepancy could possibly be a result of differences in observation rates, rather than reporting biases (Crick, 1996).

Discussion. Assessing the future risk status of relationally aggressive students in this study revealed that relational aggression is significantly associated with future social maladjustment. This is true for both overt and relational aggression. However,

evaluation of the relative contribution of relational aggression to the prediction of future adjustment revealed that relational aggression provided unique information about adjustment and about negative *changes* in adjustment for girls only (e.g., relationally aggressive girls became more rejected by peers over the course of the school year. (Crick, 1996, p. 2325)

When taken within the context of what prior research has provided--relatively little information about the antecedent behaviors of socially maladjusted girls, especially for aggressive behavior patterns--this becomes critical knowledge. The behaviorally aggressive girl in school has been somewhat of an anomaly, but in recent years has gained more and more attention once it was seen that the effects of bullying and aggression have similarly severe effects for females and males (Lumsden, 2000). Therefore, the information provided by Crick's study sheds light on a subject most teachers and school personnel were already well acquainted with, but often had no reliable information regarding interventions or preventative materials.

Also established as a finding of Crick's 1996 study was evidence for the stability of relational aggression over time. Both overt and relational aggression was found to be relatively stable over 1- and 6-month intervals for boys and girls. Additionally, the stability for relational aggression was comparable to that of overt aggression, particularly for girls (Crick, 1996). This evidence establishes that relationally aggressive students are at risk for future aggressive behavior problems, something the academic community had previously thought a prevalent characteristic of overt and physical aggression only.

Based on the findings of this study, Crick suggests that future longitudinal research of the long-term consequences as well as the antecedents of relational aggression be studied for its unique perspective on social functioning.

Grottpeter and Crick, 1996

In 1996 Grottpeter and Crick teamed up again to conduct a study concerning whether the social problems that relationally and overtly aggressive children typically experience in the peer group environment are also present in the dyadic friendship context. This study and its findings are an important step in understanding the complicated and ever-changing relationships that form between students.

Research in this area suggests that the negative effects of problems experienced within the peer group context, such as peer rejection in a relatively unstructured setting like the cafeteria, gym class, or recess can be somewhat buffered if these children have experienced success within a reciprocal, dyadic friendship (Bukowski, Hoiza, & Boivin, 1993 and Parker & Asher, 1993 as cited in Grottpeter & Crick, 1996). The goal for this study was to evaluate whether aggressive children, while experiencing the typical

negative peer interactions associated with aggressiveness, also engage in supportive dyadic friendships that allow them to express appropriate positive social skills. It was also hypothesized that engaging in these dyadic friendships allows aggressive children to talk about problems whether occurring at home or during school. While modest research has been conducted on this topic previously, results from initial studies suggest that aggressive children do have friends, and tend to be involved in social networks with other aggressive children (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest, & Garipey, 1988 as cited in Grotmeter & Crick, 1996). What is not known about these relationships is if they allow for the positive, supportive interactions that are generally typical of healthy friendships. In other words, Grotmeter and Crick were assessing the quality of the friendships between aggressive children and their peers.

To address this goal, dyadic relationships were assessed with aggressive and non-aggressive children using the degree of intimacy and support within the relationship against the degree of conflict within the friendship (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996). Once again, to control for gender balancing and equitable distribution, overt aggression was included in addition to relational aggression.

A screening was conducted to assess for relationally aggressive and overtly aggressive tendencies using 835 fourth- through fifth-grade students via peer nomination. The end sample included a total of 315 children from several small midwestern towns.

Results and discussion. The results of this study provide evidence that support previous results found by other relational aggression studies. Specifically that relationally aggressive children, while reporting no major difference from their peers on

many traditional friendship qualities, also reported that they engage in highly intimate and exclusive friendships. Additionally, relationally aggressive children reported low levels of self-disclosure to their friends, but reported that their friends self-disclosed to them often (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996).

Interestingly, the results from the overtly aggressive children were in stark contrast to the findings for the relationally aggressive children. Relationally aggressive children reported relatively high levels of aggression within the confines of the friendship. Overtly aggressive children, in turn, reported using aggressive behavior in tandem with their friends *outside* of the friendship boundaries (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996). Additionally, they reported that this behavior was important to them and the ties that made them friends with the others. For example, if the friend of an overtly aggressive child refused to take part in the behaviors with the others, the aggressive child would become upset. This in turn leads to the hypothesis that children who befriend overtly aggressive children may be reluctantly involved in the aggressive encounters for reasons unrelated to the situational circumstances (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996).

Overtly aggressive children also reported low levels of intimacy in their friendships, unlike the reports of relationally aggressive children who reported high levels of intimacy and trust, though with low levels of self-disclosure. These results are important in that they illustrate another fundamental distinction between overtly and relationally aggressive tendencies and qualities for children (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996). The findings are also significant in that they provide further insight into the complicated

and often bewildering world of children's friendships and how significantly such relationships contribute to feelings of well-being and adjustment.

Crick, Bigbee, and Howes, 1996

In an effort to obtain as complete a picture as possible of the perspective that relationally aggressive children take, Crick et al. studied whether or not children viewed the behaviors associated with relational aggression as "aggressive." In order to achieve as much clarity as possible, the definition to aggression was broken down into two components: (a) feelings of anger; and (b) intent to hurt or harm (Crick et al., 1996). Using these two components, Crick et al. attempted to assess the degree to which children viewed typical relationally aggressive behaviors as aggressive.

Also of interest in this study was the effort to assess whether children view relationally aggressive behaviors as normative in their peer group. Again, this was contrasted with previous studies of children's normative beliefs, but as is seen with most prior research, it was conducted with overt aggression only and generally had male participants (Crick et al., 1996). The results from previous studies on overt aggression show that boys typically are approving of overtly aggressive behaviors, believing that it provides an adequate framework by which to judge others (Brendtro, 2001).

A second goal was to assess children's normative beliefs about relational aggression and to compare them to beliefs about the normative nature of other forms of aggression. For purposes of this study, normative beliefs were defined as children's perceptions of how often aggressive behaviors actually occur in their peer groups, rather than children's perceptions of what one should or should not do (Crick et al., 1996).

There are so many age- and gender-related grade differences, as well as developmental differences in the prevalence of relational and overt aggression. Thus, a third goal of this study was to assess whether children's normative beliefs about aggression vary as a function of grade (or age) and gender (Crick et al., 1996).

With a total of 459 third- through sixth-graders from four elementary schools in the Midwest, it was found that a substantial number of both boys and girls associate manipulative acts with anger, the first of the two components to the definition of aggression. Grade and age was a factor in the findings of this study, as it was reported that, for girls, relational aggression was viewed as more normative behavior by fifth and sixth grade participants, as opposed to the younger participants in third and fourth grade (Crick et al., 1996).

Discussion. In the assessment of whether or not children place relationally aggressive behaviors in the second component of aggression, the intent to harm, the results show that children do associate relationally manipulative acts with the intent to harm, or just plain "meanness" (Crick et al., 1996). Taken as a whole, it can be inferred from these results that children do indeed view relationally aggressive behaviors as aggressive.

Additionally it is seen from this study that children, especially girls, view relational aggression as one of the most normative aggressive behaviors in their peer group, particularly for interactions in which a girl was the aggressor (Crick et al., 1996). Interestingly, it was seen that when a girl was the aggressor, the above finding held true for male victims as well as female victims.

In a further result of this study, children who were overtly aggressive were more likely than relationally aggressive children to cite overt aggression as the norm for girls' malicious behavior toward other girls. Conversely, children who were relationally aggressive were more likely than overtly aggressive children to cite relational aggression as the norm in girl-to-girl interactions (Crick et al., 1996). An interesting offshoot of this study is that non-aggressive children seemed to be aware of both of these norms. This can indicate that aggressive children hold egocentric and biased views of the norms for their peer groups concerning hostile behavior, something that is perhaps not a surprise (Crick et al., 1996).

Leckie, 1998

A later study conducted in Australia in 1998 by Leckie expands on what Crick and colleagues initiated. Leckie began her study by addressing the issue of aggression. She posits that it is important to know whether or not girls identify their actions as aggression or bullying. If they consider the actions as bullying behaviors, then they are indicating that, according to the definition of bullying, they represent not only an intent to harm, but that they fulfill the requirements of a power imbalance and repetition over time. However, if they do not perceive their actions as bullying behavior, but do perceive them as aggressive then according to the definition of aggression, girls are indicating that these behaviors occur between parties of equal status within the peer group and thus are part of the two-way attack and retaliation process.

To better investigate the perceptions that girls hold about their actions, Leckie turned to previous studies about the nature of girls' relationships. The research she used

suggested that girls appear to have distinctive friendship patterns revolving around shifting, dyadic alliances which are jealously guarded and reflect the concepts of exclusivity, intensity, intimacy, and disclosure (Eder & Hallinan, 1978, Maccoby, 1990, Erwin, 1993, Thorne, 1993, as cited in Leckie, 1998). Though fewer in number but stronger in intensity, it is suggested that these relationships contribute to girls' better social skills, greater emotional intimacy, and ease of self-disclosure when contrasted with boys' friendships at the same age (Eder & Hallinan, 1978, as cited in Leckie, 1998).

Communication appears to be a central characteristic of girls' relationships (Leckie, 1998). Trust levels, loyalty, and significance of disclosure all seem to increase as the relationship becomes more embedded in the lives of the girls. Once these bonds have solidified, it is hypothesized that the relationship becomes something to be jealously guarded and protected against interlopers. If others try to interfere with this relationship, the way is opened for aggressive interactions between girls (Leckie, 1998).

Girls on the whole have been known to use language more subtly, manipulatively, and indirectly than boys, who have been found to use language more directly: to command, boast, or threaten (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974, as cited in Leckie, 1998). It is suggested that girls seem to have higher verbal ability than same-age boys, and that girls are socialized to use their verbal ability to avoid overt, physically aggressive behaviors. This in turn, may facilitate language being used as the central, manipulative tool that serves to maintain, destroy, or control relationships in indirect ways (Leckie, 1998). Rather than using overt forms of intimidation with their higher level of verbal ability, girls will use subversive and circuitous methods to damage the social standing of a peer.

A double agenda has been noted in previous research (Sheldon, 1989, as cited in Leckie, 1998) where girls appear to sustain social relationships by being “nice” while at the same time working to fulfill personal socially minded goals. This schema then raises questions about manipulation and intent: two key concepts in aggressive behaviors found in girls (Leckie, 1998).

This is not to say that all relationships developed by girls are negative or unsupportive. Many, if not most, of the relationships formed are healthy, positive, and supportive friendships. The difficulty is that, while this may be true, there is still some evidence that even within these healthy friendships, manipulation and self-serving acts take place (Bjorqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1992, as cited in Leckie, 1998). So how much, if any, of this manipulation and self-serving motivation is healthy and normal? Leckie hypothesizes that it is the perception that the girls hold about their own behavior that will answer that question.

Leckie (1998) theorized that socially manipulative strategies, such as the behaviors employed by relationally aggressive children, serve two functions: (a) to protect existing friendships from the intrusion of others, and (b) to deliberately harm targeted girls through rejection and isolation. Armed with this hypothesis, Leckie explored the apparent dual function of these behaviors and looked at the link between girls’ peer relationships and bullying behaviors against the information known about relational and indirect aggression. Since the social structure of girls in relation to same-age boys appears more rigid (Leckie, 1998), it was a natural step to hypothesize that this structure was a likely vehicle for social manipulation and aggression.

Leckie (1998) administered surveys that included both self-report and peer nomination instruments to girls in different classes from Year 6 to Year 10 for a sample of 987 students in seven South Australian Catholic and Independent schools. Five schools were single-sex and two were co-educational. The data were collected between July and September, by which time the girls had spent at least six months with each other. The mean age for the entire sample was 12.9 years.

To assess the participants' understanding of the concept of bullying in general, they were not supplied with a definition of bullying. They were instead presented with key components of several different definitions: power imbalance, intent to harm, and ongoing over time. The participants were asked to indicate on a four point scale ranging from 1 = never to 4 = always, which aspects they agreed with. Using the same scale, the participants were also asked to determine which activities they perceived bullying amongst girls to involve.

Results. The responses from the participants indicate that their understanding of the concept of bullying supports previous research. Age-related data was sought to determine if it made a difference how old the participants were, relative to their understanding of the definition of bullying. It was found that there were no differences between the systems for any of the concepts, indicating that girls in both primary (years 6 and 7) and secondary (years 8, 9, and 10) schools equally understand the concept of bullying (Leckie, 1998).

Once it had been established that the understanding of the bullying concept reflected previous research, an analysis was then conducted to assess the participants'

perceptions of the items on the Direct and Indirect Aggression scale as bullying behaviors. The results state that girls very clearly identify direct physically confrontational behaviors as bullying behaviors. The results were similar for verbally aggressive or threatening behaviors. When the analysis was conducted for indirect aggressive behavior, participants across all ages and year levels perceived many of the indirect aggressive behaviors as bullying behaviors.

These results indicate that girls perceive seven out of eight of the behaviors on the survey as bullying behavior, including: spreading rumors, writing nasty notes, telling false stories, saying bad things behind backs, gossiping, purposefully shutting out, and deliberately not inviting others to parties. By the definition of bullying, this means that the girls who answered affirmatively think that these behaviors are ongoing, repeated over time, involve a power imbalance, and are deliberately intended to harm the target child. The eighth behavior that was significant in the negative was excluding, indicating that girls do not perceive excluding behavior to be bullying.

Discussion. Girls' friendships are intense constructs. These constructs operate within a larger dyad, namely the school culture. Within this culture, there is another layer, known as cliques, and these cliques promote the exclusivity, intimacy, and disclosure that are so common to female friendships (Leckie, 1998). These friendships are very fluid in their nature, with highs and lows, ebbs and flows. When these relationships break down for one reason or another, each girl has the potential to become a victim of relational aggression. What once was a relationship equal in terms of status

and power becomes unbalanced while one girl gains support from peers, and the other becomes ostracized, rejected, and excluded (Leckie, 1998).

Surprisingly, exclusion was the one activity that did not appear to be classified as a bullying behavior by the participants in this study. However, anecdotal evidence obtained while researching this study from teachers, parents, and girls have suggested that exclusion is one of the primary negative behaviors that girls use, and is one of the most hurtful (Leckie, 1998).

What does this mean in light of what the girls *do* see as bullying behavior? Leckie (1998) puts forth the hypothesis that given what is known about the intensity, exclusivity, and intimacy of female friendships, the intention of telling someone not to associate with a particular person--exclusion--is not meant with an intent to harm, or aggress, but rather to protect the status quo: the existing relationship which could be perceived as under threat from other girls. Therefore, in order to protect and maintain the current social standing and relationships with peers, girls may purposefully, though indirectly and often via a third party, manipulate, ostracize, and victimize others (Leckie, 1998).

In light of the negative outcomes for the victims, in that they feel neglected and left out, it would seem that this should be classified as a bullying behavior. However, Leckie (1998) maintains that this behavior was not classified as such because of the motives for engaging in this behavior. Even though the girls are using aggressive means to obtain an end, from their perspective, the motivation to do so was a positive reflection of their desire to preserve and protect an important friendship.

The results of this study suggest that indirect behaviors, or relational aggression, may be considered bullying when the intent is to harm, but they may be perceived entirely differently should the intent be preservation of a relationship. Thus, perception is the key when studying relational aggression, since two girls may engage in the same behaviors with two different purposes. The implication is that not all girls may respond to intervention aimed at reducing just the behaviors, if the girls themselves do not perceive that they are engaging in negative, aggressive activities (Leckie, 1998).

Campbell and Frabutt, 1999

Once the research on relational aggression had been established as an exploratory field of study, different aspects of this aggression became of interest to others seeking to know more. One such study was undertaken to examine the potential connections between mothers' interaction styles and disciplinary strategies, and children's overt and relational forms of aggression. It was also a consideration that these connections may be different for male and female offspring (Campbell & Frabutt, 1999).

A secondary purpose of this study was to evaluate any contributions or possible interplay of mothers' interaction styles and disciplinary strategies regarding children's overall aggression. This study addresses independent contributions of mothers' interaction styles and disciplinary strategies and investigates some of the complex processes through which these parenting attributes may influence children's aggression (Campbell & Frabutt, 1999).

To thoroughly explore these purposes, four clear goals were established. These included: (a) to examine associations between mothers' interaction styles and disciplinary

strategies and children's relational and overt aggression, (b) to consider possible gender differences in connections between mothers' interaction styles and disciplinary strategies and children's relational and overt aggression, (c) to evaluate the contributions and possible interplay of mothers' interaction styles and disciplinary strategies with regard to children's aggression, and, (d) to examine connections between family and peer contexts during a period in which children were confronted with multiple challenges associated with the co-occurrence of the onset of adolescence and the transition into middle school (Campbell & Frabutt, 1999).

The sample for this study included 140 married, working-class mothers and their sixth grade children. For a two-hour span, the mothers and their children were separated to complete questionnaires in privacy, then reunited and videotaped while participating in a 20-minute interaction task. At the end of the school year, the children's teachers completed two questionnaires regarding the students' aggression (Campbell & Frabutt, 1999).

The interaction task was designed to elicit information about mother-child dynamics. Later, the interactions were assessed and coded, using an adaptation of the Iowa Family Interaction Scales (Campbell & Frabutt, 1999). The codings ranged from 1 = not characteristic to 7 = mainly characteristic. Behavioral codes were determined by frequency, intensity, and context of behaviors.

Results. Preliminary analysis suggested that there were gender differences in overt and relational aggression, which replicates findings by Crick and colleagues. It was

again found that overt aggression was more typical for boys than girls and relational aggression was more typical for girls than for boys (Campbell & Frabutt, 1999).

Curiously, a trend emerged suggesting that maternal negativity was associated with higher levels of relational aggression in girls ($r = .20, p < .10$) and a modest association between observer reports of mothers' harsh discipline and overt aggression ($r = .20, p < .05$). Similarly in boys, maternal negativity was associated with higher levels of relational aggression ($r = .21, p < .05$) and overt aggression ($r = .33, p < .05$). Conversely, maternal positivity was associated with lower levels of overt aggression ($r = -.32, p < .01$), and mother and child reports of harsh discipline were associated with higher levels of overt aggression ($r = .21, p < .05, r = .21, p < .05$, respectively; Campbell & Frabutt, 1999).

Discussion. Findings suggest that parenting may be linked in a modest way with children's overt and relational aggression. However, gender differences were found only in connections between parenting and children's overt aggression. It was connected more often and more strongly in association with boys' overt aggression than with girls' overt aggression, whereas the connection between parenting and relational aggression was similar for both boys and girls (Campbell & Frabutt, 1999).

This is an unanticipated find, considering the clear gender differences in relational aggression Crick and colleagues found with their numerous studies. However, Campbell and Frabutt (1999) hypothesize that this may just be a reflection of societal norms, in which mothers acknowledge overt aggression as the preferred form of aggression for males, and a greater tolerance for overt aggression among males than females. On the

other hand, relational aggression, due to its nature, is difficult to observe and thus may fall lower on the parental radar. Consequently it may not be seen as a significant concern within the home and family context (Campbell & Frabutt, 1999).

Application to Present Study

Relational aggression is a young field of study, and there are many possible avenues with which to broaden existing knowledge. A qualitative study, such as this one, can hope to touch upon some aspects of this unpredictable social phenomenon that quantitative may not. By seeking to speak directly with the student(s) themselves who employ relational aggression, the author hopes to explore some possible motivating factors. Prior investigations on overt aggression have given the research a basis by which to compare and contrast findings on relational aggression. Though the studies by Crick and colleagues have established the milestones of relational aggression, current research has only just begun to investigate how the habits of relational aggression are learned, whether it is from familial patterns, social exposure, school culture, or as a developmental stage all children go through. The current research has just begun to, "fill in the blanks."

From a social perspective, it has been argued that external environment contributes extensively to acquiring and maintaining overt aggression. This suggests that children learn from their role models, such as their parents and peers, to use aggressive means to achieve their goals (Espelage et al., 2000). Does this hold true for relational aggression as well? The study by Campbell and Frabutt (1999) indicated that parenting style might have less to do with acquiring relationally aggressive habits than with acquiring overtly aggressive habits. However, if one were to ascribe to the externally

oriented view excluding all others, then the notion of perception and free will would not enter the equation. The suggestion is that children of families who use aggression to obtain their social status, desired objects, familial attention, or any other preferred object or desire, will become bullies or aggressive children. There are always exceptions to the rule and when a child at home sees violence that, of course, does not mean that he or she will consistently carry it into his or her social environment.

If this is the argument for the external learning theory of aggression, how does this tie into the relational aggression aspect of aggression? If fathers are the role models for young boys, then conversely mothers must be the role models for young girls. Must a girl have a “catty” or verbally aggressive mother to learn these behaviors?

In the study by Espelage et al. (2000) their findings suggest that adult influence plays a substantial role in the development of aggressive behaviors, independent of the effect from peer influence. However, peer influence was found to be significant when looking at negative activities such as damaging or destroying property, participating in gang activities, and fighting. This relationship appears as if parents have the most influence on internal attributions and characteristics but peers and social groups have the most influence on external actions and activities.

Relational aggression appears to be a socially minded activity. If peers then have the most influence on external actions and activities, it follows that many of the motivating factors are peer-related. Using qualitative research, this author hopes to explore those motivating factors within the peer-related context of school.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study was conducted using a peer nomination instrument and interviews with the nominated student(s). The protocols from the Human Subjects Review board at the University of Northern Iowa were followed concerning obtaining permission for entry into the school and the wording for parent permission forms. The peer nomination instrument and the interview protocol submitted to the review board were both approved for use in this study.

Since relational aggression is so indirect, a clearly identified victim and an equally clearly identified aggressor is generally atypical. In an effort to make identification as precise as possible, a peer nomination instrument was used. The 1995 Crick and Grotpeter study supports the reasoning for using a peer nomination instrument only rather than incorporating teacher and other adult input. Specifically, because of the relatively indirect nature of relationally aggressive actions, as well as shifting peer group dynamics, it was thought that for the purposes of this study it might have been difficult for those outside the peer group to reliably observe and interpret the behaviors occurring within the peer group. It was thought that the peers themselves would be the most accurate informants. The nominated student(s) were drawn from those with parent permission to participate in this study along with three peers were interviewed to better understand some of the complex dynamics of relational aggression from multiple age-group perspectives.

Site

The site for this study is a rural midwestern school serving middle through high school students. The average size of the graduating class is approximately 50 students. This site was chosen based on the familiarity of the researcher with the staff as well as with the age group while there fulfilling other academic obligations. An ongoing concern in the school about relationally aggressive behavior among the sixth grade class was an additional determining factor. The helpfulness and cooperation of the staff was an added benefit to conducting research at this school. Permission from the principal was obtained for entry into the site for research purposes.

Participants

Since only sixth grade students were selected to be participants, the entire sixth grade class was approached in a group setting to be asked to participate in this study. The research supports the hypothesis that relational aggression is specific to females with little to no gender cross-over (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). However, to obtain as complete a picture as possible, both boys and girls were approached to take part in this study.

There are a total of 51 sixth grade students at this school: four special education students and 47 regular education students. Of this population, 24 were males and 27 were females. Ethnicity percentages were not determined.

From the population approached to participate in this study, 14 students responded, for a consent rate of 27%. Of these 14, three were male and 11 were female. Repeated attempts, by both the researcher and the guidance counselor at the school, were made in an effort to bolster the return rate, with minimal success.

Procedures

Distribution of Parent Permission Forms

To address the sixth grade class as a whole, the students were assembled in the gymnasium with one teacher and the guidance counselor present. The students were informed as to the nature of the study (exploring something called relational aggression), why it was being conducted (to obtain a degree in school), and the details of the peer nomination instrument. They were also apprised of the opportunity to be picked for an interview following analysis of the peer nomination instrument. The students were told that the researcher would pick one person to interview and would randomly select up to four more people to interview. The parent permission forms were distributed with the students and collected the following day.

Peer Nomination Instrument

A peer nomination instrument was adapted from that described in the 1995 Crick and Grotpeter study used to assess relationally aggressive behaviors, as well as some aspects of social adjustment. Slight modifications were made to the original instrument to make the data collection anonymous. This instrument consisted of 17 items, which included four subscales designed to assess social behavior. These subscales include items on physical aggression, verbal aggression, relational aggression, and prosocial behavior. These particular indicators were used because they represent the theories most extensively explored in past research evaluating children's social adjustment (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

Physical and verbal aggression was assessed with a three- and two-item scale respectively and was drawn from those used in previous research (e.g., Asher & Williams, 1987; Coie & Dodge, 1983; Dodge, 1980 as cited in Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; refer to Appendix A for a description of the items). Relational aggression was assessed with a five-item scale that was developed for use in the 1995 Crick and Grotpeter study (refer to Appendix A for item descriptions). Items included in the relational aggression scale represent behaviors that are purposeful attempts to harm, or threats to harm, another's peer relationship or social status. The prosocial scale was comprised of four items representing socially desirable behaviors such as helping someone else when they are in need, or making someone else feel better if they are sad.

Administration of the peer nomination instrument. The students who had returned the parent permission forms were gathered in an empty study hall room, where each item was read to them. The students were supplied with a class list, where each of their peers' names had a corresponding number. The participants were directed to use only the number to indicate who was being nominated in response to each question. Once administration was complete, the students were told that the researcher would pick four students to interview, and then directed to go back to class.

Interviews

A semi-structured interview format was constructed. In order to protect the identity of the student nominated for the most relationally aggressive behaviors, the interviewees were asked the same questions with little to no variation. Some flexibility was incorporated for ease and flow of conversation. This semi-structured format

consisted of 10 predetermined questions with precise wording and an open-ended layout to allow for flexibility and exploration of perception. Since the nature of this form of aggression is a highly personal one, some questions were broad enough to avoid inference that the interviewee was the student nominated. Each question had a subset of questions prepared for some possible responses, and every effort was made so the interviewee would not be accused, verbally attacked, or in any way uncomfortable through the course of the interview (see Appendix B for interview protocol).

Participants. Three students plus the peer nominated student were interviewed for 20 to 25 minutes each. The focus of the interviews was relationships in general and the dynamics of those relationships specifically. Though the nominated student was not asked explicit questions about her experience with relationally aggressive behaviors, the questions were phrased in such a way that the information was transmitted regardless. All interviewees appeared relaxed and comfortable throughout the interview process.

Transcription. Interviews were transcribed for later analysis, and peer comments were examined for common patterns in the responses. The comments were then coded according to its relevance to each of the research questions in chapter one. The responses coded to best fit the specific research questions are included in the Results section. The responses are then further analyzed in narrative format in chapter five.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The findings of this study are summarized according to the chronological order in which the events happened, beginning with the distribution of parent permission forms, during which the researcher first had contact with the sixth grade class as a whole. Following this is a description of the peer nomination instrument and the procedures for application. Also within this section are the results of the nomination instrument and the students approached for an interview. After the peer nomination section is a description of the interview questions and process. Included in this segment is the rationale for incorporating the data from another of the students, rather than just the nominated student, as originally intended.

Distribution of Parent Permission Forms

The sixth grade students were assembled in the gymnasium with one teacher and the guidance counselor present. The parent permission forms were distributed with the students and collected the following day. The initial return rate was limited, with only nine students returning their permission forms. Three days after the initial contact, the students were again gathered, this time in the library, to thoroughly explain the study and to answer any questions. Again, the return rate was minimal. The guidance counselor throughout this process was making contact with students and reminding them not to forget the permission forms on days when the researcher was unable to travel to the school. The end results of these efforts were 14 participants able to complete the peer nomination form with the option to be interviewed.

Peer Nomination Instrument

The peer nomination instrument consisted of 17 items, which included four subscales designed to assess social behavior. The students who had returned the parent permission forms were gathered in an empty study hall room, where each item was read to them. The students were supplied with a class list, where each of their peers' names had a corresponding number. The participants were directed to use only the number to indicate who was being nominated in response to each question. Once administration was complete, the students were told that the researcher would pick four students to interview, and then directed to go back to class.

The results of the peer nomination instrument showed an overwhelming preference for one student above all others in the class for relational aggression as well as a significant amount of nominations for the other subscales. The student nominated was female, but unfortunately she had not turned in a parent permission form and was ineligible to be approached for an interview.

Of the 14 participants who were eligible for an interview, one girl in particular was nominated by 9 of the 13 other participants for Item 15, which stated, "Find the number of three people who try and exclude or keep certain people from being in their group when doing things together." She was also nominated by at least three other participants on each of the relationally aggressive items, except for Item 10, which she received one nomination for. She was approached for an interview and consented. For the rest of this paper, she will be referred to as Jackie.

The second student approached for an interview was contacted because she was nominated for 15 of the 18 items at least once. She will be referred to as Grace for the remainder of the paper.

Interviews

A semi-structured interview format was constructed. In order to protect the identity of the student nominated for the most relationally aggressive behaviors, the interviewees were asked the same questions with little to no variation. Some flexibility was incorporated for ease and flow of conversation. This semi-structured format consisted of ten predetermined questions with precise wording and an open-ended layout to allow for flexibility and exploration of perception. Since the nature of this form of aggression is a highly personal one, some questions performed are broad enough to avoid inference that the interviewee was the student nominated. Each question had a subset of questions prepared for some possible responses, but the interviewee was not made to feel accused, attacked, or in any way uncomfortable through the course of the interview.

Participants

Three students plus the peer nominated student were interviewed for 20 to 25 minutes each. The focus of the interviews was relationships in general and the dynamics of those relationships specifically. Though the nominated student was not asked explicit questions about her experience with relationally aggressive behaviors, the questions were phrased in such a way that the information was transmitted regardless. All interviewees appeared relaxed and comfortable throughout the interview process.

Transcription

Interviews were transcribed for later analysis, and peer comments were examined for common patterns in the responses. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, the data gathered was in a very broad format. In order to condense and organize this information into a manageable layout that would still relate to the research questions some decisions had to be made. After reviewing all of the transcripts from the students, the author realized that while the nominated girl's responses were certainly valuable, each of the three other interviewees represented unique and equally valuable perspectives. Each of the four students interviewed had insightful comments about the dynamics of the class and how the social environment within the school was structured. To decide what information to include in this paper, the author chose to look at other trends or patterns within the responses.

One tentative pattern emerged when assessing the data. Of the four students interviewed, two of them identified themselves as in the "popular" group or usually hanging out with the "popular kids." The other two interviewees either blatantly stated that they were "definitely not in the popular group, that's for sure," or inferred it by using terms such as "they" and "that whole group" when referring to popular students as opposed to, "the other students" or "my friends."

As a result of this speculated pattern as well as a desire to keep this study within manageable limits, the two interviewees who thought of themselves as popular will have data included in this paper. This is not to say that the other two interviewees did not have valuable information to contribute, on the contrary, their answers and insights were eye

opening. However, this study is concerned more with the aggressor's perspectives, rather than the victim or non-identified students, though that would be a worthwhile topic for later study.

Interview Data

To organize this information for the results section, each research question will be listed, and the responses from Jackie and Grace that were thought to pertain to that particular question will be included in that order. Jackie's response will begin with a "J" and Grace's response will begin with a "G."

1. Do the girls investing in relational aggression as a way to manipulate social relationships view their actions as aggressive behavior? Aggression defined is, "(1) feelings of anger; and (2) intent to hurt or harm" (Crick et al., 1996).

J: Sometimes she will start, um, saying stuff that isn't true to tell people that so they'll get mad at her.

J: We get along, so I don't really talk to her, other people have been telling her that to quit spreading rumors because it, they don't like being told that stuff isn't true and they don't like hearing that.

J: She would ignore me and would just walk away when I came over.

J: Yeah, a coupla times, there's this real popular girl, and I always try to be her friend and then, I think that I can't cause she just like ditch me, but then she checked it out with her friends, she... we became good friends after that.

J: Yeah, I've seen someone like, talk behind the other person's back, and I think that's pretty mean.

J: Yeah, I felt bad a lot of times when like the boys are making fun of another boy because he's not as cool as them or something like that.

G: Yeah, there's a few boys in our class that can't really say anything nice to anybody, all they, they try to put people down and if like you have something that they want like gum or something, they'll like beg you and everything, and try to be really nice to you.

G: They make fun of me and they talk behind my back and talk right in front of me about me bad and they talk about my friends bad too.

G: Because they try to become friends with us, but some of the girls don't like the other girl and she just came up with her.

G: Every girl that's tried, like some of the girls that talk behind the other person's back I don't, like, people who try to be in our group I'll be nice to them and everything.

2. Do attributional biases play a part in deciding to utilize relationally aggressive actions? Specifically, do the instigators of relational aggression attribute these same types of behaviors to other girls out of accurate perceptions, or are there situational circumstances that contribute to the assumption that relationally aggressive behaviors are taking place (i.e., a girl hears her name being spoken by another girl in the hallway and assumes that the other girl is spreading rumors).

J: I always invite them into conversations and I never leave them out, and I try to be a good friend.

J: You can tell them that if she wants to be a real friend, then she can stop saying lies because people won't want a friend that tells them lies.

J: I don't think like the popular group and the other group, they don't, it's not that they don't get along, it's just that they choose to hang out with the other people, and they don't really get in fights, they just hang out with other people.

J: Yeah, and we, I... like when someone gets in a fight in the un-popular group and they wanna go in [our] group, then um, the people in the popular group, um tell her they can hang out with us and stuff, and then she ends up going back over there and they become friends again, so...

J: Um, I think I woulda told her about the rumor, because I didn't want to get in the middle of it, and I just ignored it and pretended it didn't happen.

J: I didn't, I was afraid to, I didn't think they'd listen to me, they'd just tell me to be quiet or something.

G: A regular friend is someone that you can help out if they need help and they'll help you. They won't say mean things behind your back. That's what a best friend does too.

G: Um, tell them to their face that you don't like them talking about them behind their backs or in front of them.

G: I would rather have my friend come up and tell me and tell me why she's mad at me, cause then I can know what's wrong.

G: Yeah, because I am, I have one like a group of friends and then I am friends with another group of friends that they don't really like, but I'm friends with them, so...

G: Well, the group I hang out with the most, they're funny and outgoing and they like to do stuff. The other group I say hi to a lot, but we, usually the other group, they just, I don't know, I...I mean I still say hi to them and won't say mean things behind their back but I don't hang with them very much.

G: Kind of like felt bad, because they were talking mean behind their back and like if they had a good reason to, then that wouldn't be so bad, but I don't know, it still seemed mean.

3. Have instigators of relational aggression at one time perceived themselves as a victim? If once having felt a victim of relational aggression, what is the rationale for perpetrating against others?

J: Someone that you can trust not to tell secrets and they won't talk behind your back and they're always nice to you.

J: Um, I asked her why she was mad at me and she told me why and I said I was sorry and I wouldn't do it again I don't remember why, and then she said, "ok" and we were friends again.

J: Well, sorry for the other person because they didn't know she was doing it, and I just try to tell myself that I shouldn't do it cause I felt bad for the other person.

J: Yeah, it happened once before but I can't remember what they said it was about, and then they told me they were sorry for saying it.

J: Mad, and she could tell I got mad and then she came up to me and said she was sorry.

J: I would probably have told her that I wouldn't have wanted to be her friend if she would've kept saying rumors, but that I was glad she said sorry and just try not to do it again and we can be friends.

G: Um, it depends, some of my friends have other people tell me that their mad at me and some of them will just come right up and say their mad at me because I did so and so, and then I tried to fix it.

G: Um, mad that unless I did something horribly wrong, then I deserve that they are mad at me because I did something bad to them, but if it's just for some reason that they feel like being mad at me then that's not a good friend, so she's going to be mad at me for no reason.

G: Um, yeah, the one girl, she came up to me and said that she was mad at me because I said something mean behind her back, but it was a different girl, so I told her that and she believed me so now we have a really good relationship.

G: I told her that it wasn't me, it was someone else that said that and tell her that I was sorry even though I didn't say anything behind her back, and then she...I helped her deal with the other girl who said it.

G: Yeah, they'll like start following you, and we've had that happen before in our grade before, they'll just try to follow us and some people get mad, some people just leave it alone.

G: I probably would have told my friend not to be so mean.

4. Do instigators of relational aggression view themselves positively or negatively once they have aggressed? Do they believe relational aggression an effective method of interaction between peers in order to obtain the desired results?

J: Yeah, I wish I could just tell them to be quiet and leave him alone and say that we're all the same. And not to make fun of other people because they wouldn't want to be made fun of.

J: No, I have a lot of good friends.

G: Not really, it shouldn't matter who you hang out with. Some, I don't know, if like, they're a good friend then that's your choice, you can pick who your friends are, it shouldn't say anything about you, cause I have a lot of friends in different groups or whatever.

G: Yeah, um, like, when if they say something mean, or something bad happens in their family, or someone dies, I'll try to help them and cheer them up.

Summary

When looking at these responses, separated from the questions they are answering, it may seem confusing to understand how each one relates to the research question. The responses will be explored in narrative format in Chapter Five. Some of the responses seen above may seem to be driven by socially pleasing tendencies, which is normal considering that the researcher had only been in the building for a few months, and had had no direct contact with these specific students prior to this. This does not negate their value, however some care should be taken when interpreting the responses to keep this in mind.

In summary, each girl represents a personal perspective on her everyday environment and social interactions. Their responses are unique in that they are from two different viewpoints, but as seen above, they have several themes in common, such as the reaction to “outsiders” trying to get into their group. Given the cohesive nature of middle school relationships (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000), a dissenting voice may be difficult to find.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Since the research on how relational aggression is learned is still being explored, it is difficult to correlate what is seen in the girls' responses with a specific theory model or basis, however, it is possible to correlate the girls' answers with the literature examined in chapter two. Based on their replies, both Jackie and Grace are typical sixth grade girls, in that they have insecurities, are socially aware of their peers, and are seemingly aware of how their actions affect those around them. This is evident in some of the socially pleasing answers they used, also indicating that they have a sense of right and wrong. The author is not implying that the girls were not telling the truth, but that most people meeting someone for the first time would want to present as positive an image as possible. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that some of the answers given by the girls were based on a socially pleasing motivation, rather than complete, soul-baring honesty. Bearing this in mind, the author will explore the responses and support them with the evidence found in the literature.

Narrative Exploration of Research Questions

To organize the material in this chapter, the author has chosen two answers from each girl thought to pertain most to the research questions from chapter five. The author will correlate the answers with evidence found in the literature from chapter two. A short narrative discussion will follow each question to illustrate how the answers are connected and to explore Grace and Jackie's differences and similarities in perceiving their environment.

Research Question One

Do the girls investing in relational aggression as a way to manipulate social relationships view their actions as aggressive behavior? Aggression is defined as, “(1) feelings of anger; and (2) intent to hurt or harm” (Crick et al., 1996).

J: Yeah, I’ve seen someone like, talk behind the other person’s back, and I think that’s pretty mean.

J: Yeah, a coupla times... there’s this real popular girl, and I always try to be her friend and then, I think that I can’t cause she just [would] like ditch me, but then she checked it out with her friends, she... we became good friends after that.

G: They [the boys] make fun of me and they talk behind my back and talk right in front of me about me bad and they talk about my friends bad too.

G: Every girl that’s tried [to get into our group]... like some of the girls that talk behind the other person’s back I don’t like, people who try to be in our group I’ll be nice to them and everything.

There are elements of many things in these four responses. While the girls are not talking directly about aggression they have partaken in, they recognize it. There is no specific mention of any physical aggression, but several inferences of relational aggression, implying intent to hurt. For example, in the first one, Jackie is saying that she thinks it is mean to talk behind someone else’s back. During the course of the interview she states this several times, and never once alludes that she herself takes part in talking behind someone else’s back. This is in keeping with her nominations as well: She was only nominated once for talking behind other peoples’ back, but was nominated nine times for exclusionary practices. This could correspond with Leckie’s (1998) hypothesis that girls do not perceive themselves as performing aggressive acts if the acts are intended to preserve or protect a friendship. According to Leckie’s research, exclusion

was the one activity that did not appear to be classified as a bullying behavior by the participants in her study. However, anecdotal evidence obtained while researching this study from teachers, parents, and girls have suggested that exclusion is one of the primary negative behaviors that girls use, and is one of the most hurtful (Leckie, 1998).

In her second response, we see that Jackie wants to be a popular girls' friend, but this girl had to "check it out" with her friends before Jackie was allowed to be her friend. This in turn could prompt the exclusionary activities she was nominated for by intending to keep other girls away from disrupting the fragile relationship she established with the popular girl.

In Grace's responses we see a somewhat different scenario. Grace presents the picture that she is in the popular group--the reference to "our group"--but also that she is a target of the boys' group. She states that the boys also make fun of her friends as well. She appears not to like this activity when either male or female friends represent it, and is expressing hurt feelings. She mentions when the boys, "make fun of me and they talk behind my back and talk right in front of me about me bad." In relating this to the literature, Crick et al. (1996) established that children do associate relationally manipulative acts with the intent to harm, or just plain "meanness."

When looking at these responses, we see elements of relational aggression in all four of them. Crick et al. (1996) also established as a lateral finding from their study that children, especially girls, view relational aggression as one of the most normative aggressive behaviors in their peer group, particularly for interactions in which a girl was the aggressor. An additional finding is that children who are relationally aggressive are

more likely than overtly aggressive children to cite relational aggression as the norm in girl-to-girl interactions (Crick et al., 1996). While social norms were not addressed in the questions, Jackie seems to take it in stride that the girl she tried to be friends with wanted to check with her other friends first before allowing Jackie into her social group. In fact, her affect here was happy, since she was looking at results--the result being that she was allowed to be this girl's friend--and not at the process of becoming her friend.

An interesting offshoot of this Crick et al. 1996 study is that non-aggressive children seemed to be aware of both of these norms. Grace was not nominated as aggressive by her peers, but was nominated for almost every question at a minimum once, indicating that she presents several facets of her personality to at least one person. Grace in her second response addressed her awareness of both norms nicely, by implying understanding of the desire to be in the popular group, and realizing that the girls who were in the popular group consistently "talked bad" about the girls trying to get into the group. She also stated that she did not like it and would try to be nice to the girls.

Research Question Two

Do attributional biases play a part in deciding to utilize relationally aggressive actions? Specifically, do the instigators of relational aggression attribute these same types of behaviors to other girls out of accurate perceptions, or are there situational circumstances that contribute to the assumption that relationally aggressive behaviors are taking place (i.e., a girl hears her name being spoken by another girl in the hallway and assumes that the other girl is spreading rumors).

J: I don't think like the popular group and the other group, they don't, it's not that they don't get along, it's just that they choose to hang out with the other people, and they don't really get in fights, they just hang out with other people.

J: Yeah, and we, I... like when someone gets in a fight in the un-popular group and they wanna go in the other group, then um, the people in the popular group, um tell her they can hang out with us and stuff, and then she ends up going back over there and they become friends again, so...

G: I would rather have my friend come up and tell me and tell me why she's mad at me, cause then I can know what's wrong.

G: Kind of like felt bad, because they were talking mean behind their back and like if they had a good reason to, then that wouldn't be so bad, but I don't know, it still seemed mean.

Jackie's responses are interesting in that she interpreted the question as a member of a group rather than as an individual. She was asked if she thought students wanted to change groups but couldn't. Her perception is that the people in the other group are happy with their friends and that's whom they would choose to hang out with anyway. They only come to the popular group if they get into a fight with the people in their own group and eventually they mend the fight and go back to that group of friends. This very well may be true, though we see from Grace's earlier response that at some point when other girls attempt to get into the popular group, they will be discouraged by someone talking bad about them.

This perspective from the popular group is addressed by Leckie's 1998 study, which maintains that communication appears to be a central characteristic of girls' relationships. Trust levels, loyalty, and significance of disclosure all seem to increase as the relationship becomes more significant in the lives of the girls. Once these bonds have solidified, it is hypothesized that the relationship becomes something to be jealously

guarded and protected against interlopers. If others try to interfere with this relationship, the way is opened for aggressive interactions between girls (Leckie, 1998). When someone from one of the “other groups” tries to interfere with the established dynamic of the popular group, the way is opened for aggressive interactions, which is what Grace described in her initial response for Research Question One, though it seems that Jackie’s observation of the attempt to change groups is different from Grace’s.

Grace’s perspectives are more from an individual viewpoint. She was asked if she would rather have someone else come up to her and tell her that her friend was mad at her, or would she rather have her friend come and tell her she was mad. She replied that she would rather have her friend come and tell her, which argues that Grace would rather be given the opportunity to set the record straight herself than rely on others’ perceptions. Her view is also that if the other person had a good reason for talking behind someone else’s back, then it wouldn’t be so bad, however, “it still seemed mean.”

Grace’s responses also tie into Leckie’s 1998 results, suggesting that indirect behaviors, or relational aggression, may be considered bullying, or mean, when the intent is to harm, but they may be perceived entirely differently should there be a good reason, such as preservation of a relationship. Thus, perception is the key when studying relational aggression, since two girls may engage in the same behaviors with two different purposes. The implication is that not all girls may respond to intervention aimed at reducing just the behaviors, if the girls themselves do not perceive that they are engaging in negative, aggressive activities (Leckie, 1998).

Research Question Three

Have instigators of relational aggression at one time perceived themselves as a victim? If once having felt a victim of relational aggression, what is the rationale for perpetrating against others?

J: Um, I asked her why she was mad at me and she told me why and I said I was sorry and I wouldn't do it again I don't remember why, and then she said, "ok" and we were friends again.

J: I would probably have told her that I wouldn't have wanted to be her friend if she would've kept saying rumors, but that I was glad she said sorry and just try not to do it again and we can be friends.

G: Um, it depends, some of my friends have other people tell me that their mad at me and some of them will just come right up and say their mad at me because I did so and so, and then I tried to fix it.

G: Um, yeah, the one girl, she came up to me and said that she was mad at me because I said something mean behind her back, but it was a different girl, so I told her that and she believed me so now we have a really good relationship.

Clearly both girls have been victims of relational aggression, whether they were aware of it at the time or not. Equally as clear, it does not seem to matter all that much to them that they had been victims at all. Preserving the friendship at all costs seemed to take precedence over any hurt feelings or indignation about false rumors that were being spread. This leads to further support for Leckie's 1998 research where she theorized that socially manipulative strategies, such as the behaviors employed by relationally aggressive children, serve two functions: (a) to protect existing friendships from the intrusion of others, and (b) to deliberately harm targeted girls through rejection and isolation.

Girls' friendships are intense constructs. This is evidenced here in this study by the determination to maintain the friendship whether the victim had been truly wronged or not. Anything threatening the dyadic balance of the power structure within the group, or clique, must be quickly established as either something to be taken seriously or something to be scorned. These friendships are so fluid in their nature, with highs and lows, ebbs and flows, that the power balance may be shifting constantly. When these relationships break down for one reason or another, each girl has the potential to become a victim of relational aggression. What once was a relationship equal in terms of status and power becomes unbalanced while one girl gains support from peers, and the other becomes ostracized, rejected, and excluded (Leckie, 1998).

Research Question Four

Do instigators of relational aggression view themselves positively or negatively once they have aggressed? Do they believe relational aggression an effective method of interaction between peers in order to obtain the desired results?

J: Yeah, I wish I could just tell them to be quiet and leave him alone and say that we're all the same. And not to make fun of other people because they wouldn't want to be made fun of.

J: No, I have a lot of good friends.

G: Not really, it shouldn't matter who you hang out with. Some, I don't know, if like, they're a good friend then that's your choice, you can pick who your friends are, it shouldn't say anything about you, cause I have a lot of friends in different groups or whatever.

G: Yeah, um, like, when if they say something mean, or something bad happens in their family, or someone dies, I'll try to help them and cheer them up.

While their responses do not address completely the view they hold of themselves whether positively or negatively, their responses both indicate that they do not, in principle, like some of the actions that make up relational aggression. The question remains however, if they have the emotional and empathetic maturity to recognize it when they themselves are using it. Both girls seem to use how many friends belonging to what groups they have as a way to gauge how successful they are in their social settings, a gauge by which many students measure their social success. According to Grotmeter and Crick, in their 1996 study on whether or not relational aggression harms friendship quality, the negative effects of problems experienced within the peer group context, such as peer rejection in a relatively unstructured setting like the cafeteria, gym class, or recess can be somewhat buffered if these children have experienced success within a reciprocal, dyadic friendship (Bukowski, Hoiza, & Boivin, 1993, Parker & Asher, 1993 as cited in Grotmeter & Crick, 1996).

Grotmeter and Crick (1996) mention that even though relationally aggressive children may seem to be undesirable as friends, these children report friendships with high levels of intimacy and trust, though with low levels of self-disclosure. Additionally, though relationally aggressive children reported low levels of self-disclosure to their friends, they reported that their friends self-disclosed to them often (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996). A surprising find of the research reports that relationally aggressive children describe relatively high levels of aggression within the confines of the friendship. This touches on the constantly shifting power balances and the fluid nature of female friendships. There may be high levels of aggression within the friendships, but in

conjunction with the high levels of communication between females reported by Leckie's 1998 findings, these incidences of relational aggression may be fast, fleeting, and shelved by the next day. However, this assumption also may lead to the inference that there are layers of relational aggression, and degrees to how severe it can get.

Summary of research questions. According to Crick's 1996 study, her findings showed the first reliable evidence that relational aggression is relatively stable over time and is predictive of future social maladjustment (Crick, 1996). However,

evaluation of the relative contribution of relational aggression to the prediction of future adjustment revealed that relational aggression provided unique information about adjustment and about negative *changes* in adjustment for girls only (e.g. relationally aggressive girls became more rejected by peers over the course of the school year (Crick, 1996, p. 2325).

To support this, is Crick and Grotpeter's study of 1995, where their results showed a significant main effect of relational aggression and children's loneliness scores, and a significant interaction effect indicating that relationally aggressive children were significantly more lonely than were their non-relationally aggressive peers. Interestingly, follow-up analysis of the interaction effect showed that the main effect was apparent for girls only. In their discussion, Crick and Grotpeter mention the social standings of controversial children, indicating that relationally aggressive children may fall into that category since theoretically controversial children direct their relationally aggressive behaviors disproportionately among their peers, with specific children consistently the victim of these behaviors while other children may not ever come into contact with this behavior from these peers.

Crick and Grotpeter (1995) also indicate that the pattern of findings in this study suggests that the controversial status children may play a critical role in controlling the group structure and nature of peer interactions. Their popularity with some, but not all peers, may give these children what is known as “social authority” and allows them to successfully manipulate peer group relationships.

Jackie and Grace

Jackie and Grace are not one-dimensional girls. They may have different patterns of communication at home, outside of school, and within school. This study did not intend to single them out as worse or better than their peers. Each of the girls wants what almost every sixth grade student wants: To belong and to have friends that they can trust and who can trust them. While it was mentioned that they are typical sixth graders, they are different in at least one way: Each of them chose to participate in a study in which the majority of their peers chose not to. Throughout the course of the study, the participants remained helpful and cooperative, and these girls in particular were willing to be interviewed. They both gave the impression of normal, happy girls who are well-adjusted and enjoying school. Where then, are the damaging effects of relational aggression? Grace especially, having friends within more than one group of people, may be more at risk for relational aggression within at least one of the groups, while Jackie stays close with her friends in one group. Both girls reported being victims of relational aggression at least once within the interview.

Perhaps the answer lies in the lack of chronic victimization. The incidents the girls referred to were isolated events, clearly recalled and, if not forgotten, then certainly

forgiven in the name of friendship. A third interviewee, whose transcript was not included in this paper, reports instances of repeated victimization, and her affect was much less happy, and she was able to list event after event illustrating her victim status. However, if the chronic victimization is a requirement for having long-lasting detrimental effects, then we are straying into the bullying aspect of aggression. Bullying involves a power differential, which was present when the third interviewee spoke about her experiences, and repeated incidents, which was also present. Perhaps the difference between chronic relational aggression victimization and incidental relational aggression victimization may be researched with further study.

Limitations of the Study

Researcher bias. Having done prior investigations into bully prevention programs and then branching off into relational aggression, the information gained may have influenced how the author approached the participants. While the information has helped tremendously in aiding the author to form knowledgeable and hopefully objective opinions, personal experience, past encounters, and prior exposure may have all subtly, though unintentionally, influenced the writing of this paper.

Qualitative sample. The present study focused on two students who may or may not represent relationally aggressive sixth graders across different school cultures. The school where the sample was drawn from was already concerned about the potential for relationally aggressive activities, thus there was already awareness on the part of the staff and the students to what relationally aggressive acts are, if not the label itself. Though normally for quantitative studies a larger sample would have been ideal, to generate the

sort of data specific to qualitative information, the sample was intentionally a small one. The initial pool from which the nominated student was drawn ideally would have been larger, although the data gathered from the interviewed students would most likely not have changed. One of the initial reasons to undertake a qualitative study was to examine students and their social dynamics in depth. The sample was small enough that the author was able to accomplish that within the school setting. Though preferable to qualitative study, a small sample does affect generalization, and the results may not carry into other settings. Though the scale was small, this study does point out some interesting layers to relational aggression, as well as supporting previous evidence found in earlier studies.

Limited viewpoints examined. The two girls, Jackie and Grace, were included in this study because their responses reflected a similar trend. Students who do not reflect this trend would add depth and perspective to the situations that Grace and Jackie mentioned. Staff insight was also not sought, which could and probably would, add another dimension to the scenario. The belief system that Grace and Jackie reflected was not explored, as was neither their home life, nor their social systems outside of school. While this study was intentionally one-dimensional, exploration of the other aspects of student life would make further study a well-rounded prospect.

Timing. Due to time constraints within the school and on the author herself, there was a small window of time where the author could collect her data. Expanding that window of time could have yielded more insightful results.

Implications for School Psychologists

As a school psychologist in the field, this subject is often a perplexing and frustrating one. The situations that arise concerning this topic are often transient and experienced many times throughout the year with different children. Often the solution is not one that can be applied as a blanket system for every child. Since perception and personal biases play such a large part in the identification of relational aggression, any resolution must incorporate these aspects. Many times the only recourse is to identify it as it is happening and then to deal with it on an individual case by case basis. This is time consuming and can be frustrating if constantly encountering the same aggressors time after time.

Though it may seem an uphill battle to change the aggressor's point of view, meanwhile much can be done with social skills training and conflict resolution programs to enhance the ability of the victim to, "take it in stride." Though this may sound suspiciously like "bully-proofing the victim," which is generally not possible, it can give chronic victims the assurance that he or she is not to blame for the treatment he or she is receiving. Until there is a proven prevention program, adult vigilance and intervention will have some effect.

Implications for Professionals working with Relational Aggression

When a child comes to an adult in school and complains of another student calling him or her names, many times it is shrugged off, or attributed to the other student's "meanness." Attributions play an important role for not only students but teachers as well. As mentioned in this paper, many students relationally aggress not because they are

internally “mean” and they want to hurt someone for the fun of it, but as a bid for social power within the dynamic of the group. If looked at through that filter, perhaps the approach when working with a student who relationally aggresses may differ than when the student is seen as aggressive or vindictive. It is a difficult approach to take, as it involves the refocusing of attributions, but may be worthwhile if the approach taken with the student resolves the situation.

Conclusion

So, what do we have? Is relational aggression an activity that will emotionally scar its victims--and perpetrators--into their adult life? Or is it a transient pattern of communication that girls have learned from their mothers, sisters, and friends that they will eventually outgrow with minimal lasting damage? It is difficult to believe that eventually all women outgrow it, since common sense tells us that we see socially manipulative adults in our workplaces, neighborhoods, and even in our families.

Yet how do we reconcile the fact that relationally aggressive acts take place a hundred times a day in large and small ways at school, and at the time the victims either choose to ignore it to preserve the friendship, or contradict it and chance losing social status? And while at the time the acts did not seem so momentous, but months and even years later they are recalled with a kaleidoscope of emotions? Perhaps developmental levels, maturity, social group structure, family communication patterns, and school culture all come into play and affect whether or not relational aggression becomes a manipulation--or defense--method of choice. The field of relational aggression study may be relatively young, and it will take much more study before this complex social

phenomenon gives up its secrets. However, much of the groundwork has been laid, and further study will help to build the knowledge base and hopefully provide answers to those looking for them.

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APPENDIX A

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL BEHAVIOR SCALE – PEER REPORT

Children's Social Behavior Scale – Peer Report

The following measure was adapted from that described in:

Crick & Grotpeter, 1995

The following is the peer nomination measure. There are a total of 4 subscales in the CSBS-P that can be used.

This version is different from the Periwinkle one in the items selected for each subscale. Another distinction between the two versions is the insertion of a new item (three: Good Leader) and total length of this questionnaire as a consequence of that.

Subscales:

Physical Aggression: Items #5, 11, 14

Verbal Aggression: Items #8, 16

Relational Aggression: Items #4, 7, 10, 12, 15

Prosocial Behavior: Items #3, 6, 9, 13

Internal Uses:

None

Administration Instructions

To answer these questions, students will need a class list. It is suggested that this list is written alphabetically by first name. Each student is assigned a number (ID #). Students answer the questions using those identification numbers. Numbers may not be used more than once for any question. Numbers may only be reused on different questions. Under no circumstances may students use their number for answering any of the questions.

Answers to common student questions:

1. If they cannot think of three peers to put down for a certain question, ask them to think very hard about it, and help them go through the list. If it is clear that they are doing this and cannot come up with anyone, tell them they can write "no" in the blanks for this one question, but deal with this on an individual basis and quietly so children don't just do this and not give any response.
2. If they want to put down more than three peers, tell them to put down the three that are most applicable first (kids that do it the most). They can put additional children in blanks off to the right margin (again, deal with this on an individual basis).

Questions

1. Like

Which (of the people in your class/sixth graders) do you like to hang out with the most? Find their name and number on your class list. Write down their NUMBER in the first blank next to the word LIKE. Now pick another person you like to hang out with the most and put their NUMBER in the second blank next to the number 1. Now find a third person you like to hang out with the most and put their NUMBER in the last blank next to number 1.

2. Don't Like

Now, I want you to write down the number of someone you like to hang out with the least. You may like most of your classmates, but there may be some you like to hang out with less than others. Find the number of the person you like to hang out with the least and put their number in the blank next to number two and the words DON'T LIKE. Now find the number of another child who you like to hang out with the least and put their number in the second blank. Now find a third person and do the same thing.

3. Good Leader

Find the number of three kids who other students look up to and try to be like.

4. Make Others

Find the number of three kids who try to make another kid not like a certain person by spreading rumors about them or talking behind their backs.

5. Hit Others

Now find the numbers of three classmates on your list who hit, kick, or punch others at school. Put their numbers in the three blanks next to the words HIT OTHERS.

6. Do Nice Things

Find the numbers of three people who say or do nice things for other classmates.

7. Keep Out

Find the numbers of three people, who when they are mad at a person, get even by keeping that person from being in their group of friends. EXAMPLES: 1) Say your going to a party with some friends, and someone says "lets invite some kid," we want you to pick someone who would say "NO, I don't want to invite that kid because I'm mad at them." 2) Pick someone who would say to a kid "I'm going to the mall with my friends & you can't come, because I'm mad at you."

8. Insults

Find the number of three people who say mean things to other classmates to insult them or put them down.

9. Helps Others Join

Find the number of three kids who help others join a group or make friends.

10. Ignores Others

Find the numbers of three people who, when they are mad at a person, ignore the person or stop talking to them.

11. Push Others

Find the numbers of three kids who push and shove others around.

12. Stop Liking

Find the number of three people who let their friends know that they will stop liking them unless the friends do what they want them to do.

13. Cheer Up Others

Find the number of three people who try to cheer up other classmates who are upset or sad about something. They try to make them feel happy again.

14. Will Beat Up

Find the number of three kids who tell others that they will beat them up unless the kids do what they say.

15. Keep People

Find the number of three people who try to exclude or keep certain people from being in their group when doing things together (like having lunch in the cafeteria or going to the movies). EXAMPLES: 1) Say your in the cafeteria eating with your friends & someone says "lets ask that kid to sit with us" we want you to pick someone who would say "NO, I don't want that kid to sit with us." 2) Pick someone who would say to a kid "I'm going to the movies with my friends & you can't come."

16. Mean Names

Find the number of three people who call other classmates mean names.

17. Who is my best friend?

CIRCLE: BOY GIRL

1. Like _____

2. Don't Like _____

3. Good Leader _____

4. Make Other Kids _____

5. Hit Others _____

6. Do Nice Things _____

7. Keep Out _____

8. Insults _____

9. Help Others _____

10. Ignores Others _____

11. Push Others _____

12. Stop Liking _____

13. Cheer Up Others _____

14. Will Beat Up _____

15. Keep People _____

16. Mean Names _____

17. Best Friend _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROBES, INTRODUCTORY SCRIPT, AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Probes will be used throughout the interviews to elicit further information thought applicable to the study. Probes include:

1. Tell me more about it.
2. Explain what you mean.
3. Is there anything else?

There will also be an introductory script to reassure the student and to emphasize confidentiality. The script is as follows:

Hello, my name is Katie McLallen, and you might have seen me around the building before. I am a student at the University of Northern Iowa and I'm doing some research for a paper I'm writing. Before we start, I want to say again that this is completely confidential, no one will hear this except for me and I won't use your real name when I write about this, at all. Also, I want to ask you to not use anyone else's name when you're answering my questions, so they have privacy too. Do you have any questions before we start?

Due to the nature of the study, student interviews will focus on the broader topics of peer relationships and friendship qualities. The target student will not know she was the focus of the study, as that may increase anxiety and will likely add to any existing social stresses. Ethically this consideration outweighs any potential benefits of direct and pointed questioning. Questions are as follows:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Do you like school?
 - a. If yes, what makes school enjoyable for you?
 - b. If no, what would make school better?

3. Tell me about your friends. Are they mostly boys or mostly girls?
 - a. Do you have a best friend? Why is she/he your best friend?
 - b. What is your definition of a friend?
 - c. Is that just a regular friend, or a best friend?
4. How do you show your friends that you care about them?
5. I'm trying to better understand some of the relationships that students your age have. Can you tell me if there is anyone at school you don't get along with, without mentioning names?
 - a. If yes, is there anything specific about why you don't get along with this person?
 - b. If no, then let me rephrase the question: Is there anyone at school you have ever had an argument with or a big disagreement with?
6. What did you do to let that other person know that you are unhappy with them, or with something that they have done?
 - a. Has (whatever she had done) worked for you in the past, meaning, did that fix whatever was wrong?
 - b. Can you think of other ways to tell someone you are unhappy with them?
7. Has anyone close to you at school, like your friends, ever been upset or unhappy with you?
 - a. If yes, how did he or she show/tell you that they were upset?
 - i. How did that make you feel?

- b. If no, can you think of a time when someone was angry or upset at something they thought you had done?
 - i. How did that problem get fixed, or how did you guys make up?
8. Do you think there are groups at school? Like the popular group, the sports group, the not-popular group, and so on?
- a. If yes, do you think those groups are important?
 - i. Do you think what group a person is in says something about that person?
 - b. If no, is there a certain group of people you like to hang out with?
 - i. What makes it fun to hang out with them instead of another group of people?
9. Do you think that people sometimes wish they could change groups but can't?
- a. If yes, why do you think they can't change groups?
 - b. If no, have you ever wished to be friends with someone, but thought you couldn't?
10. Without mentioning names, have you ever seen someone do something that seemed kind of mean to someone else in your class?
- a. If yes, how did that make you feel to see that?
 - i. If you could go back in time to that moment, is there anything you would like to have changed or done differently?
 - b. If no, is there any time you have ever felt bad or sorry for someone?
 - i. Why did you feel sorry for them?

APPENDIX C

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH JACKIE

I = Interviewer

P = Participant

I: So how are you today?

P: Good.

I: Good, ok. Well, hello, my name is Katie McLallen, and you might have seen me around the building before. I am a student at the University of Northern Iowa and I'm doing some research for a paper I'm writing. Before we start, I want to say again that this is completely confidential, no one will hear this except for me and I won't use your real name when I write about this, at all. Also, I want to ask you to not use anyone else's name when you're answering my questions, so they have privacy too. Do you have any questions before we start?

P: Nope.

I: Ok. Tell me about yourself.

P: Um, I like to play sports, I play basketball and softball and I like to hang out with my friends.

I: Do you like school?

P: Yeah.

I: What makes school enjoyable for you?

P: I like the teachers at the school and I like block scheduling because it's easier, and I like my friends that come here.

I: Tell me about your friends. Are they mostly boys or mostly girls?

P: Mostly girls.

I: Do you have a best friend?

P: No, I have a lot of good friends.

I: Um, what is your definition of a friend?

P: Someone that you can trust not to tell secrets and they won't talk behind your back and they're always nice to you.

I: Ok, is that just a regular friend, or is that a best friend?

P: A best friend.

I: How do you show your friends that you care about them?

P: I always invite them into conversations and I never leave them out, and I try to be a good friend.

I: Tell me more about that.

P: I try to be helpful and nice and I don't be snotty or some..., I try not to be a brat.

I: Ok. I'm trying to better understand some of the relationships that students your age have. Can you tell me if there is anyone at school you don't get along with, without mentioning any names?

P: I don't really not get along, but I know a lot of people don't care for them, because they always, sometimes she can be a brat.

I: Ok, if yes, is there anything specific about why you don't get along with this person?

P: No, we get along fine, it's just that sometimes she just not the nicest.

I: Is there anything specific you can think of?

P: Sometimes she will start, um, saying stuff that isn't true to tell people that so they'll get mad at her.

I: So like spreading rumors?

P: Yeah.

I: What did you do to let that other person know that you are unhappy with them, or with something that they have done?

P: We get along, so I don't really talk to her, other people have been telling her that to quit spreading rumors because it, they don't like being told that stuff isn't true and they don't like hearing that.

I: Has that worked for you in the past, having somebody else telling them to quit it? Did that fix whatever was wrong?

P: Yeah, she hasn't done it for a while.

I: Can you think of other ways to tell someone you are unhappy with them?

P: You can tell them that if she wants to be a real friend, then she can stop saying lies because people won't want a friend that tells them lies.

I: Ok, has anyone close to you at school, like your friends, ever been upset or unhappy with you?

P: Yeah, once like last year, she got mad at me, but I don't know why though.

I: If yes, how did he or she tell you or show you that they were upset?

P: She would ignore me and would just walk away when I came over.

I: Really? How did that make you feel?

P: Sad.

I: Ok. Um, how did the problem get fixed, or how did you guys make up?

P: Um, I asked her why she was mad at me and she told me why and I said I was sorry and I wouldn't do it again I don't remember why, and then she said, "ok" and we were friends again.

I: Ok, um this is a little different topic. Do you think that there are groups at school? Like the popular group, the sports group, the non-popular group, and stuff like that?

P: Yeah.

I: Do you think those groups are important?

P: No. I think they're just the same, it's just they're in groups.

I: Ok, so do you think that what group a person is in says something about that person?

P: Um, the whole grade, they get along, sometimes they get in fights, it's just they hang out with people in their own groups, and... I don't know.

I: Can you tell me a little more about that, what you think about those groups?

P: I don't think like the popular group and the other group, they don't, it's not that they don't get along, it's just that they choose to hang out with the other people, and they don't really get in fights, they just hang out with other people.

I: Do you think that people sometimes wish they could change groups but can't? Like for example, does someone from the non-popular group ever want to be part of the popular group?

P: Yeah, and we, I... like when someone gets in a fight in the un-popular group and they wanna go in the other group, then um, the people in the popular group, um tell her they can hang out with us and stuff, and then she ends up going back over there and they become friends again, so....

I: Yeah. Why do you think they can't change groups?

P: Well, I think they can hang out with them, they just, they're just more friends with the other group and then they end up becoming friends again and they just wanna hang out with them. I think they like being in their group because they're really good friends.

I: What group would you say that you're in?

P: Um, probably I hang out with the more popular kids I guess.

I: Ok, that's fine. Have you ever wished to be friends with someone, but thought you couldn't?

P: Yeah, a coupla times, there's this real popular girl, and I always try to be her friend and then, I think that I can't cause she just like ditch me, but then she checked it out with her friends, she... we became good friends after that.

I: You guys are friends?

P: Yeah.

I: All right, cool. Without mentioning names, have you ever seen someone do something that seemed kind of mean to someone else in your class?

P: Yeah, I've seen someone like, talk behind the other person's back, and I think that's pretty mean.

I: How did that make you feel to see that?

P: Well, sorry for the other person because they didn't know she was doing it, and I just try to tell myself that I shouldn't do it cause I felt bad for the other person.

I: Has anyone started something about you behind your back that you didn't know about?

P: Yeah, it happened once before but I can't remember what they said it was about, and then they told me they were sorry for saying it.

I: How did it make you feel to see that about the other person?

P: Mad, and she could tell I got mad and then she came up to me and said she was sorry.

I: If you could go back in time to that moment, is there anything you that would like to have changed or done differently?

P: I would probably have told her that I wouldn't have wanted to be her friend if she would've kept saying rumors, but that I was glad she said sorry and just try not to do it again and we can be friends.

I: How bout with the other person, that you saw it happened to?

P: Um, I think I woulda told her about the rumor, because I didn't want to get in the middle of it, and I just ignored it and pretended it didn't happen.

I: Ok. Is there any time you have ever felt bad or sorry for someone?

P: Yeah, I felt bad a lot of times when like the boys are making fun of another boy because he's not as cool as them or something like that.

I: Is there something you wish you could about that?

P: Yeah, I wish I could just tell them to be quiet and leave him alone and say that we're all the same. And not to make fun of other people because they wouldn't want to be made fun of.

I: How come you decided not to do that?

P: I didn't, I was afraid to, I didn't think they'd listen to me, they'd just tell me to be quiet or something.

I: Ok, that's cool. Well, that's all I got. Pretty painless. That's it. Thank you for meeting with me.

P: Ok, bye.

APPENDIX D

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH GRACE

I = Interviewer

P = Participant

I: Hello, my name is Katie McLallen, you might have seen me around the building before. I am a student at the University of Northern Iowa and I'm doing some research for a paper I'm writing. Before we start, I want to say again that this is completely anonymous, no one will hear this except for me and I won't use your real name when I write about this, at all. Also, I want to ask you to not use anyone else's name when you're answering my questions, so they have privacy too. Do you have any questions before we start?

P: No.

I: Ok. Tell me about yourself.

P: I'm [name omitted] ...oop. I'm 11 years old, er 12 actually. And I'll be 13 in August. Um, I have a sister and I have a lot of friends that I like to hang with and that's it.

I: Do you like school?

P: Yes I do.

I: What makes school enjoyable for you?

P: My friends and the teachers, and actually having to go home and do something other than mess around.

I: Tell me about your friends.

P: Um, they're nice and caring. If I'm sad they'll help me cheer up and if I'm hurt they'll ask me if I'm ok.

I: Are they mostly boys or mostly girls?

P: Mostly girls.

I: Do you have a best friend?

P: Yes.

I: Can you tell me about her?

P: Um, she is really nice and she lives by me so we hang out every day after school and we can tell each other secrets and she won't go tell and I won't go tell anybody.

I: So why is she your best friend?

P: Because we have a lot of the same stuff, like interests and everything, and we like to hang out together.

I: What is your definition of a friend?

P: Um, someone that if you're down will make you cheer up and help you if you're hurt and you can tell each other secrets and talk about stuff and they won't go blab to each other or to any other people.

I: Is that just a regular friend, or is that a best friend?

P: That's a best friend.

I: What's a regular friend?

P: A regular friend is someone that you can help out if they need help and they'll help you. They won't say mean things behind your back. That's what a best friend does too.

I: How do you show your friends that you care about them?

P: Um, helping them like if they need help with their homework I'll help, or if they have problems at home or at school or if they need help.

I: I'm trying to better understand some of the relationships that students your age have. Can you tell me if there is anyone at school you don't get along with, without mentioning any names?

P: Yeah, there's a few boys in our class that can't really say anything nice to anybody, all they, they try to put people down and if like you have something that they want like gum or something, they'll like beg you and everything, and try to be really nice to you.

I: Um, is there anything specific about why you don't get along with them, other than that they try to just take stuff?

P: They make fun of me and they talk behind my back and talk right in front of me about me bad and they talk about my friends bad too.

I: The boys do?

P: Yeah.

I: Do any girls do that?

P: No.

I: Just boys?

P: Yeah.

I: What did you do to let the other person, well the boys, what do you do to let them know you're unhappy with them or with something that they've done?

P: Um, some of the girls ignore them and then they'll get all mad because we're ignoring them. Some of them like yell at them and tell them to sh... be quiet and everything, or some of them will tell the teachers.

I: Has that worked for you in the past, like, did that fix whatever was wrong?

P: Mm-mmm, some of the teachers are really nice and will help you.

I: How do they help you?

P: Like they'll tell the person to say sorry or start being a little bit nicer if they don't have anything to say nice, then don't hang around them and say things about them.

I: Can you think of other ways to tell someone you are unhappy with them?

P: Um, tell them to their face that you don't like them talking about them behind their backs or in front of them.

I: Has anyone close to you at school, like your friends, ever been upset or unhappy with you?

P: Yes.

I: How did he or she tell you that they were upset?

P: Um, it depends, some of my friends have other people tell me that their mad at me and some of them will just come right up and say their mad at me because I did so and so, and then I tried to fix it.

I: How did that make you feel?

P: Um, mad that unless I did something horribly wrong, then I deserve that they are mad at me because I did something bad to them, but if it's just for some reason that they feel like being mad at me then that's not a good friend, so she's going to be mad at me for no reason.

I: What do you prefer; having somebody else come up and tell you that your friend is mad or would you rather have your friend come up and tell you?

P: I would rather have my friend come up and tell me and tell me why she's mad at me, cause then I can know what's wrong.

I: Was it ever justified? Like were they mad at you for a good reason?

P: Um, yeah, the one girl, she came up to me and said that she was mad at me because I said something mean behind her back, but it was a different girl, so I told her that and she believed me so now we have a really good relationship.

I: How did that problem get fixed, did you just...?

P: I told her that it wasn't me, it was someone else that said that and tell her that I was sorry even though I didn't say anything behind her back, and then she...I helped her deal with the other girl who said it.

I: Switching topics a little bit...Do you think there are groups at school? Like the popular group, the sports group, the non-popular group, and stuff like that?

P: Yeah.

I: Ok, do you think those groups are important?

P: Yeah, because I am, I have one like a group of friends and then I am friends with another group of friends that they don't really like, but I'm friends with them, so...

I: Do you think what group a person is in says something about that person?

P: Not really, it shouldn't matter who you hang out with. Some, I don't know, if like, their a good friend then that's your choice, you can pick who your friends are, it shouldn't say anything about you, cause I have a lot of friends in different groups or whatever.

I: What makes it fun to hang out with one group instead of another group?

P: Well, the group I hang out with the most, their funny and outgoing and they like to do stuff. The other group I say hi to a lot, but we, usually the other group, they just, I don't know, I...I mean I still say hi to them and won't say mean things behind their back but I don't hang with them very much.

I: Do you think that people sometimes wish they could change groups but can't?

P: Yeah, they'll like start following you, and we've had that happen before in our grade before, they'll just try to follow us and some people get mad, some people just leave it alone.

I: Why do you think they can't change groups? Why do you think that they would follow you around and not be allowed in your group?

P: Because they try to become friends with us, but some of the girls don't like the other girl and she just came up with her.

I: Have you ever wished to be friends with someone, but thought you couldn't? Or that you shouldn't?

P: No.

I: So all the girls that, well not all the girls, but the girls that would try to become friends with your group, you just didn't have an interest in being their friend?

P: Every girl that's tried, like some of the girls that talk behind the other person's back I don't, like, people who try to be in our group I'll be nice to them and everything.

I: Without mentioning names, have you ever seen someone do something that seemed kind of mean to someone else in your class?

P: Yes.

I: How did that make you feel to see that?

P: Kind of like felt bad, because they were talking mean behind their back and like if they had a good reason to, then that wouldn't be so bad, but I don't know, it still seemed mean.

I: If you could go back in time to that moment, is there anything you would like to have changed or done differently?

P: I probably would have told my friend not to be so mean.

I: How do you think that would have gone over?

P: Mmm... I probably woulda had...she probably would have been a little bit mad at me for saying that because I don't know.

I: Is there any time you ever felt bad or sorry for someone?

P: Yeah, um, like, when if they say something mean, or something bad happens in their family, or someone dies, I'll try to help them and cheer them up.

I: Cool, that's all I got.

P: Ok.

I: Thank you for meeting with me.

P: Yep.