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Am I a Bully? A Mixed Methods Phenomenological Study of the Perspectives and Experiences of Girls Who Are Relationally Aggressive

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Graduate Program in Education
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

This explanatory mixed-methods, phenomenological study investigated how relationally aggressive females perceive and experience their social world. The first, quantitative phase of the study included 237 students (85 males, 152 females) in grades 6 to grade 8 from 13 classrooms from four different schools. All students completed the quantitative measures of the study; a peer nomination scale of relational aggression, the Basic Empathy Scale (Joliffe & Farrington, 2006), and a self-concept measure, the Self-Description Questionnaire Short Form (Marsh et al., 2005). Female students whose mean relational aggression score was greater than 1 SD about the class mean, and received votes from more than 30% of the class were identified as relationally aggressive. The second qualitative phase of the study included interviews with 62 female students including 18 identified as relationally aggressive. To triangulate the data, seven of the students' teachers were also interviewed. The theoretical framework for this study included resource control theory and symbolic interactionism to provide a holistic lens for examining the lived experience of relationally aggressive females.

The results revealed the complexity of girls' social environment; in particular the powerful social arena of *drama*. The results revealed the girls' highly competitive nature that stretched from their social relationships to their extracurricular activities and academics. Most of the participants had a very positive self-concept and self-esteem, and reported respectful relationships with parents and teachers. However, some teachers raised suspicions around the authenticity of that respect. The findings indicate the need to understand the complex social world of relationally aggressive adolescent girls, the meanings they create of their world through social interaction, and the powerful and influential force of *drama*. Implications of the study's findings for anti-bullying interventions are discussed.

Keywords

Relational aggression; social aggression; bullying; girls; females; phenomenology; resource control theory; symbolic interactionism

Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Peter Jaffe for his immense support and guidance throughout this dissertation. There were many, many times of uncertainty and stress throughout the process of conducting and writing this research. Dr. Jaffe was always available to offer his words of encouragement and amusing proverbs about eating elephants that always brought everything back into perspective and enabled me to trek on. You always said you'd see me to the finish line and here I am; eternally grateful for you taking me in and supporting me through to the end. Thank you also to my committee supervisors Dr. Susan Rodger and Dr. Jason Brown whose critical feedback helped raise questions for me to consider in the design and implementation of this research. A special thank you also to my wonderful examiners including Dr. Ryan Broll, Dr. Wendy Ellis, and Dr. Jacqui Specht.

To my family. My two amazing daughters Lila and Adaira who always respected my space to work even at such a young age, and for allowing me to disappear to conferences for days at a time with big understanding smiles, never complaining. A huge thank you to my brother David and my mother Kay for taking care of Lila and Adaira whenever I had to travel and for always being around to help with anything I needed - which I often took you up on! And thank you to my sister Carolyn who was always there to chat and make me laugh. Our morning phone calls were a great support to me.

A huge thank you to all of my friends from the doctoral program. A special thanks to Sarah C. and Sarah C. T. who went through this process with me, to Adrienne for always answering my ping texts and phone calls when I had questions, to Elan for listening when I really needed a listener and some really good questions to help me make sense of things, and to Cathy for always being there to answer questions, help me with my CV, and explain many processes that were new to me. So many others were a part of this journey; so many amazing memories of my fellow doctoral students.

I also want to thank the principals who welcomed me into their schools and the teachers for welcoming me into their classrooms. I sincerely appreciate the time the teachers took out of their busy schedules to help make this study possible. And a big thank you to the students who shared their stories with me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introducing the Issue

A day rarely goes by that one does not see a media story of bullying and the victimization of youth. Some of these media stories include tragedies with links between cyberbullying and youth suicides. Many of these media sources and academics who conduct research on bullying have gone so far as to, as early as the 1990s, label it an “epidemic of aggression and violence that plagues our society” (Smith, Mullis, Kern, Brack, 1999, p. 135). According to the co-executive director of the Media Awareness Network, a rising concern is that the increase in attention and the labeling of bullying as an “epidemic” or “crisis” makes it sound as though the problem is getting worse; statistics on bullying, however, say differently. Between 1997 and 2006, surveys on youth ages 11 to 15 showed significant decreases in both occasional and chronic bullying (Molcho, Craig, Due, Pickett, Harel-Fisch, Overpeck, 2009). This trend was found in the case of boys but there were no significant changes found for girls. This finding may be an issue of measurement and a tendency for overt bullying to be more salient than relational bullying. It is also possible that relational aggression and relational bullying may not be effectively addressed with current intervention programs.

Three meta-analytic reviews of the effectiveness of bullying intervention programs (targeting all forms of bullying) were found in the existing literature. One study focussed on whole-school approaches to anti-bullying programs (Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004) and two others focussed on programs implemented in classrooms in schools (Merrell, Bueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). The three meta-analytic reviews reported very different findings. Smith et al.’s (2004) review of 14 schools reported that “the majority of the programs evaluated to date have yielded nonsignificant outcomes of self-reported victimization and bullying, and only a small number have yielded positive outcomes” (p. 547). The authors stated, however, that systematic implementation of the programs varied across schools and that program integrity likely had an effect on the success of the programs. Final conclusions of the study included that there are “a few instances of significant improvement following program implementation ... and there are many nonsignificant findings, and some results opposite to the expected direction (p. 557). Merrell et al. (2008) reported similar findings in their meta-analytic review of 16 schools. Out of 28

intervention outcome types, only 10 were associated with positive meaningful changes. The authors concluded that there was “some evidence” of clinically important positive effects, but the majority of the outcomes showed no meaningful change. Based on the changes that were observed, Merrell et al. (2008) concluded,

there is some evidence supporting the effectiveness of school bullying interventions in enhancing students social competence, self-esteem, and peer acceptance; in enhancing teachers knowledge of effective practices, feelings of efficacy regarding intervention skills, and actual behavior in responding to incidences of bullying at school; and, to a lesser extent, in reducing participation by students in bully and victim roles. (pp. 38)

They further concluded that the majority of effects found for the programs were too weak to be considered meaningful or clinically important and that the positive outcomes of the programs were more likely to “influence knowledge, attitudes, and self-perceptions rather than actual bullying behaviors” (p. 38).

Tfofi & Farrington (2011) reported very different results of their meta-analytic study of 44 intervention programs. They found programs reduced bullying by 20 – 23% and victimization by 17 – 20%. The researchers attribute the results of Smith et al.’s (2004) meta-analytic study, in part, to the inclusion criteria (not clearly focussing on bullying) and the inclusion of uncontrolled studies. Tfofi and Farrington (2011) attribute Merrell et al.’s (2008) findings to limited database searches (only two English databases) and too wide a range of outcome measures. Only eight of the 16 studies included self-reported bullying and ten with self-reported victimization. Tfofi and Farrington (2011) argue their meta-analytic to “go beyond previous reviews” to include more extensive searches, more extensive meta-analysis, and focussing on programs specifically designed to reduce bullying and not aggressive behaviour (p. 29). They concluded the most effective programs included parental involvement (parent meetings and education), firm discipline for bullying behaviour, and increased playground supervision.

One other element of effective element of successful programs and general school health is the integration of social and emotional programming (SEL) (Crooks et al., 2015). In a controlled study of an evidence-based, healthy relationships program including 57 schools, results showed significant group differences as a result of SEL programming. The intervention groups showed increased knowledge about violence, greater critical thinking and

awareness about violence, and increased number of identification of successful coping strategies for stress (p. 517). Several characteristics of the students were found to influence the scores including sex. Girls scored higher than boys on all four measures (knowledge about violence, critical thinking, awareness, and acceptance of violence).

The meta-analytic reviews discussed thus far have targeted general bullying behaviours. There are, however, unique aspects to relational aggression that likely need to be differentially targeted. For example, while physical and direct aggressors tend to have low social skills and often socially excluded by their peers, girls that are relationally aggressive (RA) often have high social skills, are perceived as popular, and enjoy a considerable amount of social power (Vaillancourt, 2003). It has further been found that beginning in middle elementary school (grade four), the use of relational aggression by girls (but not for boys) increases (Murray-close, Ostrov, & Crick, 2007; Werner & Crick, 2004). One likely reason for this increase for girls only was that the social context of girls (more intimate, didactic friendships) “during this developmental period may facilitate the use of aggressive strategies over time” (p. 198).

The observed differences between relational aggression and direct, physical aggression, strongly suggests that more attention should be paid to how research on relational aggression can inform intervention programming (Leff et al., 2009). Reviews of bullying programs targeting relational aggression currently used in Canadian schools have demonstrated promising yet variable results (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010). While relational aggression research has begun to inform programs, the previous research which informs most programming has often grouped all forms of aggression (physical and indirect/relational) together as though they were the same psychological constructs. Further, most research conducted on aggression and bullying has been quantitative. Therefore, we know very little about the personal motivations and perspectives of the aggressive students themselves. For example, knowing that an individual committed five acts of aggression or bullying only tells part of the story. An in-depth investigation into why that person did what he/she did would be far more revealing.

The first issue repeatedly found in the literature is that all forms of aggression are often grouped and considered together under the construct of *bullying*, despite research repeatedly demonstrating that they are markedly different forms of aggression (e.g. overt/physical aggression and relational aggression) and that they significantly different

constructs (Crick, 1997). Physical and overt aggression, the more salient forms of aggression exhibited by boys, includes punching, hitting and threatening physical violence. Girls engage in bullying differently than boys; predominately engaging in indirect, social, and relational bullying (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992). Relational aggression aims to hurt others by damaging social relationships. This is accomplished through exclusion, spreading of rumours, gossiping, manipulation, or any action meant to embarrass, alienate, or isolate another. Physically aggressive youth and relationally aggressive youth differ significantly on many characteristics including empathy (Kaukiainen, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, Lagerspetz, 1996), social intelligence (Kaukiainen et. al, 1996; Andreou, 2006), hostile attribution bias (Dodge, 1980; Crick & Dodge, 1992, Godleski & Ostrov, 2010), and confidence and self-esteem (Pollastri, Cardemil, & O'Donnell, 2009). Motivations for these two different forms of aggression are also different. Physical aggression tends to be a 'hot-headed' reaction to provocation while instrumental and relational aggression tends to be well thought out and goal directed to accomplish a self-serving purpose (Hawley, Stump, & Ratliff, 2010; Woodworth & Porter, 2002). Therefore, it is evident that grouping physically aggressive youth and relationally aggressive youth in the same participant pool to study *bullying* is not empirically sound.

Before moving on from discussing the differences between physical aggression and relational aggression, and the apparent differences between the methods by which girls generally prefer to exhibit aggression compared to boys, it is important to point out why these differences may exist. There are two main branches of theories that attempt to account for observed gender differences in aggression: sociobiological/evolutionary theories and gender socialization theories. Sociobiological theories state that sex differences in behaviour between males and females are rooted in evolution – natural adaptations to the environment for increasing reproductive fitness (Krahe, 2013). Thus, male aggression (physical) is designed to demonstrate strength and power to attract female partners, and female's expression of aggression (indirect) carries a lower cost and risk to injury than physical aggression, which is necessary for reproduction and nurturance of offspring. Perhaps more obviously relatable to bullying in schools today, a female's use of indirect aggression may be seen "as a less risky form of intimidating potential rivals in the competition for attractive male partners" (Krahe, 2013, p. 83). Due to intrasexual competition, physically attractive females may be at risk of being indirectly victimized by other females (Arnocky, Sunderani, Miller, & Vaillancourt,

2012; Massar, Buunk, & Rempt, 2012; Vaillancourt, 2005).

The other branch of theories accounting for observed gender differences in aggression emphasize social and cultural influences in developing contrasting gender identities. Eagly's (1987) social-role theory is a widely recognized theory on gender socialization (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Krahe, 2013). Social-role theory states that shared expectations within a given culture shape appropriate and acceptable behaviour each sex. For example, females are often expected to possess more *communal attributes* such as friendliness, empathy, and emotional sensitivity whereas males are expected to possess more *agentic attributes* such as independence and dominance, which facilitate aggression (Baron & Richardson, 1994). Overt aggressive behaviour appears to be incompatible with the female gender role as indicated by research demonstrating women to report significantly more anxiety and guilt than men when engaging in aggressive behaviour (Campbell, 2006). Strong support for social-role theory's account for gender differences in expression of aggression was found in a study where males and females played an aggressive video game (Lightdale & Prentice, 1994). When the participants were identifiable, women made significantly fewer aggressive acts than males. When the participants' identities were hidden (no one knew could identify who was dropping the bombs) gender differences in aggressive acts perpetrated disappeared. The women's change in behaviour, their willingness to act more overtly aggressive if they could not be identified, appears to "attest to women's sensitivity to gender role norms" (Krahe, 2013, p. 85).

There is support for both sides of this argument. It is likely the case that the expression of aggression is a combination of the two explanations; sociobiologically based, and perpetuated by socially constructed gender roles. As Moretti, Odgers, and Jackson (2004) state, "there is no single perspective or linear combination of risk factors that explains aggression in girls, or for that matter, aggression in boys" (p. 2). To understand girls' aggression, these psychologists state that one must look at the interaction between gender and a variety of factors including individual, family, peers, school, and socio-cultural factors. Given gender socialization and the differential expectations of girls, they likely have different lived experiences of *being* an aggressive person. Choosing only girls to participate in the interview phase of this study will allow deeper focus on this experience.

A second example of all forms of aggression being erroneously grouped together is when simple acts of aggression are incorrectly labeled as acts of bullying when a crucial

distinction separates these constructs. *Aggression* is defined as a negative act intended to harm another (Coie & Dodge, 1998) whereas *bullying* includes two additional criteria; repeated harmful acts over time, and an imbalance of power (Olweus, 1994). Thus, while all bullying is aggression, not all acts of aggression are bullying. Research often fails to ensure that the two additional criteria for bullying are met, and, therefore, acts of bullying are often mistakenly grouped together with aggression as though they are one and the same (Salmivalli & Peets, 2009). Distinguishing between these two forms allows researchers to consider and study different perspectives of the functions of the two different types of behaviour. For example, as Hawley et al. (2011) argued, while aggression may serve the function of competent pursuance of “human need fulfillment,” bullying behaviours, where the intention is to inflict harm, likely does not share this same competency, and likely serves a very different function (p. 102). Thus, identifying *all* aggressive behaviours as bullying blurs the distinction between natural and strategic forms of aggression toward human fulfillment and the destructive forms of actual bullying behaviours that require intervention. The current umbrella construct of bullying, which has come to encompass all forms of aggressive behavior including physical aggression and relational aggression, is perhaps one reason there are inconsistencies in research and one possible explanation why current intervention programs are not as effective as desired.

This logically leads to a second possible reason bullying programs yield promising yet variable results. Most of the research on aggression and bullying in schools has used quantitative methods to identify characteristics and behavioural trends of aggressive youth (Almeida, Correia, & Marinho, 2010). This data is problematic because the disaggregated data that comes from the general school population is composed mainly of bystanders, victims, bully-victims, and students that bully occasionally. Bully-victims are those that have experience both bullying and victimization. Rates of bully-victims in schools range from 4 – 19% (Craig, 1998; Xu et al., 2003) to a more recent study that found the percentage of bully-victims to be 30% (Marini, Dane, Bosacki, & YLC-CURA, 2006). This includes both boys and girls completing self-report surveys of direct and indirect aggression and victimization. This is problematic for understanding relational aggression because youth who are relationally aggressive tend not to self identify (Crick & Dodge, 1996; Kaukiainen et al., 1996; Moretti et al., 2001). In another quantitative measure of bullying in schools, Pepler, Craig, and Connolly (2008) found that while nearly 60% of students aged 10 to 17 engaged

in bullying behaviour at some point, only a small group of students (9.9 %) were identified as the high-bullying group. While these bullying rates are an example of what is available to inform programming at this point, it is problematic for two reasons. First, the bullying survey was, again, a self-report survey and as indicated previously, girls that are relationally and socially aggressive tend to not self-identify (Crick & Dodge, 1996; Kaukiainen et al., 1996; Moretti et al., 2001). Secondly, the authors themselves stated “girls were underrepresented in the high and moderate-bullying trajectory groups and overrepresented in the never bullying group... in part, [because] the definition of bullying provided on the questionnaire which did not elaborate on the social forms of aggression that are more characteristic of girls” (p. 334). Thus, quantitative surveys to estimate bullying rates likely provide more accurate data for overt aggression (more typical of boys) than for relational aggression.

Mixed-methods research, combining the strengths of quantitative measures and rich contextualized data from qualitative interviews that investigates the experiences, beliefs, and motivations of girls identified as relationally aggressive (bullies) is required to fill the gap in our understanding of their perspective of their social world. An understanding of the female bullies’ perspective is crucial to effective bullying program development. Without proper data about the perspectives, intentions, and motivations of the different types of bullies, interventions are mainly focused on their actions and the fall-out of such actions, but not the root cause of the problem; the motivations that compel girls who are relationally aggressive to do what they do.

As Torrance (2000) has argued, “if researchers and practitioners are to develop an in-depth understanding of bullying within a social setting, supported by findings which lead to a better understanding of intervention strategies, greater emphasis needs to be placed on qualitative research.” (p. 16). Chapter two includes a review of the existing qualitative research on aggression that specifies female participants, although the scarce amount of research found tends to use victims and bystanders as participants, not the bullies themselves.

Purpose of the Study

A crucial, missing element in our understanding of relational aggression in females is an understanding of how they *perceive and experience* their social world. Further, in what ways do these perceptions influence their behaviour amongst their peers? If we can understand what motivates girls who are aggressive to engage in relational aggression, we

will be better able to conceptualize and deliver more appropriate programs. These insights may also provide us with better approaches for helping victims.

To fill this gap in the literature, this study used a mixed-methods approach including quantitative surveys of relational aggression, empathy, and self-concept followed by individual interviews with girls, aged 11 to 13, nominated by their peers as being relationally aggressive. This age range was chosen because research has demonstrated that the frequency and severity of the relationally aggressive behaviours of girls to peak at this age (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Ferguson, & Garipey, 1989). Teacher interviews were conducted to explore their perspectives of the social dynamics they observe in their classrooms and on the playground. Drawing from Hawley's (1999) evolutionary resource control theory (RCT) and Blumer (1969/1998) and Snow (2003)'s symbolic interactionism, this study explores the following research questions:

How do girls who are relationally aggressive perceive their own behaviour?

Do they see themselves as aggressive or do they see others as being too sensitive?

Do girls who are relationally aggressive feel they are misunderstood?

What is their perspective of others who interact with them?

Are they trying to hurt others? Or are they trying to do something else?

Overview of the Dissertation

This first chapter provided an introduction to the issue and research problem and offered an explanation for choosing a mixed-methods design to examine relational aggression from the perspective of girls who are relationally aggressive. Chapter 2 defines various concepts and terms related to aggression research, and reviews the research literature relevant to the study. Chapter 3 describes the justification for the mixed methods design of this study, the methodological process used, and procedures. Chapter 4 presents the quantitative results of the psychological measures and Chapter 5 presents the qualitative results of the interviews with the participants and teachers. Finally, Chapter 6 discusses the findings and addresses the research questions presented above. Results are further discussed in relation to the research literature on relational aggression, the theoretical framework, limitations of the study, implications for school-based intervention strategies, and future research directions.

Chapter 2: Relevant Literature and Theoretical Framework

Literature Review

This literature review presents a summary of the research on relational aggression (RA) including relational aggression as distinct from reactive/physical aggression, gender differences and developmental trends in aggression, and a detailed definition and description of RA. Subsequently, three areas of research particularly relevant to playing a key role in the lived experience of RA for girls is reviewed; friendships and dynamics of friendships for girls who are relationally aggressive, social intelligence and empathy, and self-concept.

Relational Aggression as Distinct from Reactive/Physical Aggression

Reactive/hostile aggression and indirect/instrumental aggression are not the same behavior; research has demonstrated that they are two significantly different constructs (Vaillancourt, Brendgen, Boivin, & Tremblay, 2003). The argument that reactive aggression and instrumental aggression are two discreet constructs that should be examined as such was first raised by Kingsbury, Lamber, and Hendrickse (1997). They stated that creating categories broad enough to cover all instances of a concept minimizes important distinctions that are imperative for developing successful interventions and that such broad definitions “fail to address the underlying dimensions of different types of violent behavior” (p. 224). Others in the research community, including Hart and Dempster (1997), also argued for distinguishing between reactive and instrumental aggression. Opposing dichotomizing aggression, Bushman and Anderson (2001) stated that “violence cannot be dichotomized” and that it was “time to pull the plug” on the reactive-instrumental dichotomy (p. 273). One of their arguments was that most acts of violence or aggression are committed with mixed motives – that most acts have both a reactive and an instrumental component. The authors cited the example of revenge. Hostile/reactive aggression involves anger whereas instrumental does not. However, would a well-planned act of revenge which is carried out some time after the provocation not be rooted in anger? And if the act resulted in the achievement or attainment of a goal, is the act then instrumental rather than hostile? Proponents of dichotomizing reactive and instrumental aggression often cite a study by Woodworth and Porter (2002) where the results showed that the primary motive for acts of violence could be dichotomized in 92% of the cases. Tapscott, Hancock, and Hoaken’s (2012) recent findings appear to have inarguably tipped the scales in favour of finally

establishing reactive and instrumental aggression as two distinct types of aggression. They tested the validity of the distinction between reactive and instrumental aggression by analyzing the characteristics of aggression perpetrated by 220 offenders. Utilizing a new taximetrics analysis method (Ruscio, 2007), the data revealed two significantly different distributions for reactive acts of violence and instrumental act of violence. Tapscott et al., (2012) stated that these findings may have significant implications for treatment programs; instrumental aggressors and reactive, violent aggressors “may benefit from alternative courses of treatment that target the predominating motivation behind their violent behaviour” (p. 214).

Within the context of aggression with children in schools, Vaillencourt et al. (2003) also found a significant distinction between indirect/relational aggression and physical aggression. In their study, a confirmatory factor analysis found the two constructs to be significantly different across time (from age four to 11) and between sex.

Thus, if reactive/physical aggression and instrumental/relational aggression are two discreet concepts, it makes sense, when attempting to explore and gain a deeper understanding of relational aggression, to *not* include both types of aggressors in the participant pool. Within the last decade, alongside the growing acceptance of the existence of two different forms of aggression (instrumental and reactive/hostile aggression), research has begun to focus on either one or the other. The purpose of this study was to examine the form of aggression typically preferred by females - instrumental aggression. Having said that, the review of literature focuses on instrumental, relational aggression.

Gender Differences and Developmental Trends

Boys have always been believed to be more aggressive than girls (Buss, 1961; Frodi, Macaulay, & Thom, 1977; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1980). This long-held stereotype, however, began to be questioned with the recognition of different modes of aggression. Over the past few decades, research has repeatedly found that boys and girls tend to display aggression differently. Girls tend to use relationally, indirect forms of aggression while boys tend to use more direct, physical methods of aggressing (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick et al., 2007; Lagerspetz et al., 1988). In a meta-analysis of sex differences in aggression, Eagly and Steffen (1986) found that boys do prefer physical modes and girls do prefer indirect means. However, the authors argued that this is more a function of perceived consequences of aggression that are learned. Interestingly, they found that women were not

less aggressive than men if readiness to inflict psychological and emotional pain was measured. A more recent meta-analysis of sex differences in aggression (Archer, 2004) replicated the finding that males do prefer physical aggression and females prefer indirect aggression. The analysis found sex differences in aggression were highest for physical aggression. The difference was smaller for verbal aggression, but still higher for males. Sex differences were found to be in the female direction or absent for indirect aggression. Archer (2004) contends that the likely reason the effect for indirect aggression was lower than expected was because of the age of the samples and because they used self-report measures. Peer ratings, teacher reports, and observational studies showed sex differences for indirect aggression for girls, and, not surprisingly, the self-reports of indirect aggression showed no sex differences for adults (p. 309). No sex difference for anger was found. Archer (2004) states, “if males are more prone than females to use risky forms of aggression when they are angered, and there are no sex differences in anger, the question arises as to what alternative response females use when angered. Indirect aggression... is the most obvious form” (p. 309). Most research has found that males prefer physical means of aggressing and females prefer indirect means of aggressing (Archer, 2009; Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Card, Stucky, Sawalani, Little, 2008; Craig & Pepler, 1998; Eagly, 2013; Hess & Hagen, 2006; Lagerspetz et. al., 1988; Salmivalli & Kaukiainen, 2004; Tapper & Boulton, 2004). As cited by Maccoby (2004), while males are more overtly and physically aggressive than females, males tend to make up faster than females therefore their conflict tends to be less damaging to peer relationships (Lagerspetz et al, 1988). Females tend to become angry at wider number of concerns and stay angrier longer than males thereby making female conflict more disruptive to their social networks (Maccoby, 2004).

Other differences between genders in terms of aggression includes social structure and self-reporting of aggression (Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988). Cairns, Perrin, Cairns (1985) found that boy’s and girls’ social structures differ. When asked to describe same-sex friendship patterns in their school, the boys’ level of accuracy was low (66.9%) indicating a loose structure. Girls, however, were remarkably accurate (95.3%) in naming the positions of the other girls in terms of where they fit in the social structure, who is friends with whom, and other critical dynamics. The results suggested that girls have tighter, more closely knit connections that the authors stated may encourage the development of more indirect forms of aggression. In regards to self-reporting of aggressive behaviour, it has been

found that while boys' scores between self-report tests of aggression and peer-nominated measures correlate positively, there is a low correlation between self-report and peer-nominated measures for girls (Huesmann & Eron, 1986/2013; Lagerspetz et al., 1988). The implication here is that a person who uses indirect aggression to hurt anonymously will likely deny being aggressive either because they do not want to admit their aggressiveness, or because they do not see themselves as aggressive. This repeatedly demonstrated finding suggests that in order to obtain a valid measure of indirect and relational aggression, self-report measures should not be used.

The developmental trajectory of aggression aligns with findings regarding social structure and preference of expression of aggression. Young children, before developing verbal skills, rely mainly on physical, direct means of aggressing. As verbal ability and social intelligence develops, girls' use of direct aggression decreases and use of the less observable relational and social aggression becomes their preferred method (Cairns et al., 1989; Maccoby, 2004). Indirect/relational aggression requires a certain level of verbal ability, a developed social network, and social intelligence (Archer & Coyne, 2005). In a study where a group of eight-year-olds was compared with a group of 11 and 15 year-olds, Bjorkqvist et al., (1992) found no difference in the use of indirect aggression with the group of eight year olds where the social networks of the boys and girls were similarly developed. By the age of 11 and 15, however, the girls social network had matured and developed into more closely knit groups, and the use of indirect aggression had significantly increased. The authors concluded that,

this fact facilitates the use of manipulation of friendship patterns as an aggressive strategy. Girls are also known to mature faster verbally than boys do, which probably facilitates the usage of indirect means of aggression by increasing the verbal skills needed for the manipulation in question. (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992, pp. 126)

Cairns et al.'s (1989) longitudinal study following children over a six-year period sought to investigate: a) sex differences in the expression of aggression and, b) the developmental trajectory of aggression. Again, the results showed very definite sex differences. Boys were found to choose direct confrontation during conflict, mainly with other boys, and the use of direct physical aggression decreased from grade four to grade seven suggesting a maturation effect. Quite conversely, girls demonstrated a significant increase in female-female conflict from grade four to grade seven, wherein they chose 'social aggression' (relational

aggression) as their prominent strategy. The developmental curves for each sex also showed different trajectories depending on the sex of the subject and sex of the victim. In grade four, while both sexes did get into conflict more often with their own sex, boys did aggress against girls and girls did get into conflict with boys. By grade seven, however, there was a distinct separation; boys fought with boys primarily by physical means, and girls fought with girls primarily using relational and indirect aggression.

Relationally aggressive girls view the use of relational aggression more positively than both non-aggressive girls and boys (Salmivalli & Kaukiainen, 2004). This has been found of relationally/indirectly aggressive girls in instrumental conflict situations (classmate purposefully breaks the child's belonging, cutting ahead in line) and in relational conflicts (when they are socially excluded or rejected by peers) (Crick & Werner, 1998). The authors claimed this was the evidence demonstrating that "girls evaluate some forms of aggression more favourably than do boys" (p. 1637).

The use and degree of relational aggression used by an aggressive child had previously thought to be relatively stable over time (Zimmer-Gembeck, Geiger, & Crick, 2002). More recently, however, Werner and Crick (2004) found that 25% of children actually demonstrated a marked increase in their use of relational aggression when they were observed over a two-year period. At Time One, aggression scores were correlated between reciprocated friends ($r = .17$) and unreciprocated friends ($r = .01$) indicating that relationally aggressive children tended to choose relationally aggressive friends. One year later, the correlated aggression scores between reciprocal friends ($r = .36$) had increased significantly indicating that the relationally aggressive children had become increasingly relationally aggressive over time. Werner and Crick (2004) suggested that this increase might be, in part, due to "maladaptive peer relationships" (p. 508).

It is for these reasons that only female participants were included in the interview phase of this study. While it is possible that boys may be equally (Rys & Bears, 1997) or even more overtly and relationally aggressive (Salmivalli & Kaukiainen, 2004) than girls, the purpose of this study is to probe deeply into the phenomenon of relational aggression as predominately demonstrated by girls. Thus, including only female participants is the best, most logical method of examining only relational aggression, and separating out the potential confounds that including boys (and thus other forms of aggression) might bring.

Defining Relational Aggression

Social aggression and relational/indirect bullying is a pervasive problem with serious implications, particularly for girls. Girls report being significantly more worried and distressed about vulnerability to indirect aggression than boys (Paquette & Underwood, 1999). For victims, relational aggression has been associated with a range of internalizing problems, relationship difficulties, and psychosocial maladjustment (Murray-Close, Ostrov & Crick, 2007). Whether the perpetrators of RA demonstrate these internalizing problems is less conclusive; some female bullies who are relationally aggressive were perceived as more popular, better-liked, attractive, good athletes, and overall “powerful with leadership qualities, competencies and assets” (Vaillancourt et. al., 2003, pg. 158).

Relational aggression is defined as nonphysical aggression that is intended to harm another person by manipulating and deliberately damaging their social relationships and/or social standing within the peer group (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). This harm is typically accomplished through the spreading of rumours so peers will reject the person, breaking confidences and sharing secrets, and the exclusion of the person from the playgroup. It was initially believed that girls were more relationally aggressive than boys (Bjorkqvist, 1994; Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Cairns et al., 1989; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Eagly & Steffen, 1986). Subsequent studies found no sex difference in the use of relational aggression (Bentley & Li, 1996; Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997; Frodi et al., 1977; Rys & Bear, 1997;). More recent research, however, have found boys to be significantly more aggressive than girls in every respect, including the use of relational aggression. (Henington et al., 1998). As cited by Vaillancourt (2013), it has since been repeatedly demonstrated that while girls engage predominantly in relational aggression (52% for girls versus 20% for boys in 15-year olds) (Osterman et al., 1998), boys tend to engage in more direct, overt forms of aggression.

The current understanding in the research literature is that females *prefer* indirect/relational aggression and males prefer more direct/overt aggression and that this difference is likely due to socialization and cultural stereotypes (Basow, Cahill, Phelan, Longshore, & McGillicuddy-Delisi, 2007; Hess & Hagen, 2006). The media and the general public, however, often still consider relational aggression the *female form* of aggression.

It is a particularly effective method for girls to aggress against and hurt another as relationships are of primary importance to girls (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). For boys, physical dominance is important. Therefore, a boy is more likely to use physical violence against

another to inflict harm. For girls, personal relationships are paramount. Girls are not “less aggressive” because they do not typically engage in physical modes of hurting others, it is more that physically hurting someone is simply not the most efficient method to damage what girls value most. The most direct and strategic means for a girl to hurt another girl is by damaging her social relationships and isolating her from her peer group. This hurt is best accomplished by withdrawing friendship, spreading rumours so that her peers will reject her, gossiping, and any action meant to embarrass and isolate her.

Characteristics of Youth that are Relationally Aggressive

Lastly, three areas of research particularly relevant in playing a key role in the lived experience of relational aggression for girls are reviewed. These three areas include the friendships and dynamics of friendships of girls who are relationally aggressive, their level of social intelligence and empathy, and self-concept.

Friendships. Girls who are relationally aggressive may not be liked by many of their peers, but they do have one or more reciprocal friends just like the non-aggressive students in the class (Rys & Bear, 1997). As articulated by Ellis and Zarbatany (2007) “the very nature of relational aggression requires that these children have friends” (p. 83).

Aggressive youth form friendships with other aggressive youth (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest, & Garipey, 1988; Pellegrini, Bartini, Brooks, 1999). In a study examining aggressive children’s friendships, Grotper and Crick (1996) found that relationally aggressive children’s circle of friends “engage in highly intimate and exclusive friendships” (p. 2337). They found that highly relationally aggressive children tend not to share personal information with their friends but may “elicit private information from their friends” (p. 2337). Also found was that relationally aggressive children reported significantly higher levels of relational aggression used *within* the friendship group than both non-aggressive groups and overtly aggressive groups. Whereas overtly aggressive groups reported low levels of intimacy and high levels of aggression against children outside the group, relationally aggressive groups used relational aggression against those within their group.

Friendship circles, also termed as *cliques*, have a hierarchal structure and are dominated by a leader (Adler & Adler, 1995). They tend to include the most popular kids, and they, and their social activities attract the attention of the other kids. Cliques function as “bodies of power within grades, incorporating the most popular individuals, offering the most exciting social lives, and commanding the most interest and attention from classmates”

(Adler & Adler, 1995, p. 145). Popularity within relationally aggressive groups of girls, those that are the leaders of these groups, are those that use proactive (or instrumental) aggression effectively to control and manipulate the members (Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999).

These leaders

justify their behaviour cognitively by endorsing bullying in the form of positive attitudes toward bullying. The remainder of the group seems to be made up of emotional and active youngsters who use aggression both proactively and reactively. (p. 222)

Recent research on peer group interactions has also demonstrated that the higher status members of a group use more direct and controlling interaction styles than its lower status members (Ellis, Dumas, Mahdy, & Wolfe, 2012). This was found regardless of group status although high-status members of low-status groups exhibited the most aggressive behaviour. Further found was that high-status members “were generally less tolerant or open individual differences and opinions” (Ellis et al., 2012, p. 262). By discouraging other group members’ opinions, high-status members can assert their position in controlling group decisions. This strategy appears to be effective as it was found that members of high-status groups express fewer opinions than that of lower-status groups. Ellis et. al (2012) concluded that, “in highly central groups, there may already be clearly defined expectations of appropriate behaviors and all members have learned that individual freedom is not acceptable” (p. 262). This finding points to possible complications for programs such as the Upstander program and other prevention programs that promote students standing up against individuals or groups engaging in aggressive behaviour. Speaking against the group will likely not be tolerated and may carry serious social risks.

While girls who are relationally aggressive are generally disliked and considered aggressive by their peers, they are often also perceived as popular, attractive, strong leaders within the grade level (Andreou, 2006; Rose, Swenson, & Waller, 2004; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2003). An important distinction in understanding the relationship between bullying and status is that sociometric popularity (who is liked) is only modestly related to perceived popularity (those perceived to hold high peer status) (Parkhursts & Hopmeyer, 1998). In a study investigating bullying, social status, power, and self-perceptions, Vaillancourt et al. (2003) found peer-nominated females who are relationally aggressive to report high levels of social self-efficacy and see themselves as “well integrated

into the peer group and less lonely”
(p. 168).

Ellis and Zabatany (2007) examined both how children who are relationally aggressive make friends and the stability of those friendships. It had been hypothesized that relationally aggressive children would make friends easily due to their social saliency and social power. They found, however, when new friendship formations were measured over the course of a three-month time period, girls who are relationally aggressive did not make more new friends. The authors concluded this might be because of the mixed-feelings they tend to create in the peer group. Their peers that dislike them “due to their manipulative ways may be too wary to befriend them” or, perhaps some peers would like to be a part of that social network are not of interest to the relationally aggressive girls (p. 1251). Next, the results showed significantly greater friendship stability when both friends were relationally aggressive. The friendship may be reinforced by the girls’ shared values around dominance and aggression and their need to support and validate each other’s behaviour. Further holding their friendships together may be a fear of retaliation should one friend “unfriend” another. Spreading rumours, sharing secrets, and exclusion are felt by girls to be particularly hurtful and hostile (Paquette & Underwood, 1999); the friendship may be maintained out of fear of that friend becoming angry and sharing your secrets with all of your peers.

In summary, girls who are relationally aggressive have friends; they form friendship circles, or *cliques* much like other girls, however, their cliques tend to be highly exclusive and socially salient. They are often thought of as the attractive, powerful, popular kids. The group shares similar values around aggression and support each other’s behaviour. They see themselves as having many friends and being well integrated into the peer group. The friendship group has a hierarchy; the leader of the group effectively uses proactive/instrumental aggression to control and exert dominance within the group, while the lower members tend to use both proactive/instrumental and overt aggression against its own members. This factor is one salient way that female relationally aggressive friendship circles are distinguished from the overtly/physical aggressive groups more typical of boys; friends who are relationally aggressive use aggression against each other while friends who are overtly aggressive tend to bond together and aggress against those outside the group.

Social Intelligence and Empathy. Low empathy is often thought to be causally related to aggression; the ability to empathize with others and have a feeling for their pain

serves to inhibit the behaviour that is causing that pain (Joliffe & Farrington, 2006; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). Thus, if one has low empathy, they may fail to respond to others' distress; they do not experience the emotional consequence of their actions. Therefore, the aggressive behaviour is not inhibited.

There are two components to empathy: affective empathy (the ability to experience the emotions of another) and cognitive empathy (the ability to comprehend the emotions of another) (Hogan, 1969; Joliffe & Farrington, 2006; Strayer, 1987). As further explained by de Kemp et al. (2007),

the affective [or emotional] component of empathy involves the vicarious experience of emotions consistent with those of others. The cognitive component involves understanding another's feeling whether by means of simple associations or more complex perspective-taking processes. (p. 6)

The cognitive component of empathy is considered a form of social intelligence and therefore, the two concepts are often included together in aggression research. Children who engage in indirect aggression have repeatedly been found to achieve significantly high scores on measures of social intelligence (Androu, 2006; Kaukiainen et al., 1996; Kaukiainen et al., 1999).

Research on the relationship between empathy and aggression has predominately focused on physical aggression. There is very little research that focuses on the relationship of empathy and indirect or relational aggression. Thus, the abundance of research clearly demonstrates students that engage in direct, physical aggression (predominately males) to have low affective empathy (Gini et al., 2007; Kaukiainen et al., 1996; Lafferty, 2003; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). It has also been demonstrated (with a predominantly male, physically aggressive sample) that low cognitive empathy is strongly related to more serious, criminal offending behaviours; low affective empathy was not related (Joliffe & Farrington, 2004).

The research on the relationship between relational/indirect aggression and empathy is sparse and the results less clear. Kaukiainen et al. (1996) investigated social intelligence and empathy in two groups of children: a ten-year-old cohort (Group 1) and a 12-year-old cohort (Group 2). No significant correlations between aggression and empathy were found for the ten-year-old children. The 12-year-olds showed significant positive correlations between indirect aggression and high social intelligence, a significant negative correlation between physical aggression and empathy, and no correlation between indirect aggression

and empathy. The authors suggested perhaps one reason children who engaged in indirect aggression did not score significantly low on empathy is because a self-rating measure of empathy was used. They are perhaps unable to see themselves as less empathic, or perhaps they are equally skilled at deceiving themselves as they are at deceiving others.

In a later study, Kaukiainen et al. (1999) again investigated social intelligence and empathy in physical, verbal, and indirect aggression. In this study, however, peer ratings were used to measure both social intelligence and empathy. Indirect aggression was once again found to have a strong, positive correlation with social intelligence. Contrary to the previous study where self-ratings of empathy were used, findings of this study showed a significant, negative correlation with empathy and both forms of aggression. This finding supports Kaukiainen et al.'s (1996) previous suggestion that children who engage in indirect aggression either do not see themselves as aggressive or simply will not self-identify as less empathic. It appeared that the peers of indirectly aggressive children were able to give more valid assessments of their level of empathy. A subsequent study that also used peer evaluations of empathy demonstrated more support for the negative correlation between physical aggression and empathy (Kaukiainen et al., 1999). Surprisingly, despite using peer evaluations of empathy, no correlation between empathy and indirect aggression was found.

Bjorkqvist et al. (2000) found social intelligence to positively correlate with all forms of conflict behavior, with highest scores on peaceful conflict resolution and indirect aggression, and lowest scores on physical aggression. Surprisingly, results only showed a significant negative correlation between physical aggression and empathy; there was no correlation between empathy and indirect aggression. Thus, it appeared that indirect and relational aggression require higher levels of social intelligence, and those who engage in relational aggression may have higher levels of empathy than those who engage in physical aggression.

Andreou (2006) examined the relationship between social intelligence and aggression. Social intelligence was measured in terms of social information processing (ability to guess the feelings of others, ability to read others' body language, expressions, meaning), social skills (ability to get along with others, accommodate to new situations, fit in easily), and social awareness (understand others' choices, do not upset or irritate people with their ideas and opinions, notice others' reactions to their behavior). They found that social information processing and social awareness were positive indicators of relational

aggression. Quite conversely, physical aggression was significantly negatively correlated with social skills in boys. The authors stated these findings supported previous findings that “efficient relational aggression is linked with a deep understanding of human relations, reactions, and skills while physical aggression can be linked with lack of social skills” (p. 346).

A study by Gini et al. (2007) tested a model “that described the different relations between empathic responsiveness and participation in bullying” (p. 473). They found only boy’s bullying behaviour to be significantly related to low empathy. The model that predicts bullying behaviour based on low empathy fit the data only for boys. No relationship between low empathy and bullying behavior was found for girls.

Only one study was found where males and females were examined separately and physical and indirect aggression was distinguished. Joliffe and Farrington (2006) stated,

It is clear that the relationship between empathy and bullying requires further empirical investigation. However, the bullying of males and females should be examined separately, as research has suggested that the mechanisms which lead to antisocial behaviour may be different for males and females. (pp. 543)

Their study found that indirect female bullies scored significantly lower on both affective empathy and total empathy. Cognitive empathy was not related to physical or indirect bullying for males or females.

It appears that other than Joliffe and Farrington’s (2006) study, much of the support for the assertion that females who are relationally aggressive have low empathy may be based on other research that does not directly assess relational aggression and empathy. For example, high empathy has been shown to be highly correlated with prosocial behaviour (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). Other research has shown that students with high empathic skills were less angry, less verbally and physically aggressive, engaged in more prosocial behaviours, and had healthier social relationships (Robert & Strayer, 2004). Other research has shown empathy training programs to be effective at increasing empathy resulting in a decrease in bullying behaviours (Nickerson, Mele, & Princiotta, 2008; Sahin, 2012). These studies indicate a crucial role of empathy in prosocial behaviour but do not directly assess empathy and indirect aggression.

Thus, it has been reasonably well established that relationally aggressive people tend to be highly socially intelligent. That the cognitive component of empathy is considered a

form of social intelligence suggests that relationally aggressive people may also have higher levels of cognitive empathy. What is not clear and requires further research is the relationship between affective empathy and indirect aggression in females. It is possible that relationally aggressive people either do not see themselves as less empathic, or do not want to appear less empathic and thus give the *correct* answers to questions that measure affective empathy. What is their understanding of empathy? To investigate this, Jolliffe and Farrington's (2006) basic empathy scale (BES) was used in this study. The BES was specifically designed to measure affective empathy (the capacity to experience the emotions of another) and cognitive empathy (the capacity to comprehend the emotions of another) in adolescents. This scale was also chosen, in part, because the authors claim that in their study, "responses to the BES were not influenced by the adolescent's desire to appear more empathic than they actually were" (p. 608). Thus, in using this scale, this study attempted to avoid the social desirability bias that has previously been problematic in self-reports of empathy. The results of the BES and the students understanding of empathy were further explored in the student and teacher interviews.

Self-Concept and Self-Esteem. Research on the relationship between self-concept, self-esteem and relational aggression is inconclusive. The two concepts are closely related, therefore, this review outlines the research that looks at both constructs. Self-concept is an individual's knowledge about oneself formed through experience and interactions with the environment and others (Marsh, Smith, & Barnes, 1983). One's self-concept answers the question, who am I? One's self-concept is both a description of knowledge about oneself and an evaluation. Self-esteem is an attitude towards oneself; it reflects how much we like and value ourselves. In Marsh et. al.'s (1983) model, there are two components of self-concept; a cognitive component and an affective component. The cognitive component refers to one's beliefs about oneself, for instance, "I am a good person" and the affective component refers to how one feels about oneself, for example, whether they experience positive or negative feelings about themselves (Leary & Downs, 1995, p. 124). Regarding the centrality of self-esteem in driving human behaviour, Leary (1999) cites William James (1890) in that, since the beginning of research in psychology, it has been widely acknowledged that the "strive to feel good about oneself is a fundamental aspect of human nature" (p. 32).

Much of the research in the literature addressing these constructs looks at self-esteem and bullying while also discussing self-concept. The preponderance of this research focuses

on self-esteem and overt/physical bullying. Earlier research claimed children who bully to not have low self-esteem (Olweus, 1993b; Rigby and Slee, 1991). Conversely, some research claimed bully's to have higher self-esteem but perhaps only in the case of boys (Pearce & Thompson, 1998). Research on bullying has often not addressed gender differences. Moore and Kirkham (2001), for example, reported pure bullies to have significantly lower scores on self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy than those who were not involved in bullying. There were, however, two important limitations to this study; bullying was identified using self-reports (those who engage in relational aggression tend to not self-identify) and sex differences were not addressed.

Sex differences in self-concept and self-esteem with regards to bullying is repeatedly found in the research. In Kaukiainen et al.'s (2002) study (which appropriately used a peer-nomination scale) bullying was found to correlate positively with self-concept scores, but only for boys. Johnson and Lewis (1998) also found male bullies to have relatively high positive self-perceptions and self-esteem. Rigby and Cox (1996) found teenage girls who bully (but not boys) had low levels of self-esteem. Again, however, self-reports of aggression were used, so it is likely the girls in the study were more physical/overt bullies, and the self-report aggression scales would not likely have identified girls who are relationally aggressive.

Due to the finding that people that are relationally aggressive do not self-identify, Crick and Dodge (1996) devised a peer-nomination scale to identify overt and relational bullies. They found girls that were relationally aggressive significantly more rejected by peers, and reported higher levels of loneliness, depression, and isolation; all factors central to self-esteem. Moretti, Holland, and McKay (2001) used a self-report of relational aggression; they did not find a difference between boys' and girls' negative self-representations. There were, however, differences between boys and girls on the other scales. Only girls were found to report significantly higher scores on both perceived negative maternal and paternal representations of self. Further, for girls only, their level of relational aggression was found to correlate positively with perceived negativity of peer perceptions of self. Meaning that, girls who are highly relationally aggressive (but not boys) reported that they perceived their mothers, fathers, and peers to have increasingly negative perceptions of them.

While it may seem that the research evidence leans towards girls who are relationally aggressive having low self-esteem and a negative self-concept, other research raises doubt on

this issue. Osterman et al. (1999) examined the relationship between locus of control and aggression. Locus of control is a personality trait regarding one's beliefs or perceptions about whether life events are contingent on their own behaviour and choices (internal locus of control) or external factors outside of their control (external locus of control). Rather, they believe that outcomes are a matter of fate, chance, or controlled by others (external locus of control). External locus of control has been found to correlate with psychological maladjustment (Kliewer & Sandler, 1992), depression and anxiety (Rawson, 1992), and low self-esteem (Ward & Kennedy, 1992). A peer-nomination scale was used to identify male and female aggressors. If aggressive females have low self-esteem and negative self-concept as others have reported (Crick & Dodge, 1995; Rigby & Cox, 1996), we would expect females to have an external locus of control. Osterman et al.'s (1999) research, however, showed only aggressive boys to have significantly low external loci of control. Girls actually scored significantly higher on internal locus of control (associated with psychological well-being and positive self-esteem) than boys.

Further contradictory evidence is found in Pollastri et al.'s (2009) longitudinal study. Participants were divided into four groups; pure victims (PV), pure bullies (PB), bully/victims (BV), and non-involved (NI). Self-esteem was measured twice, once at age 10 and again at age 12. At the age-10 measure, both the PV and BV groups reported significantly lower levels of self-esteem than the NI group. In the PB group, neither the PB girls nor PB boys differed on self-esteem from the NI group. Of particular interest is that when the participants were measured again two years later, at age 12, PB girls and BV girls showed a significant increase in self-esteem over time. Consistent with previous research on the developmental change of self-esteem in girls (Block & Robins, 1993) girls in the NI group reported a significant decrease in self-esteem over time. Pollastri et al. (2009) suggested that the equivocal results of the relationship between bullies and self-esteem in previous research may be because the *types* of bullies were not differentiated. Further, they stated their results suggested, "the social advantage for girls of bullying appears to be related to an increase in these girls' sense of global self-worth" (p.1497). One might ask, then why did PB boys and BV boys not report an increase in self-esteem? The authors suggested that social dominance may be more central to girls' goals because girls are more orientated towards interpersonal relationships. They also suggested that because boys tend to engage in more physical, overt aggression, their bullying behaviour was likely more noticeable.

Teachers would likely have noticed and punished boys' bullying behaviours more than girls' more indirect methods. Thus, boys' behaviours would often be punished while girls' behaviours would often be socially rewarded.

Craig (1998) examined relationships between types of bullying and depression and anxiety as depression and anxiety are important indicators of emotional adjustment (Franke & Hymel, 1984; Parker & Asher, 1987). The results demonstrated "sex, level, and physical, verbal, and relational aggression and victimization did not significantly contribute to the prediction of depression" (p. 128). Relational aggression was, however, significantly related to anxiety for both aggressors and victims.

Finally, Vaillancourt et al. (2003) found that peer-nominated female bullies did not fit the "stereotype of a psychologically maladjusted, marginalized individual" (p. 168). The bullies had high status within their peer groups, reported high social self-concept, and a positive sense of self-efficacy. The relationally aggressive bullies did not report lower self-esteem or depression. The authors suggested one reason for these positive reports by the aggressive students is that "oppressing others feels good" and that the findings suggest "powerful students and bullies by and large feel good about themselves and their social interactions" (p. 170).

Thus, it appears that levels of self-concept and self-esteem in girls who are aggressive were unclear in previous research possibly because types of bullies were not differentiated. Differentiating types of bullies, as opposed to looking at bullies in a general sense, likely explains inconsistencies in research findings. In studies that identified females that were pure bullies (Pollastri et al., 2009) and high-status bullies (Vaillancourt et al., 2003) results showed these powerful female bullies to have average to high self-concept and self-esteem. Thus, it was anticipated that the relationally aggressive female bullies in this study would have average to high self-esteem and self-concept.

Theoretical Framework

The aim of this study is to investigate a specific area of aggression/bullying that has yet to be carefully considered; the experiences, beliefs, and motivations of female bullies aged 11 to 13 who are relationally aggressive. Two theories, including Hawley's (1999) resource control theory (RCT), and Blumer's (1969/1998) and Snow's (2003) symbolic

interactionism provide a framework for providing a deeper understanding their behaviour and the perspectives underlying that behaviour. These two theories, interwoven, help provide a rich context for which to explore this study's five research questions: How do females that are relationally aggressive perceive their own behaviour? Do they see themselves as aggressive or do they see others as being too sensitive? Perhaps they feel they are misunderstood? What is their perspective of others who interact with them? Are they trying or hurt others or are they trying to do something else? In this section, the study's theoretical grounding in pragmatism will be discussed. Subsequently, the two theories providing the framework for exploring an understanding of the research questions above are presented.

Theoretical Position Grounded in Pragmatism

A pragmatist's perspective guides the overall design of this study. Pragmatism holds an evolutionary view of life and inquiry (Bredo, 2006). It asserts that the world, and the organisms that inhabit it, are in a constant state of change and in a constant process of adapting to change. This constant adaptation and dynamic process includes our thinking. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2006) explain,

our thinking follows a dynamic homeostatic process of belief, doubt, inquiry, modified belief, new doubt, new inquiry ... in an infinite loop, where the person or research (and research community) constantly tries to improve upon past understanding in a way that fits and works in the world in which he or she operates.

The present is always a new starting point. (pp. 18)

Nothing is fixed, including knowledge. Thus, there is no absolute knowledge, no higher truth, and no end point to be discovered. Pragmatism asserts that "truth is what works (for society), and what works is what satisfies desires" (Hicks, 2010). Hicks further clarifies that desires are not to be thought of as desires of an individual, but rather desires of the social group. Thus, knowledge is constructed through our interaction with an ever-changing environment; it is tentative, and there are no absolutes. This study sought a deeper understanding of relationally aggressive bullies' perspectives and experiences in their social world. The data was analyzed to determine if there are consistencies amongst the participants in terms of these perspectives and experiences for the purpose of creating a model of the phenomenon of relational aggression. Scepticism, open-mindedness, and a willingness to change ways of thinking are pivotal in pragmatism. This study did not attempt to discover the answer in the absolute sense – only to potentially create a model that works to suggest a different

perspective of aggression and bullying. Pragmatism views theories as instrumental in that the *truth* of any given theory is demonstrated by how well the theory works (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2006).

Hawley's (1999) resource control theory (RCT) and Blumer (1969/1998) and Snow's (2003) symbolic interactionism are used to provide a framework for understanding the perspectives of the girls who are relationally aggressive. Both RCT theory and symbolic interactionism are based on the assumption that human learning and behaviour are directly shaped and adapted to through interactions with the environment. Consistent with the pragmatic perspective, RCT theory provides an adaptive, evolutionary frame to understand aggression; RCT conceptualizes aggressive behaviour as a natural human behaviour; strategic acts in pursuit of positive social regard and the rewards that accompany social dominance. Symbolic interactionism is an approach to understanding human behaviour from the perspective that action is based on the meaning that things have for people, and these meanings are constructed within a societal and cultural context. Thus, RCT theory provides an evolutionary account for the motivation of aggression while symbolic interaction provides a framework for understanding the girls' perspectives and reasoning for their actions.

In the following section, the key principles of the two theories will be presented. A brief summary will follow explaining how RCT and symbolic interactionism, when woven together, provide a robust framework, the theoretical underpinnings, with which to understand and reveal meanings underlying the perspectives and actions of girls who are relationally aggressive.

Resource Control Theory (RCT)

RCT theory (Hawely, 1999) conceptualizes aggressive behavior as a natural human behavior; strategic acts in pursuit of positive social regard and the rewards that accompany social dominance; evolutionary psychologists frame aggression as *adaptive* and strategic (Willer & Cupach, 2011) rather than a skill deficit. Regarding aggression specifically amongst females, "its relationship to social dominance remains relatively unexplored" (Hawley, Little, & Card, 2008, p. 77).

Evolutionary psychology has often been misunderstood as stating that all behavior is prewired or instinctual. This, however, is incorrect as Montagu (1991) clarified; ...man possesses the biological elements which under the requisite organizing conditions may influence the development of aggressive behaviour, but I repeat,

this is a very different thing from asserting that he possesses an instinct of aggression which causes him to be aggressive. (Hawley et al., 2008, pp. 55)

RCT does assert that while many aggressive behaviors are learned, it further argues, “there may be a biological predisposition for such aggressive behavior that is maintained and reinforced by social systems” (Kolbert & Crothers, 2011, p. 74).

According to evolutionists, bullying and aggression in youth serve the function of establishing and maintaining one’s position in the social hierarchy (Hawley, 1999). Recent evolutionary theorists contend that childhood bullying is “one of the central mechanisms in the establishment of dominance hierarchies in school systems” (Kolbert & Crothers, 2011, p. 73). From the evolutionary perspective, schoolyards are little microcosms of the larger society. Hawley (2003b) explains,

Youths encounter peers who are all pursuing individual goals and creating contexts that call for compromise, negotiation, cooperation and reconciliation. As in the adult world, some children stand out as being especially effective at achieving their personal goals. Also as in the adult world, these effective competitors can be aggressive, deceptive, and manipulative. (pp. 279)

Social dominance theories state that achieving dominance reflects the social effectiveness of that individual. Such theories contend that socially dominant individuals are the focus of attention, and watched and imitated by peers. Because of their high status in the group, peers gravitate towards them in pursuance of attention and positive regard from them (Hawley, 1999). Hawley, Little, and Card (2008) identified what they term the *peer regard-aggression paradox*. Children’s aggressive behaviour has been demonstrated repeatedly to be associated with peer rejection (Almeida, Correia, & Marinho, 2009; Hughes, White, Sharp, & Dunn, 2000) and psychological maladjustment (Crick, 1997; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). However, research has also demonstrated that many aggressive children are not rejected (Coie, Dodge, Terry, Wright, 1991) and are actually regarded as popular by their peers (Hawley, Little, & Card, 2007). Some aggressive children who are labeled as *bullies* are very well socially adjusted and have been found to have high self-esteem (Pollastri, Cardemil, & O’Donnell, 2009). This is the paradox that Hawley and colleagues refer to; there are children who are highly aggressive yet popular, central figures in their school or as they describe the paradox, “the apparent allure of some highly aggressive youths” (Hawley et al., 2008, p. 77). Resource control theory (Hawley, 1999) explains the regard-aggression paradox as follows; some

aggressive children are well-liked, attractive to peers, and enjoy the highest social dominance status because they are highly socially skilled and have access to resources. In social dominance hierarchies, examples of resources include influence over other group members, being the focus of attention (looked at and watched by peers), and being highly attractive social partners. Thus, similar to social dominance in non-human species, social dominance in children and youth is associated with a certain degree of prestige. RCT theory links access to resources with social dominance, despite aggression; simply put, those who obtain and control resources achieve dominance and high social status.

Childhood aggression and bullying is viewed as intergroup and intragroup competition utilizing primarily coercive and prosocial strategies to gain access to resources and promote their position in the social hierarchy. Coercive strategies are direct, aggressive, and immediate including such behaviours as the taking of others property, threats, and forceful, physical behaviours. Prosocial strategies are indirect and include “reciprocity, cooperation, unsolicited help, and positive alliance formation (i.e., friendships)” (Hawley, 1999, p. 217). Prosocial methods are, in evolutionary terms, reciprocal altruism; actions and behaviors that may appear to be in service of another, but the expectation is that the recipient will repay the prosocial act at a later time in some beneficial way. Prosocial strategies, as opposed to coercive strategies, are “indirect, prolonged, and generally win positive group regard” (p. 217). By observing individuals and through self-reports, the degree to which one utilizes either strategy can be assessed and strategy style can be identified. One can either be categorized as a *coercive controller*, a *prosocial controller*, or if the individual utilized both styles fairly equally they would be identified as a *bistrategic controller*. Bistrategic controllers, according to Hawley (2003a), confound commonly held views of social competence. They are socially skilled, have many friends, extroverted, conscientious, and are reported by their teachers to be liked by their peers and non-aggressive. They do, however, also possess a “very high need for recognition from others, and are among the most aggressive children in the school yard” (p. 217). Bistrategic controllers, strategically employ a combination of social skills that positions them as successful resource controllers in their social environment. Their peers report them as being manipulative and socially aggressive in ways that teachers are unaware of.

Regarding the issue of gender differences in aggression, RCT theory holds that bistrategic controllers are equally likely to be male or female, although females may likely

prefer more prosocial strategies and males may prefer more coercive strategies (Hawley, 1999). In one study (Hawley et. al., 2008), children were identified as prosocial, coercive, bistrategic, and non-controllers based on self-report and peer-nominated measures. The only significant difference in the distribution in regards to gender was in the coercive controller group where the group was comprised primarily of boys. Results also showed significant differences in social motivations; boys favoured extrinsic motivations (need for recognition, resource control, influence by physical means) and girls favoured intrinsic motivations for making friends.

Hawley (2003a) stated that traditional social cognitive models would predict bistrategic controllers to possess cognitive deficits including faulty perspective taking and immature moral development while evolutionary theory would state that bistrategic controllers have skills that enable them to appear moral while behaving immorally. In a study that compared self-reported moral interpretations of bistrategic controllers with coercive and prosocial controllers, results showed that; (a) teacher-rated relational aggression was associated with moral maturity in girls, and (b) bistrategic controllers while aggressive, were also morally mature. The author stated the findings support evolutionary theory's hypothesis that "highly effective resource controllers would be simultaneously aggressive and yet well aware of moral norms" (p. 213). In a follow-up study, Hawley (2003b) examined personal and social characteristics of coercive, prosocial, and bistrategic controllers. Results showed that bistrategic controllers self-reported high levels of aggression and hostility and admitted to cheating in school. Interestingly, they were rated by their peers quite similarly – aggressive, hostile, and manipulative, yet they were also rated by peers as being socially effective, popular, and well-liked. In the case of the bistrategic controller, their aggressive strategies are socially adaptive and highly effective. Coercive controllers were rated as highly aggressive, not popular, and rejected by peers. Interestingly, children who were classified as non-controllers, meaning they did not engage in either prosocial or coercive strategies, were rated as less popular, less liked, and more socially rejected than coercive controllers. These results suggest that even a negative social strategy in a competitive environment is more socially beneficial than no strategy at all.

RCT theory, therefore, is a strong theoretical framework within which to conceptualize the aggressive drive of children and adolescents because it offers a detailed account of the motivation and functions of aggression. Further, it explains many of the

inconsistencies in the research literature; why some aggressive youth are rejected and some are highly regarded, even powerful. Finally, RCT theory, like symbolic interactionism (described next), recognizes social systems as playing an integrative role in shaping behaviour.

Symbolic Interactionism (SI)

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective, grounded in pragmatism, which focuses on the small-scale interactions between individuals and the development of self as a social process (Blumer, 1969/1998). SI is concerned with how meaning is constructed and reconstructed in response to an ever-changing social environment, and how these meanings form the basis of how humans act towards things and people. Symbolic interactionism provides a necessary phenomenological lens with which to investigate the meanings of the perspectives held by the relationally aggressive girls in this study.

George Herbert Mead laid the foundation of the SI approach (Blumer, 1969/1998). Blumer further developed the approach where he articulated three major tenets of the theory. The first tenet states that action depends on meaning. Thus, how a person acts in a given situation or towards another person is based on the meaning that person has previously ascribed that situation or person; we “act toward things on the basis of the meanings which these things have for them” (p. 2). The second tenet states that “the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows” (p. 2). We give meaning to things based on our social interactions with those things. We give names (labels/symbols) to things/objects but the meanings are not inherent in these labels but are created through language. The third tenet states that meanings are social products; the meaning we give things can change. Blumer (1969/1998) articulates, “these meaning are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters” (p. 2).

Blumer (1969/1998) argued that the first tenet, that action depends on meaning, is overlooked in psychological research. He argues that psychology tends to view human behaviour as the “product of various factors that play upon human beings; concern is with the behaviour and the factors regarded as producing them” (p. 3). In doing so, the “meanings of things for the human beings who are acting are either bypassed or swallowed up in the factors used to account for their behaviour... one merely identifies the initiating factors and

the resulting behaviour” (p. 3). Symbolic interactionism holds that the meanings humans ascribe to things are central to understanding the behaviour.

Symbolic interactionism is further grounded on six principles or *root* images that describe society and human behaviour within the approach. The six root images described by Blumer (1969/1998) that constitute the symbolic interactionist framework of study and analysis include: 1) Society is seen as humans, in groups, engaging in action; humans interact with each other in an ongoing process; 2) Human interaction is a process that *forms* human behaviour, not simply a place to *express* behaviour. This means that in interacting with each other, we have to “take into account of what each other is doing or about to do; they are forced to direct their own conduct or handle their situations in terms of what they take into account ... one has to *fit* one’s own line of activity in some manner to the actions of others” (Blumer, 1969/1998, p. 8); 3) The world is composed of *objects*; physical objects (chair, cat), social objects (mother, student), and abstract objects (moral principles, justice, compassion). Objects may have different meanings for different people. The meanings we ascribe to things is based on our interactions with those things and to the observance of other’s interactions with those things; 4) People are acting agents possessing a *self* that he/she can recognize as an object. He/she can recognize themselves as a student, with an age, with a career, as a mother or father; “he acts towards himself and guides himself in his action toward others on the basis of the kind of object he is to himself” (p. 12); 5) The nature of human action is that it is active; constructing and guiding action actively in the social environment, not merely acting in response to factors acting on the human. Humans construct and direct their own action; 6) The *interconnection of lines of action* refers to “joint action” which is a “societal organization of conduct of different acts of diverse participants” (p. 17). A joint action is two or more people coming together (for example, marriage or a church service) where one can speak of the joint action and not the individual lines of action of each participant. This principle of joint action has crucial implications regarding group behavior. For example, joint action groups that are repetitive and stable (e.g. gangs or any groups within the concept of social order); people know and understand how to act in that group and how others in the group will act. They share “common and pre-established meanings of what is expected in the action of the participants, and accordingly, each participant is able to guide his own behaviour busy such meanings” (p. 17).

Thus, symbolic interactionism views individuals, engaged in constant interaction with others living within their groups, negotiating meanings of physical, social, and abstract objects, acting purposefully within their social environment based on those meanings. The meaning of an object is not inherent within that object; meanings are socially constructed and people act based on the meaning they ascribe to those objects.

Snow (2003) believed Blumer's (1969/1998) three core tenets of SI conceptualized the theory too narrowly; he stated that Blumer linked SI "too tightly and narrowly to the issue of meaning and interpretation" and overlooked other crucial principles of the theory (Snow, 2003, p. 368). Thus, Snow (2003) expanded Blumer's three tenets into four broader tenets that were more inclusive of the core principles of SI. The four *cornerstone principles* described by Snow (2003, p. 374) include the principle of interactive determination, the principle of symbolization, the principle of emergence, and the principle of human agency.

The principle of interactive determinism states that the understanding of objects for analysis,

be they self-concepts, identities, roles, organizational practices, or even social movements – cannot be fully achieved by attending only to qualities presumed to be intrinsic to them. Instead, the principal requires consideration of the interactional contexts or webs of relationship in which they are ensnared and embedded. For all practical purposes, then, neither individual or society nor self or other are ontologically prior but exist only in relation to each other; thus, one can fully understand them only through their interaction (Snow, 2003, pp. 369)

The other three principles are embedded within the context of this first and fundamental principle of interactive determinism.

The principle of symbolization is an extension of Blumer's (1969/1998) second tenet regarding the meaning of objects. Snow (2003) extends this by focusing on the way in which "meaning and symbolization can be culturally constrained and embedded" (p. 372). That is, the analysis of object must consider how meanings of objects are often "embedded in and reflective of existing cultural and organizational contexts and systems of meaning" (p. 371). Thus, Snow (2003) asserts, the meaning and interpretation of objects is more complicated than Blumer (1969/1998) outlined as it has both structuralist and constructionist factors not addressed by in his model. Snow (2003) suggests that rather than ask whether people act toward things in terms of their meaning, ask "What kinds of social contexts, organizational

forms, relational connections, and social processes are conducive to or facilitative of the routinization of meaning” (p. 372).

The principle of emergence refers to the dynamic character of human social life. The construct of emergence refers to,

the arising of novel and coherent structures, patterns, and properties during the process of self-organization in complex systems. Emergent phenomena are conceptualized as occurring on the macro level, in contrast to the micro-level components and processes out of which they arise. (Goldstein, 1999, pp. 49)

Goldstein (1999) describes emergent phenomena as radically novel, unpredictable, complex systems that arise over time; their “full richness” cannot be anticipated before they actually show themselves (p. 50). Emergence with regards to SI refers to the process out of which new “social entities, or cognitive and emotional states, arise that constitute departures from ... everyday routines, practices, or perspectives (Snow, 2003, p. 372). Snow’s (2003) expansion of SI theory proposes increased attention to interactions and situations, amongst individuals or groups, where emergence is occurring.

The principle of human agency focuses on human character as dynamic and self-willed; humans as social actors whose lines of action are purposeful as opposed to simply reacting to the environment. Societal and cultural frameworks (roles, social expectations, norms values) may influence the meaning of objects and thereby action, but they do not determine meaning and action (Snow, 2003). Humans consider these frameworks “in the course of developing their respective lines of action” (p. 374).

The Self. Symbolic interactionism has roots in phenomenology, emphasizing the subjective meaning of reality (Charon, 2001). Each person has created his/her own meaning of reality through everyday social interactions. These meanings and symbols that we create give us the “core qualities that make us unique in nature: our symbols, our self, and mind” (p. 72). The self is “an object of the actors own actions” (p. 72); it is constantly changing because we are constantly engaged in social interaction and therefore continuously renegotiating and redefining the self. Charon (2001) explains the self as a social object,

How I view myself, how I define myself, how I act toward myself thought life are highly depended on the social definitions I encounter every day of my life ... It is rather a process, continuously created and recreated in every social situation.... (pp. 73)

Self-concept is the picture we have of our *self*; it is not fixed, but it is relatively stable over time. Our self-esteem is our appraisal and judgment of our *self*. Our self-concept and our self-esteem are also a result of social interaction; “What I end up liking or not liking about myself is, to a great extent, the result of the acts of others toward me and my action toward them” (p. 83). The self is a social object, a process. We are able to reflect on self in different situations, or imagine self in future situations when determining our actions or in trying to achieve goals. We are able to judge ourselves and evaluate our actions. Self means “the individual is able to be active in relation to the world for self makes possible self-control, or self-direction.” (Charon, 2001, p. 91)

Symbolic interactionism has historically been viewed as a theory underlying qualitative research. Blumer (1969/1998) rejects quantitative methods; he believed they were too limited and simplistic to explain complex phenomena. However, other researchers believe combining symbolic interactionism and quantitative methods within a study to explore the same phenomenon “may serve to increase the depth and breadth of knowledge” (Benzies & Allen, 2001, p. 541). They further assert that the tenets and assumptions of symbolic interactionism are compatible with quantitative methods, and therefore SI, is conducive to multiple methods designs.

Evaluation of Resource Control Theory and Symbolic Interactionism

An evolutionary perspective based on Hawley’s (1999) RCT theory combined with a Blumer (1969/1998) and Snow’s (2003) symbolic interactionism provides an integrative framework to understand how the perspectives and experiences of girls who are relationally aggressive might be perceived by them. Both perspectives see humans as primarily social beings and both assert that to understand behavior; it must be looked at within the context of their social system. Both theories also contend that aggression is a learned behaviour. The evolutionary perspective of RCT theory offers an intriguing alternative position from which to examine and understand human aggression. Instead of looking at aggression in youth as abnormal and deviant, RCT theory positions aggression and the often mean and hurtful behavior it produces as strategic attempts to earn friends, social power, and favoured positions in their environment. Symbolic interactionism takes the perspective that people seek social status and the rewards that come with it; “status provides power, and power enables one to obtain rewards” (Felson, 1981, p. 185). In SI theory, impression management emphasizes the importance of an audience when deciding how to act. The audience may

either be present at the time of the action, or the audience may find out about the action, but in any case, the actor seeks the approval of the audience. Whether “the act is labeled aggressive or not is important since it affects how others react and how the actor behaves” (Felson, 1981, p. 182). Actions are based on the meanings people ascribe to situations; meaning determines action.

Interweaving these two theories provides a deeper, more contextualized framework with which to understand the participants’ perspectives. RCT theory provides an adaptive, strategic approach to conceptualize the aggressive drive of children and adolescents because it offers a detailed account of the motivation and functions of aggression and because it explains many of the inconsistencies in the research literature. RCT theory and symbolic interactionism both recognize social systems as playing an integrative role in shaping behaviour however symbolic interactionism emphasizes the importance of examining the meanings individuals attribute to people and situations within their social context because meaning drives action. SI theory provides the phenomenological lens for exploring the perspectives and experiences of the participants within their social world. Given that “the strive to feel good about oneself is a fundamental aspect of human nature” (Adler & Adler, 1998, p. 32) the interweaving of RCT and SI theory would suggest that this study will find the participants (girls nominated as highly relationally aggressive by their peers) to be highly socially competitive. The ways in which they act and behave toward people during their strive for social status is based on the meanings that they hold for those people and the situations along the way. Understanding the meanings (perspectives) the girls have, and the context within which those meanings are negotiated, are the foci of this study.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter will delineate the steps taken to investigate experiences and perspectives of girls who are relationally aggressive. Grades six to eight classes were asked to participate because research has shown the frequency and severity of relational aggression peaks during this time frame (Cairns et. al., 1989).

This explanatory mixed-methods approach included 2 phases. In Phase one, 237 students (13 classes of grades six to eight students) from four different schools in southwestern Ontario completed three surveys. One of the surveys was a peer nomination survey of both prosocial and relationally aggressive behaviors. The peer nomination data served to determine students identified as relationally aggressive by their peers. Boys were included in this first phase of the study (quantitative surveys only) for two reasons; first, to be included in the peer-nomination survey to identify students they perceive as relationally aggressive, second, as another measure taken to avoid girls feeling singled out in the study

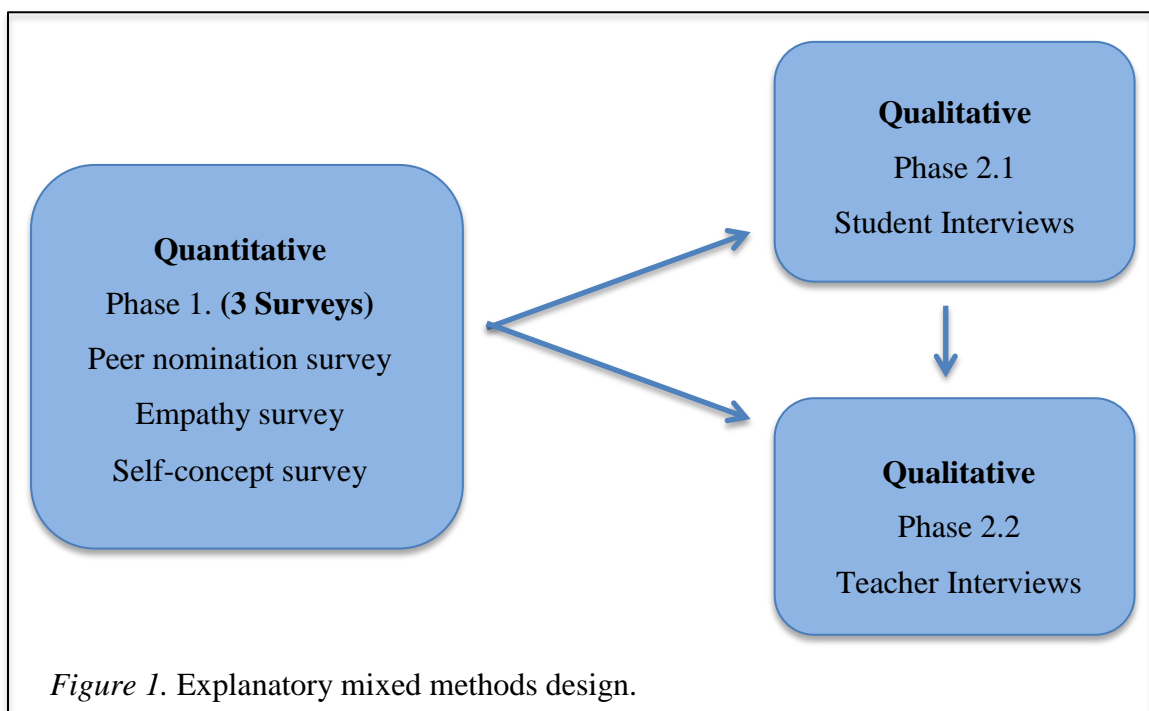
In Phase two, each class was asked for volunteers to be interviewed. In each class, volunteers were called on for interviews until the one or two girls in each class that had been nominated as highly relationally aggressive had been interviewed. The interviews lasted between 20 to 30 minutes. Seven teachers from the classes' were also interviewed. The data from the quantitative phase of the study further informed the questions of the second, qualitative stage. In the following section the methodological approach including the rationale for the mixed-methods design is discussed. Next, the organization of the study beginning with the participants in Phase 1 and how participants for Phase 2 were selected is described. The quantitative surveys and qualitative data sources (student and teacher interviews) is then discussed along with methods of data analysis.

Methodological Approach

This study uses an explanatory mixed methods design. In the following section the rationale for choosing an explanatory mixed methods design is discussed. Much of the research conducted on relational aggression and social bullying in schools has been quantitative; objectively identifying characteristics and behavioural trends of aggressive youth (Almeida, Correia, & Marinho, 2010). While trends and statistics are crucial to our understanding of youth behaviour, the addition of qualitative interviews with aggressors to help explain the perspectives and motivations behind those numbers would add greatly to our

understanding. Both quantitative and qualitative research have their strengths and weaknesses; quantitative research is effective at generating large pools of data, but may not consider context. Qualitative research is rich in context but generalizability is limited due to small sample sizes and potential for researcher bias in interpreting the data. As argued by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), “the combinations of strengths of one approach makes up for the weaknesses of the other approach” (p. 12). The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods together provides the opportunity for a deeper understanding of a research problem than either approach on its own (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p.5). Gay (2003) argues that the combination of quantitative and qualitative research enhances a research study, especially when direct quotes from the participants are used to support and bring meaning to the descriptive statistics.

Of the six major mixed methods designs, the best fit for this study was an explanatory design (See Figure 1). In this design, data collection occurs in two distinct phases; first, the quantitative data is collected and analyzed. The second, qualitative phase is designed so that it follows from and provides context to the quantitative data (Creswell, 2013). In choosing a typology-based design, the study is “provided with a framework and logic to guide the implementation of the research methods to ensure that the resulting design is rigorous, persuasive, and of high quality” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 68).



Thus, a mixed methods design was ideally suited for this study which sought to probe deeper into the girls' experiences; to investigate how the concepts measured in the quantitative surveys (relational aggression, empathy, self-concept) play out in their real life social interactions as reported in the interviews.

Recruitment of Participants

After obtaining Western University's Ethics approval (Appendix A), and approval from both the Thames Valley District School Board and the London District Catholic School Board, a general invitation to participate was emailed to all school principals (Appendix B). Five school principals were contacted directly about participating in the study. All five schools agreed to participate in the study. The purpose of the study was explained to the grade-six, seven, and eight teachers. Teachers were then able to choose whether or not to have their class participate. Parent letters of information and consent forms (Appendix C) and student letters of information and consent forms (Appendix D) were sent home with the students in participating classes. The student consent forms contained the same information as the parent consent form but the student form used words and phrases that would perhaps be more easily understood by an 11 to 13-year-old student. Consistent with Ellis and Zarbatany's (2007) method, only classes that had participation rates of 60% or more were included in the study to ensure the validity of the peer nomination scores. Teachers were provided with a box of sour-key candies to serve as an incentive for the students to return the consent forms signed by both themselves and their parents. At the end of Phase 1 the names of all participants in each class were entered into a draw that occurred that same day, after the completion of the three surveys. The prizes for the draw included a choice of a \$10 iTunes card or a voucher for Cineplex Theatre.

All teachers returned consent forms (Appendix E) agreeing to participate in the interview phase of the study. Teacher interviews occurred after all student interviews were completed. Only seven out of the thirteen teachers were able to complete the study due to time constraints; the last teacher interview was conducted the morning of the schools' grade eight graduation.

Data Sources and Implementation

This study had two phases. The first phase was the completion of three surveys, and the second phase was the individual interviews with the students and teachers. The first phase allowed the collection of empathy and self-concept scores for all students, and further, the

students' identification of different types of behavior demonstrated by their peers. The second phase of the study provided an opportunity to further explore relationally aggressive behaviours and gain a contextualized understanding of the perspectives and experiences of females who engage in this behaviour.

Quantitative Surveys (Phase 1). The first, quantitative phase of the study consisted of three surveys. All participants completed the peer nomination survey, an empathy scale, and a self-concept measure (see Appendices F, G, I, respectively). Each class completed the surveys individually. Students who did not return a consent form remained in the classroom and completed quiet seat work until the class had finished the surveys. The surveys were conducted in the afternoon and took approximately one-hour to complete. When the surveys were complete, each participant wrote their name on a small piece of paper that was provided for them to enter a draw. One student was asked to draw a name for the \$10 iTunes card or Cineplex ticket. The three quantitative measures are described below.

Survey #1: Peer Nomination Survey. Purposeful sampling (used in this study) involves identifying persons who may have specific knowledge about the phenomenon being investigated to be participants (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). The purpose of the peer nomination survey in this study was to identify girls who are relationally aggressive within classrooms. Based on the best estimate available for percentage of "high bullies" (not including victims or bystanders) being approximately 7% to 9.9% (Molcho et al., 2009; Pepler et al. 2008), it was predicted that there would be between one and three girls nominated as highly relationally aggressive in each class. Peer nomination is often used in aggression research (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Boivin & Hymel, 1997; Cole, Cornell, & Sheras, 2006; Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Dodge, 1980; Espelage & Holt, 2001) and continues to be the standard measurement procedure in research on peer relations (Bukowski, Cillessen, & Valasquez, 2011; Ellis & Zabatany, 2007). Peer nomination is particularly appropriate for people who are relationally aggressive because they tend to not self-identify, either because they do not want to be detected, or because they do not believe themselves to be aggressive (Crick & Dodge, 1996; Kaukiainen et al., 1996; Moretti et al., 2001). Researchers have stated that peer nomination is a very accurate method of identifying aggressive behaviour as youth are quite accurate at identifying the social structure of the classroom (Pakaslahti & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 2000), and are able to observe the subtle behaviours that often occur only within the peer context (Risser, Underwood & Mayeux, 2007). Adults often have fears

and concerns around the use of the peer nomination method; fears around asking children to indicate negative statements about each other, or that the process of nominating people for negative items will increase poor treatment or rejection of those children. Research on the ethics of sociometric research with children have determined those concerns to be unfounded; the children were not hurt or upset by the testing (Iverson & Iverson, 1996; Risser et al., 2007). Further, both children and their teachers reported that the social dynamics in the classroom did not change following the peer nomination. Recommended guidelines for administering the peer nomination procedure were followed in this study (Hayvren & Hymel, 1984; Risser et al., 2007). These guidelines include; a) subject and parental consent; b) participants instructed in regards to importance of confidentiality and to not discuss their responses with anyone; c) participants advised they can choose not to answer a question if they choose not to; d) participants advised they can choose to stop participating in the study at any time; e) the inclusion of positive questions at the end of the survey.

The peer nomination procedure for this study was as follows. The entire class, including both male and female students, completed the Tell Me About Your Class measure (approximately twenty minutes). Each student was given a class list of participating student names with identification numbers beside them. Seventeen questions asked students to indicate up to three people in their class whose behaviour fit the description. There were seven statements regarding relationally aggressive behavior (e.g. often teases others, spread rumours, excludes others) taken Crain, Finch, and Foster's (2005) peer nomination scale. The items are essentially the same items also used in Crick & Bigbee's (1998) peer nomination scale. Six additional items identifying prosocial behaviours (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) were added for two reasons. First, the measure might have been perceived too negatively when only relationally aggressive behaviours were listed, and second, the inclusion of prosocial questions allowed identification of students who display prosocial behaviour for comparison purposes. Two additional items asked about social preference (preferred peers to play with and not play with) (Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982; Dodge, 1980; Rys & Bear, 1997), one item inquired about popularity, and one distractor item. To ensure the wording of the items on the peer nomination survey were relatable to girls' age 11 to 13 years old, the survey was presented to 20 random girls of that age from the area. A few minor changes (same meaning but a change in wording) were made based on the girls' evaluations.

Method for Identifying Girls who are Relationally Aggressive. For each class, votes for each student on each of the 17 questions was calculated and summed. A raw RA score (relational aggression score) was calculated for each student by summing the number of nominations on the subsection of relational aggression questions on the survey (questions # 3, 4, 6, 8, 10 – 12). There are two methods for identifying groups of students in peer nomination research each of which are described below. This study utilized Method 1 as the primary method of identifying girls who are relationally aggressive because it is most often used in aggression research. Method 2, a more recent method of identification, will be used as a secondary measure to further investigate the peer nomination data.

Method 1. Voted as relationally aggressive by over 30% of class. Previous peer nomination research on aggression (Boulton & Smith, 1994; Salmivallie et al., 1997) has set the percentage of peers nominating a student on a particular behavior to be 30%. Thus, in this study, if 30% or more of the class nominated a girl as demonstrating RA behaviors, then that student was considered relationally aggressive and identified for interviewing in Phase two.

Method 2. Students with mean RA score > 1 SD above class mean RA. Another procedure used in peer nomination research for identifying behaviour clusters (Ellis & Zarbatany, 2007), identifies students whose mean RA score is higher than 1 SD above the class mean are identified as being relationally aggressive. The total number of nominations for each student received was averaged across the RA items and then standardized within nominating groups (classes) to control for differing class sizes.

After completing the peer nomination survey, all students completed two psychological measures: empathy and self-concept. Together the completion of these two surveys took approximately 25-minutes.

Survey #2: Empathy Survey. Empathy was measured using The Basic Empathy Scale (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). This scale was chosen because it is commonly used in aggression research (Gini et al., 2007; Viding, Simmonds & Petrides, 2009). Further, the scale was specifically designed to measure empathy in early adolescents. The scale contains 20 items measuring empathy as both an affective trait (the capacity to experience the emotions of another; Bryant 1982), and empathy as a cognitive ability (the capacity to comprehend the emotions of another; Hogan, 1969). The affective empathy subscale is composed of 11 items (alpha = .85), and the cognitive empathy subscale is composed of 9 items (alpha = .79). Each item asks the participants to express their own degree of agreement

on a 5-point Likert scale. The measure asks questions such as “I can usually realize quickly when a friend is angry” and “My friend’s unhappiness doesn’t make me feel anything (reverse coded)”. A BES score was calculated by summing the total scores on the two subscales. See Appendix G for the Basic Empathy Scale).

Survey #3: Self-Concept survey. Self-concept was measured using the Self-Description Questionnaire II – Short form (SDQII-S) (Marsh, Ellis, Parada, Richards & Heubeck, 2005). The SDQII is widely acknowledged as the leading multidimensional self-concept instrument for adolescents (Boyle, 1994; Hattie, 1992; Marsh et al., 2005). Support for its construct validity has been repeatedly demonstrated (Guerin, Marsh, Famose, 2003; Leach, Henson, Odom & Cagle, 2006). The scale was designed on the basis of Shavelson’s multidimensional and hierarchical model of self-concept (Shavelson, 1976; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982) and consists of 11 factors; math, appearance, general, honesty/trustworthiness, physical abilities, verbal ability, emotional stability, parent relationships, school, same-sex relationships, and opposite sex relationships. See Appendix H for a description of the 11 factors. There is a total of 66 items that participants answer on a 6-point response scale: True, Mostly True, Sometimes True, Sometimes False, Mostly False, and False. Sample questions include, “I get along with other kids easily” and “I like the way I look.” Cronbach alpha coefficients range from .80 to .92 (see Appendix I for the SDQ-11 survey).

Qualitative Interviews (Phase 2). The second, qualitative phase consisted of student and teacher semi-structured interviews. In the following section I will first discuss the study’s grounding in phenomenology, then I will discuss the interview process with the students and the teachers in this study.

Psychological Phenomenology. The method of this study is grounded in Moustakas’ (1994) and Giorgi’s (1985) psychological phenomenology; an exploration of the lived experiences of relational aggression. All branches of phenomenology are concerned with studying lived experiences of a particular phenomenon for the purpose of developing descriptions of the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013). However, while some branches, for example, Hermeneutical phenomenology, focus more on the researcher interpreting meaning of the participants experiences, Moustaka’s (1994) psychological phenomenology focuses on objectively describing the experiences. In this manner, psychological phenomenology takes a more empirical approach to research. Moustaka’s (1994) clarifies this empirical phenomenological approach as,

a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience... The human scientist determines the underlying structures of an experience by interpreting the originally given descriptions of the situation in which the experience occurs. (Moustaka, 1994, pp. 13)

These goals of psychological phenomenology are directly aligned with a pragmatic, epistemological perspective in that, “the aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (Moustaka, 1994, p.13). The current study was concerned only describing the essence of the experiences as expressed by the participants in as objective a manner as possible.

The goal of this study is to “describe the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of [the] concept or phenomenon” of relational aggression (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Therefore, the most logical method of obtaining an authentic description of the experiences of relational aggression was to ask girls who are considered highly relationally aggressive by their same aged peers to be. The voices of 18 girls who are relationally aggressive were heard, describing their thoughts and interpretations of their social environments, in an attempt to “develop a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals... ‘what’ they experienced and ‘how’ they experience it” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Phenomenology holds another key philosophical assumption that is of central importance to this study; the suspension of judgment. This neutral position was crucial during the interview process when asking the students to discuss behaviours that are typically frowned upon. Psychological phenomenology’s empirical approach to research provides a solid grounding with which to frame this mixed methods design to investigate the phenomenon of relational aggression.

Semi-structured student interviews. The teachers were emailed one to two months after their class had completed the surveys to set up a day for student interviews. Each class had one interview day scheduled with interviews typically beginning during the first period (9:00 am) and continued until approximately 1:00 pm. The interviews were conducted individually, in a private room, and lasted between 15 to 30 minutes depending on how much the student had to say. A list of the s in the class with their accompanying scores from the peer nomination survey indicated which girls were considered relationally aggressive by their peers. This list was kept hidden and seen only by the researcher. The morning of the

interviews began with a brief reminder to the entire class about the study and a short discussion about what the interviews entailed. Some of the classes had a large number of students. The goal was to interview the girls identified as relationally aggressive, however, as to not single any one girl out, the class was asked for volunteers to be interviewed. The volunteers were interviewed until all of the girls who were nominated as highly relationally aggressive in that class had been interviewed or until at least six students had been interviewed. Thus, only one interview day per class was necessary. Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed using the Dragon Dictate Pro program. Interviews were listened to a second time and checked against transcriptions by for accuracy. Completed transcriptions were then imported into NVivo software for coding and analysis. See Appendix J for student interview protocol and questions.

Semi-structured teacher interviews. Teachers of the classes were asked to participate in a 30-minute interview to discuss their perspectives of the social dynamics of the classroom. As stated previously, it was only possible to interview seven teachers (three female , four male) due to time constraints around the end of school year and preparation for grade eight graduation. Teachers were between the ages of 35 to 50 with over fifteen years teaching experience. The interviews were conducted individually in the teachers' homeroom classroom in the morning prior to the beginning of classes. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and entered into NVivo software following the same process as was used for the student interviews. See Appendix K for the teacher interview protocol and questions.

Interview data analyses. The student and teacher interviews were analyzed using Moustaka's (1994) modification of the Van Kaam (1959, 1966) phenomenological method of data analysis. Transcription of the interviews were conducted weekly from the start of the interview phase. Creswell (2014) recommends Moustaka's phenomenological approach to data analysis because it has clear, systematic steps and guidelines for assembling descriptions from the transcribed data. This systematic procedure to conducting data analysis includes following eight steps:

- 1) Bracketing: Moustakas (1994) refers to this process as Epoche (p. 84). The purpose of this step is for the researcher to describe (disclose) their own personal experience with the phenomenon in an attempt at identifying any biases they may hold while attempting to describe the participants' experience with the phenomenon.

- 2) Sense of the whole: The researcher reads the entire text to gain a sense of the whole. The function of this first step is not to derive meaning or analyse, but to understand the text in its entirety to lay the groundwork for the third step.
- 3) Horizontalization: This process involves going through the data and highlighting *significant statements* made by the participant that relate directly to explaining how they experience the phenomenon. This step also includes *Reduction and Elimination* which entails identifying and eliminating elements of the text that do not contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon.
- 4) Discrimination of meaning units: This step includes clustering the significant statements identified in step 3 into larger themes (thematic labels).
- 5) Final Identification of Themes: The researcher checks the validity of the identified themes with each of the participants' interview records. The research asks him or herself if the themes are expressed explicitly in the interviews? Are they compatible? If the themes are not compatible, they are determined not relevant to that participant's experience of the phenomenon and that theme is discarded.
- 6) Individual textural descriptions: The researcher reflects on the meaning units/themes and derives the essence of the phenomenon for each participant. Each unit, which is still in the language of the participant, is translated into psychological science language.
- 7) Structural Description: The themes and significant statements are also used to write a description of the situational context of the participant that influenced how they experienced the phenomenon.
- 8) Composite Description or Essence: From the individual textural description and the structural description, the researcher develops a "composite description of the meaning and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

Validation Procedures. This study includes three methods of validating data:

1) bracketing (Step 1 of Moustaka's phenomenological approach), 2) final identification of themes (Step 5), and 3) triangulation (or crystallization) of the quantitative and qualitative data. The first two methods, bracketing and final identification of themes, are described above. Triangulation of the data is described in the next section. Member checking of the

essence of relational aggression (Step 8), where participants review the finished data to confirm the description is an accurate portrayal of their experience (Lodico et al., 2010), was not an option as every effort was being made in this study to provide the RA participants with anonymity.

Triangulation/Crystallization of the Qualitative and Quantitative Data. The term triangulation and the term crystallization essentially refer to same method of validation; using multiple sources of data, or looking at a phenomenon from multiple perspectives to clarify meaning, verify the demonstration of observations, and provide diverse perspectives of a phenomenon to provide a deeper and more contextualized description (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005). A key difference between the two constructs is that triangulation is said by some researchers to be the act of looking at a fixed object from three distinct perspectives, whereas other researchers prefer the term crystallization because they state “an object is not fixed, not stagnant, and there are many more ways than three to approach the world or look at a phenomenon” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963). This study will utilize the term triangulation as this term is most often used in mixed methods research (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Converging lines of inquiry are said to occur when data from multiple sources intersect at a similar point. The multiple sources of data for the present study come from student interviews, teacher interviews, and the three quantitative surveys. Yin (2006) discusses the importance of having multiple sources of evidence, “the main idea is to triangulate or establish converging lines of evidence to make your findings as robust as possible” (p. 115). Finding corroborating results across the different methods used to collect data allows greater confidence in the validity of the findings. Each method by which I am collecting data has the benefit of further contextualizing the big picture of our understanding of the experiences of females who are relationally aggressive.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of the methods and procedures used in this study, and the underlying methodological position supporting those methods. This mixed-methods, phenomenological study included two phases; a quantitative phase measuring relational aggression, empathy, and self-concept, and a qualitative phase where 18 girls nominated as relationally aggressive, and seven of their teachers, were interviewed

individually. The method of data analysis for both phases of the study was explained. Further discussed were validation procedures including triangulation of data and Moustaka's (1994) final identification of themes (5th step of data analysis). This mixed-method design allows for the merging of the two data sources so that "their combined use provides a better understanding of the research problem than one source or the other" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 268). The mixed methods methodological question to be addressed in the discussion chapter is, "in what ways [did] the qualitative data help to explain the quantitative data?" (p. 234). The qualitative interviews in this study were designed to further explore the concepts measured in the quantitative phase for the purpose of contributing deeper contextualization and a more holistic picture of the participant's perspectives of themselves and their social environment.

Chapter 4: Quantitative Results

The purpose of this study was to explore how girls who are relationally aggressive experience and perceive the world around them; how do they perceive their own behaviour? Do they see themselves as aggressive or do they believe others are too sensitive? Are they trying to hurt others or are they trying to accomplish something else? To explore these questions from their perspective, we must first know whom to ask. The mixed-methods approach began with identifying these students. Phase 1 consists of three quantitative surveys. The first survey was a peer-nomination survey where each class was asked to nominate peers based on both positive, pro-social behaviours and aggressive, relationally aggressive behaviours. This survey allowed peer identification of girls who are perceived of as relationally aggressive by their peers to be interviewed in the second, qualitative phase of the study. Students also completed surveys measuring empathy and self-concept, which were also further explored in the interviews.

This chapter first describes the participating schools (four) and the participating classes (13) from those four schools. Next, the two methods used for analyzing the peer-nomination data for the purpose of identifying girls who are relationally aggressive in each class is discussed. Finally, the results of the data analysis of the two psychological measures of empathy and self-concept are reported. For this results section, “girls who are relationally aggressive” will be written as “RA girl” where a shorter form for the term makes discussion more clear.

Participants

Four of the five elementary public schools had classes that returned over 60% signed consent forms. Classes from the fifth school were unable to participate in the study because the teachers had difficulty having the students return the consent forms. After three weeks, the teachers were able to obtain only 30% to 40% of the classes’ consent forms (below the 60% minimum) and therefore that school withdrew from the study.

Participating Schools

The student participants (N=237) were from thirteen classrooms from four different schools in a school district in southwestern Ontario. School 1 was located in an urban centre (population 37 905) located within forty-five minutes of the other schools in the study. The three other schools (school 2, 3, and 4) were located within a mid-size city (population 367

000). Schools 1 and 2 had enrolments of between 250 to 400 students. School's 3 and 4 were slightly larger with enrolments ranging from 600 to 800.

Phase 1 Participants

In the first, quantitative phase of the study, all 237 participating students (85 boys, 152 girls) completed the peer nomination survey (see Appendix F), a psychological measure of empathy (see Appendix G) and a psychological measure of self-concept (see Appendix H). Appendix L shows the breakdown of total participants (N=237) by school, class, grade, age, number of participants per class, and percentage of female students. The mean age was 12.48 years (SD= .77) with a minimum age of 11 and a maximum age of 14.

Peer Nomination Survey to Identify Phase 2 Participants. For each class, votes for each student on each of the 17 questions was calculated and summed. A raw RA score (relational aggression score) was calculated for each student by summing the number of nominations on the subsection of relational aggression questions on the survey (questions # 3, 4, 6, 8, 10 – 12). There are two methods for identifying groups of students in peer nomination research; the first (Method 1) is based on percentage of class nominators (Salmivalie et al., 1996), and the second (Method 2) is based on scores one standard deviation above the class mean (Ellis & Zarbatany, 2007). Both methods were used in this study (see Table 1 and Table 2 respectively). The two methods for identifying and distinguishing participants as relationally aggressive are described below.

Method 1. Voted as relationally aggressive by over 30% of class. Previous peer nomination research on aggression (Salmivalie et al., 1996) has set the percentage of peers nominating a student on a particular behavior to be 30%. Thus, in this study, if 30% or more of the class nominated a girl as demonstrating RA behaviors, then that student was considered relationally aggressive and identified for interviewing in Phase two. See Table 1 for number of RA girls identified in each class. As expected, there were zero to three girls nominated as relationally aggressive in most of the 13 classes. Two classes' peer nomination scores (class 8 and class 9) showed no one voted as being more aggressive than others. Class 8 was a sole class participating from school 3 therefore that class was thanked for their participation and excused from the interview phase of the study. Because they were the only class from that school there was no risk of other classes inquiring as to why they were excused or inferring the inclusion of their class meant students had been identified.

Table 1

Method 1 (>30%) for Identifying Students who are Relationally Aggressive

| School | Class | N/clas | St. ID# | RA score | # of nominators | % of class | | |
|--------|-------|--------|---------|----------|-----------------|------------|-----|-----|
| 1 | 1 | 17 | 8 | 19 | 9 | 47% | | |
| | | | 14 | 19 | 5 | 30% | | |
| 2 | 2 | 18 | 28 | 24 | 8 | 44% | | |
| | | | 3 | 18 | 50 | 16 | 6 | 33% |
| | | | | | 56 | 27 | 10 | 55% |
| | 4 | 14 | 60 | 20 | 9 | 64% | | |
| | | | 61 | 15 | 6 | 42% | | |
| | | | 69 | 59 | 10 | 71% | | |
| | | | 80 | 21 | 10 | 63% | | |
| 4 | 6 | 19 | 101 | 24 | 8 | 42% | | |
| | | | 114 | 21 | 3 | 33% | | |
| | | | 117 | 30 | 9 | 47% | | |
| | 7 | 21 | 137 | 50 | 13 | 62% | | |
| | 4 | 10 | 20 | 225 | 15 | 7 | 35% | |
| 401 | | | | 20 | 6 | 35% | | |
| 11 | | 23 | 252 | 20 | 11 | 48% | | |
| | | | 262 | 25 | 7 | 31% | | |
| 12 | | 24 | 286 | 35 | 10 | 42% | | |
| 13 | | 23 | 413 | 42 | 13 | 57% | | |
| | 433 | | 25 | 10 | 44% | | | |

Total RA female students = 20

Table 2

Method 2 (> 1 SD) for Identifying Students who are Relationally Aggressive

| School | Class | Class RA score | | > 1 SD above mean ID# |
|----------|-----------|----------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| | | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | |
| 1 | 1 | 1.11 | 1.35 | 14, 8 |
| 2 | 2 | .51 | .84 | 28 |
| 2 | 3 | 1.53 | 1.23 | 56 |
| 2 | 4 | 1.91 | 2.32 | 69 |
| 2 | 5 | 1.12 | 1.14 | 80 |
| 2 | 6 | 1.54 | 1.27 | 101, 114, 117 |
| 2 | 7 | .96 | 1.63 | 137 |
| 3 | 8 | .56 | .63 | 0 |
| 4 | 9 | .38 | .64 | 0 |
| 4 | 10 | .57 | .75 | 225, 401 |
| 4 | 11 | .64 | .92 | 252, 262 |
| 4 | 12 | 1.26 | 1.71 | 286 |
| <u>4</u> | <u>13</u> | <u>1.4</u> | <u>2.01</u> | <u>413, 433</u> |

Total RA female students = 17

Note. Table displays mean RA scores and standard deviations for each class, and the identification numbers of the female participants with RA scores higher than 1 SD above the class mean.

Class 9 was from a school with four other participating classes therefore to maintain anonymity that class was included in Phase 2 with the other classes. Six interviews with volunteers were conducted with class 9 to maintain anonymity of RA students in other classes. Using Method 1 (any student receiving > 30% of class nominations), 20 females were identified as relationally aggressive.

Method 2. Students with mean RA score > 1 SD above class mean RA. Using a procedure in other peer nomination research for identifying behaviour clusters (Ellis & Zarbatany, 2007), students whose mean RA score was higher than 1 SD above the class mean were identified as being relationally aggressive. The total number of nominations for each student received was averaged across the RA items and then standardized within nominating groups (classes) to control for differing class sizes. Using this method, 17 females were identified as relationally aggressive. See Table 2.

Participants Selected. To increase validity by which participants were identified as aggressive, the results of both methods were used in the identification and classification of RA participants for the second phase of this study. Both methods identified the same 17 females as aggressive. Method 2 identified an additional three girls. Thus, a total of 20 female students were identified as relationally aggressive based on the nominations from their peers.

Peer nomination measures of social preference, popularity, leadership, and humour.

Peer nominations for each RA girl on the above measures were calculated as a percentage of class nominators (See Table 3). Social preference includes who voted that person as someone they like to play with (1) or someone they do not like to play with (3). The score for reciprocal (2) indicates whether that RA girl nominated the other RA girl in the class as someone they like. These results indicate that, for social preference, all of the girls but one appear to have some friends that like playing with them. However, in most classes, an average of 30% of the class voted the RA girls as people they do not like playing with. In only one class (class 6) did the RA girls indicate that they liked the other RA girl in the class. In five classes, one of the RA girls indicated she doesn't like the other RA girl. In terms of popularity, the RA girls were either voted as one of the more or most popular girl in the class, or they received no votes. Three of the RA girls (#8, #61, #262) were voted by half of the class as *the best leaders*. In terms of who the funny people are in the class, only two RA girls

received votes by over 20% of the class. Most of the RA girls were not rated as funny by their classmates.

Results of Quantitative Surveys

The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS statistical software program. The data collected on both the BES and SDQ-11 surveys was prepared for analysis using the following method. First, Little's MCAR test was conducted to ensure that the data points that were missing were missing completely at random. All tests were found to be not significant. A missing data analysis to replace missing values using EM (Expectation-Maximization) method was then conducted. The results of the empathy measure (Basic Empathy Scale) and the self-concept measure (Self-Description Questionnaire) are reported below.

Basic Empathy Scale

The internal consistency of the BES was investigated. First, a reliability test was conducted on the total 20 items of the measure and secondly, each of the two subscales. Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the BES test was .83, and when its two subscales were tested individually, results showed an alpha of .80 for the affective subscale and .74 for the cognitive subscale.

Female students and Male students. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine whether males and females differ in terms of empathy. Based on total empathy scores (all 20 items), female students ($M= 3.93$, $SD=.45$) scored significantly higher on empathy than male students ($M= 3.60$, $SD= .05$), $t(235) = 5.41$, $p<0001$. To examine further for possible differences, independent t-tests were conducted on the cognitive empathy subscale and the affective empathy subscale separately. Results showed that female students ($M= 4.17$, $SD= .50$) scored significantly higher on cognitive empathy than male students ($M= 3.97$, $SD= .05$), $t(235) = 3.06$, $p< .01$. Female students ($M= 3.72$, $SD= .58$) also scored significantly higher on affective empathy than male students ($M= 3.29$, $SD= .61$), $t(235) = 5.44$, $p< .0001$.

RA Females and Non-RA Females. Independent t-tests were conducted on empathy scores of the RA group ($n=20$) and the non-RA group ($n=132$). Results showed that the RA group ($M=3.90$, $SD=.45$) did not differ from the non-RA group ($M=3.93$, $SD=.45$) in terms of total empathy ($t(150) = -.27$, $p = .79$). The two groups were then compared on both the cognitive subscale alone and the affective subscale alone. There

Table 3.

Percentage of Class Nominating RA Participants on Social Preference, Perceived Popularity, Leadership and Humour.

| Class # | N/class | Student ID# | RA Score | % 1. Like | % 2. Reciprocal | % 3. Dislike | % 4. Popular | % 5. Leader | % 6. Funniest |
|---------|---------|-------------|----------|-----------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1 | 17 | 8 | 19 | 18 | Dislikes 14 | 12 | 53 | 47 | 0 |
| | | 14 | 19 | 6 | No | 30 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 18 | 28 | 24 | 11 | na | 28 | 78 | 11 | 0 |
| 3 | 18 | 50 | 16 | 33 | No | 28 | 56 | 0 | 0 |
| | | 56 | 27 | 22 | No | 23 | 17 | 6 | 6 |
| 4 | 14 | 60 | 20 | 21 | Dislikes 69 | 36 | 7 | 14 | 0 |
| | | 61 | 15 | 14 | No | 7 | 86 | 50 | 21 |
| | | 69 | 59 | 7 | Y 61 | 57 | 71 | 0 | 14 |
| 5 | 16 | 80 | 21 | 19 | na | 25 | 63 | 13 | 6 |
| 6 | 19 | 101 | 24 | 37 | Yes | 26 | 47 | 5 | 0 |
| | | 117 | 30 | 21 | Yes | 32 | 42 | 5 | 5 |

(continued)

| Class # | N/class | Student ID# | RA Score | % 1. Like | % 2. Reciprocal | % 3. Dislike | % 4. Popular | % 5. Leader | % 6. Funniest |
|---------|---------|-------------|----------|-----------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| 7 | 21 | 137 | 50 | 10 | na | 29 | 33 | 0 | 0 |
| 10 | 20 | 225 | 15 | 10 | Dislikes 401 | 30 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | | 401 | 20 | 10 | No | 30 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| 11 | 23 | 252 | 20 | 0 | Yes | 39 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | | 262 | 25 | 17 | No | 30 | 61 | 44 | 4 |
| 12 | 24 | 269 | 18 | 17 | Dislikes 286 | 21 | 8 | 0 | 21 |
| | | 286 | 35 | 8 | No | 33 | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| 13 | 23 | 413 | 42 | 4 | Dislikes 433 | 57 | 9 | 9 | 1 |
| | | 433 | 25 | 26 | Yes | 26 | 23 | 1 | 13 |

Note: Peer nominations for questions regarding 1) Like; Who do you LIKE to play with; 2) RA participants who voted other RA girl in class as LIKE or DISLIKE; 3) Dislike; Who do you prefer NOT to play with; 4) Who is the most POPULAR girl in your class; 5) Who are the best LEADERS in your class; 6) Who are the FUNNIEST people in your class. Na = not applicable because only 1 RA in class. Yes = voted other RA participant in class as LIKE. No = did not vote other RA girl as someone they like.

were also no differences between the groups on the individual scales. The tests were then repeated using random samples of 20 non-RA females to equal out the number of participants in each group. Three different samples of 20 non-RA females were selected and individual t-tests were conducted on each group. Using equal sample sizes had no effect on the tests; there were no differences between the RA females and non-RA females in terms of total empathy, cognitive empathy, or affective empathy. (See Table 4). A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between empathy and relational aggression, no correlation was found, Pearson's $r(152) = .06$, $p = .48$.

Self-Description Questionnaire 11 (SDQ-11)

The internal consistency of each of the subscales was investigated. Coefficient alphas for the ten dimensions ranged from .79 to .93.

Female students and Male students. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine whether females and males differ in terms of self-concept. Based on total self-concept scores, there was no difference between the female students ($M = 4.58$, $SD = .62$) and male students ($M = 4.69$, $SD = .62$), $t(235) = -1.28$, $p = .20$.

RA females and Non-RA females. Independent t-tests were conducted to see if there was a difference between the RA group ($n = 20$) and the non-RA group ($n = 132$). Results showed there to be no difference in the level of general self-concept between RA females ($M = 4.70$, $SD = .67$) and non-RA females ($M = 5.57$, $SD = .61$), $t(150) = .79$, $p = .43$. To investigate possible group differences further, independent t-tests were conducted on each of the 11 subscales of the SDQ-11. Nine of the 11 subscales showed no significant differences between the groups. See Table 5 for means, standard deviations, and t-scores for each of the subscales. Two subscales did show significant differences between the groups; physical abilities and opposite-sex relations. Results indicated that the RA group ($M = 5.19$, $SD = .73$) had significantly higher self-concept around their physical abilities than the non-RA group ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.39$), $t(44) = 5.25$, $p < .01$, $d = .85$. Cohen's d measure of effect size shows physical ability to have a strong effect. Results further indicated the RA group ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.32$) to have significantly higher beliefs in their success with opposite-sex relationships than the non-RA group ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.33$), $t(150) = 2.99$, $p < .01$, $d = .71$) Cohen's d measure of effect size shows the effect of perceived success with opposite-sex relations to also have a moderate effect.

Table 4

Independent t-tests of RA-females and Non-Aggressive Females on Empathy.

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| <i>Total Empathy</i> | | | | | |
| RA(20) | 3.90 | .45 | 150 | -.27 | ns |
| nonRA(132) | 3.93 | .45 | | | |
| <i>Cognitive Empathy</i> | | | | | |
| RA(20) | 4.12 | .55 | 150 | -.41 | ns |
| non-RA(132) | 4.17 | .49 | | | |
| <i>Affective Empathy</i> | | | | | |
| RA(20) | 3.72 | .58 | 150 | -.09 | ns |
| non-RA(132) | 3.73 | .58 | | | |

Table 5.

RA-Females and Non-RA Females' Mean Scores on Each of the 11 Subscales of the SDQ 11

| Subscale | Group M (SD) | | t(df) |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------|
| | RA (20) | Non-RA (132) | |
| Math | 4.25 (1.21) | 4.50 (1.49) | -.72 |
| Appearance | 4.60(1.10) | 4.13(1.16) | 1.67 |
| General | 4.92 (.85) | 4.87 (.81) | .24 |
| Honesty | 4.89 (.85) | 4.94 (.79) | -.31 |
| Physical Abilities | 5.19 (.73) | 4.29 (1.39) | 4.39** |
| Verbal | 4.56 (1.29) | 4.64 (1.14) | -.30 |
| Emotional Stability | 3.27 (1.34) | 3.32 (1.20) | -.17 |
| Parent relationships | 5.05 (1.36) | 5.25 (.82) | -.63 |
| School | 4.93 (.83) | 4.98 (1.03) | -.19 |
| Same-sex relationships | 5.03 (1.25) | 5.18 (.92) | -.65 |
| Opposite-sex relationships | 4.80 (1.32) | 3.85 (1.33) | 2.99* |

Note. (df) = 150 for all subscales. Cohen's d measure for physical abilities (d = .85) and for opposite sex relationships (d = .71). **p < .005, *p < .01

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between self-concept and relational aggression, no correlation was found, Pearson's $r(152) = .09$, $p = .48$.

Summary of Results

The peer-nomination results showed, as expected, one to three females in each class to be considered relationally aggressive by their peers. Consistent with the literature on empathy, females were found to be significantly more empathic than boys. Surprisingly, however, RA-girls were not found to differ in terms of empathy (either cognitive or affective) than non-RA females. When testing all 11 subscales of the self-concept measure, RA females were also not found to be different from the non-RA females. However, when the 11 subscales were tested individually, the RA-females were found to score significantly higher than the non-RA females on two of the subscales: physical abilities and opposite-sex relationships.

Chapter 5: Qualitative Results

This chapter presents the key findings obtained from the 18 student interviews and seven teacher interviews. While twenty females were identified as relationally aggressive, two of those students were absent on the day of the interviews. Due to time constraints, only seven teachers were interviewed; three teachers were male, four teachers were female, all teachers were between the ages of 35 to 50 with over 15 years teaching experience. Interview questions for both the student interviews and teacher interviews are attached as Appendices J and K.

Five major themes emerged from the data: Self-Esteem and Friendships, Adult Relationships, Achievements and Attitudes, Drama, and Perspectives on Own Behaviour. The first theme, Self-Esteem and Friendships has three subthemes including Friendships and Social Circles, Valued Qualities in Friends, and Beliefs about Self. The second theme, Adult Relationships, has two subthemes that include Relationships with Parents and Relationships with Teachers. The third theme, Achievements and Attitude, has four subthemes including Competitive Nature/High Achieving, Academics, Maintain Social Status, and Logical Empathy. The fourth theme, Drama, has two subthemes Drama and Rude Behaviour and Rude to be Rude. The fifth theme, Perspectives on Own Behaviour has four subthemes; Arguments with Friends, They are liked, Not mean, rude, or a Bully, and Views on Mean People. See Figure 2 for summary of the five themes that emerged from the data and subthemes within each of those themes.

In the following section, the five major themes and subthemes will be presented, discussed, and substantiated with direct quotations from the participants. Pseudonyms are used for the participants. Teacher observations and perspectives of students' behaviour are presented each section where the teachers' discussed that theme in the teacher interviews. Finally, a summary of the results of the interviews with students and teachers is provided.

Theme 1: Self-Esteem and Friendships

The girls see themselves as fun, outgoing, loyal people who have a lot of friends at school. Three sub-themes emerged from the descriptions the girls gave about their friendships and social activities. These include friendships and social circles, valued qualities in friends, and beliefs about themselves.

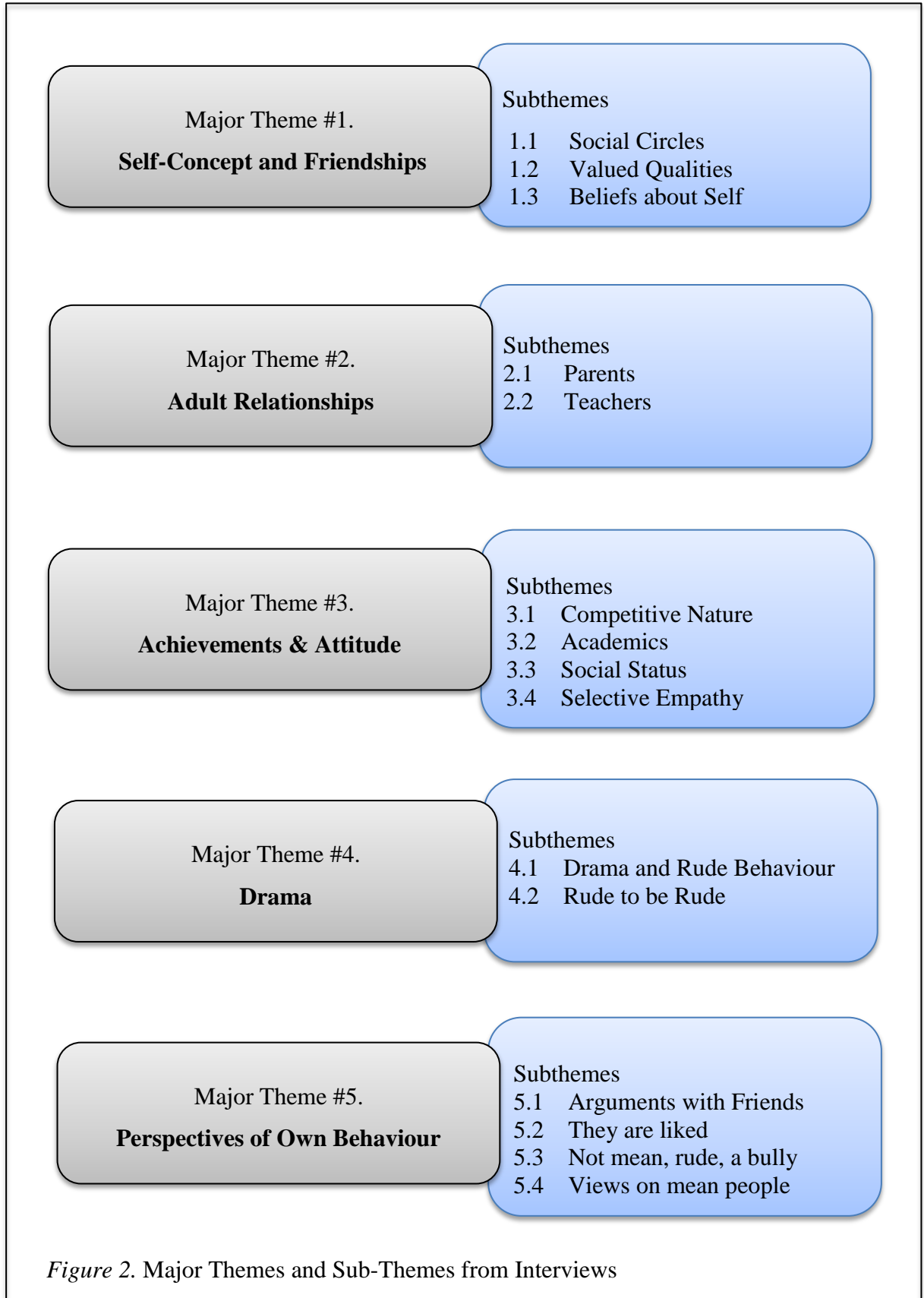


Figure 2. Major Themes and Sub-Themes from Interviews

1.1 Friendships and Social Circles. When asked about their friendship circles, the most common response emphasized describing a “big group of friends” or a “whole bunch of friends” as opposed to close, intimate friendships. For example, Tia’s first response when asked about her friendship circles was, “we usually hang out in all big groups or like little groups... I go around everybody.” All of the students discussed having a large group of friends, and most students described having one or two ‘best friends’ or ‘friends that are close.’ Hannah’s response exemplifies most of the responses by the girls, “I have two or three really close friends and then we have like one really big group of friends like five or six even and we all just like hang out.” A student who is very aware and speaks openly about her aggressive behaviour described how she now has a ‘better’ group of friends. Again, however, her new group is a big group as opposed to describing a close friend.

S: Last year, they, I had a whole different group of friends and they left and I started hanging out with better people so I have a whole bunch of more friends now and we just hang out I guess, I don’t know.

I: When you said they left ... where did they go?

S: High school.

I: Oh, so they were a year older than you. Then you said they left and you got a bunch of better friends.

S: Yeah well I was doing like bad stuff with them. So I was getting in trouble and stuff.

I: Ah. What kind of bad stuff?

S: Drugs and just doing bad things.

I: Oh ... and getting in trouble?

S: Yeah.

I: Ah, so maybe that’s good they went to high school.

S: Yeah! That’s what everybody else says too.

I: So you get along well with your new friends?

S: Yeah.

S: Get in less trouble?

I: Definitely.

Four girls commented about not having a best friend or ‘closer friends’ at the school. Two said they did not want to choose or favour anyone in the group therefore they just stayed friends with everyone. They described their social circles as follows:

S: Sometimes when we’re at their house it’s like 10 of us.

I: Oh wow... okay so do you have like one or two best friends in a group or are you just friends with everybody?

S: Ummm...well I don’t pick favourites so it doesn’t matter I guess.

I: So you’re friends with like the whole group of 10?

S: Yeah. (Lila)

S: I don't really have any best friends, I’m just friends with everyone. I don't like having a best friend cause then other people feel like, ‘why am I not your best friend?’”

I: Oh I see, okay so if you are going to talk about something or tell a secret...

S: I don’t really tell secrets to people, I just keep them to myself.

S: Oh okay... You keep all your secrets to yourself?

S: Yup.

I: You don't have anybody that you share secrets with?

S: Nope. (Jamie)

The two other students said their best friends went to different schools. The first girl stated that her best friend also goes to another school, and that she “also has friends from hockey and other sports and stuff... lots of different groups.” The other girl stated that “a lot of close friends are still at [the other school]... we keep in touch... sometimes so...”

Thus, most of the girls described having very large groups of friends that they ‘hang out’ with or play with at recess and after school, and then one or two closer friends or best friends. Four girls did not have close friends at the school.

Teacher Views on Friendships and Social Circles. The teachers reported that, in general, the girls in their classes seem to get along well and ‘hang out’ in large groups. Mrs. Black described her class as the following:

For the most part they're very close knit group and it's an unusual year in that there's a lot of hugging all the time ... There's one group that's particularly large I'd say, the group varies I'd say at least a dozen or 10 or so. They sit together at lunch and they're

very close they quite often of each other in the hall they drink their arms around each other and have sleepover parties they do a lot together so that's a very tightknit group. And the rest tend to form smaller groups of, well, it's flexible, generally 3 to 5 students that's how it breaks down, and I don't think that there's anybody who is isolated. But one girl probably isn't as closely connected with anybody she pairs up with someone but she's not particularly close.

Two teachers stated they had students that were a little “less part of a group.” One student was described as being “louder and needier” and can sometimes “end up being by herself with the boys.” The other student was described as having no friends and was an outcast because her peers consider her mean or rude. The teacher explained,

I don't know that she knows that she's not especially well liked because she's not very kind. I don't think she knows that she doesn't have a large group of friends because she's not kind. I have so many kind kids in this class and they don't tolerate that ... and I don't know if she's made that connection.

The other six teachers stated that everyone appeared to have friends within the class, but also all admitted that they probably do not know what is ‘actually going on.’ One teacher explained,

They generally get along very well they know how to behave. They've been trained well by teachers and parents to behave appropriately in every circumstance that I've seen them so far this year. I don't think that that necessarily reflects what they're really ... they know the appropriate responses in certain circumstances because they are polite and well mannered but that's not necessarily how they're feeling so it is difficult ...to know ... exactly...

According to one teacher, it is difficult to know who has friends and who does not in the classroom because in the classroom “they'll interact because there forced to and everyone appears to be kind, but when out in the yard they will not interact at all.” Generally, most teachers stated that while it appears that all of the girls have friends within the class and tend to ‘hang out’ in large groups, they also reported their belief that their observations of ‘true’ friendships in the class is likely invalid because often with the girls, “you don't know everything.”

1.2 Valued Qualities in Friends. The girls stated that the most important qualities in a friend are loyalty, trustworthiness, and support. Loyalty and trustworthiness were mentioned repeatedly amidst the backdrop of the social drama and jealousy that occurs within their social circles. For example, when asked what is important in a friend Reign stated, “that they’re loyal. That they won’t talk behind your back or they won’t... they kind of will be there for you if you need them, that’s the major thing.” Not talking behind a friend’s back and keeping secrets was an important element of loyalty mentioned by most of the girls. Another student explained:

S: Like to trust them with things...like if I told them something and they wouldn’t tell anyone because I actually trust her as a friend or him.

I: Okay so to keep your secrets and you can trust them, anything else?

S: Just to be a fun friend and not like a rude one or anything like that.

I: Okay to be fun and not be rude. What would be...what is to be rude? What does that mean to you?

S: Like...not to like talk behind your back, like bad stuff and then like just not to be mean to people either; rude to people.

The girls considered talking negatively about others, being mean, and excluding as ‘being rude,’ not bullying. Jamie explained what was important to her in a friend:

To be honest and to not like talk about other people...saying like “this person....” don’t talk about them rudely, like, also if your one friend doesn’t like this other person but you like them, don’t get obligated to be friends with this person and not talk to the other one, okay, and like not be rude to each other and stuff.

The girls also stated that *supportiveness* is another crucial quality of a good friend. Example statements include Olivia’s explanation that a good friend is “always there for me and when I’m sad they always come in comfort me, and I can talk to them about anything” and Brooklyn’s response, “That they are like there for you... like when you’re like hurt or something... they get you back up in the cheer you up.” One girl summed up in one brief statement what was most important in a friend: “Trust, respect, listening, honesty.”

One student’s response to this question demonstrated two things; first that she values caring as an important quality in a friend, and secondly, the likelihood that she has no close friends who she feels cares about her. She spoke quickly at first, laughing and making light of what she was saying but then became quieter and visibly upset.

S: Ummm, they have to have a good sense of humour just because you can't be like [serious], all of the time. You gotta have like, you can't be just like clueless, you always have to be, you have to be a good listener I guess because you just can't be like a space cadet all the time. You can't just be wandering around not knowing what's going on all the time... Umm, you can't be, well you can be shy, but like you can't be that shy, not that you don't talk all the time, umm and stuff like that... have to be nice and stuff... helpful... caring and stuff like that.

I: What do you mean people who wander around and don't know what's going on?

S: Like if you're in a conversation and you're talking to them and they're just looking off in the other direction and they are not even caring what you're saying. I: Oh okay, so they're... just they're not listening.

S: Yeah, they don't care.

I: So it's important that your friend's care about what you're talking about and what you're doing?

S: Yeah.

The girls valued loyalty, trustworthiness, respect and caring/supportive friends. This was further supported when the girls were asked about what makes someone popular. The most common response was that they had to be 'nice and caring.' Several girls stated that who was popular depended on how 'kind you are and how social you are.' According to the girls, there are two types of popular: *nice* popular and *mean* popular. However, the mean popular girls are not respected; the popular girls who have the valued qualities of kindness, respect, and trustworthiness are admired and held in high esteem.

1.3 Beliefs about themselves. Most of the students appear to have a positive, confident sense of self; they believe they are fun, caring people who are liked by their peers. The following are comments from the students when asked what they like about themselves:

I like that people can trust me and they feel like they can tell me things and I can help people as much as I can and I want to do that. (Christine)

I make friends quite easily and I think that's pretty special...Probably because I'm not shy unless I'm like talking to older people but if I'm talking to my own age group I'm kind of outgoing. I like to show everyone who I am and if they don't like me for who I am then that's kind of their loss I guess. (laughs) (Ashley)

How I'm open and inviting to people but if they're mean like I can, I, back away from them (laughs) or something. Like, I'm open to people, and, I can be a leader sometimes (laughs). And I'm open to people...I can be very open-minded to other things and I can solve problems easier, like easy and not get frustrated with people that quickly.

[I like that] I'm kind to others around me (big smile).

Sarcastic, athletic, beautiful, like I'm really caring about my friends if they have something to help them out with it, and caring

Many also exuded a confidence in themselves either in their ability to stand up for themselves or in their competence around sports or programs they're involved in.

I was going to say I can trust ... but I can't really... how do you trust yourself? I don't really understand that. Like I always do what I feel is right and not what other people feel is right so for instance when my friends said don't tell and I was like no I feel like the right thing to do is do tell so I did. (Molly)

I can do like pretty much every sport (Laughs). (Hannah)

I like that I'm athletic and I am umm I am committed to sports and things and um... I like being athletic because it's good for your health and it is also really fun and you get to meet new people that are athletic. (Karen)

S: I can be smart when I want to and make great decisions.

I: What is an example of you making the right decision?

S: Not going with my friends to the wicked party instead of going to the movies. I: Because you don't want to get stuck doing drugs at the wicked party... So there was a party your friends were going to and you decided not to go?

S: Yeah ... I went to the movies with my other friends. (Olivia)

A few of the girls, however, appeared to have a low self-esteem. They had difficulty thinking of things they liked about themselves or that their peers liked about them; their demeanour fell flat during this discussion. After taking a few seconds to think of a response, one student finally answered 'I guess I can be funny... rude kinda.. I don't know anymore.'

Two other students, who had lengthy answers to other questions, finally responded; one said that she likes her hair and the other said she likes the way she looks. When asked if there was anything about her personality that she liked the response was ‘no.’ Another student’s response indicated a very low self-esteem; she became quite upset and stated that she doesn’t deserve good things because of how she’s behaved to people.

Teacher Views on Beliefs about Self. The teachers, without direction, seem to focus their responses to questions about self –concept and self-esteem to the girls in their class they perceived as having social issues. These girls they perceived as having lower levels of self-concept and self-esteem. One teacher explained,

I’d say the most colourful student that we’ve been referring to probably is a little bit more negative about herself but she is making strides. She’s bad because somebody told her she was bad so she was to be bad and she thinks she’s bad... that was little girl thinking ... umm... Since she’s been back in school last couple of years... I mean like last year was pretty rough I’d say that for sure but she, her self-concept is slowly improving because she’s finding relational success. She is in class 97% of the time whereas last year she was in class 20% of the time... yeah ... significant. She is more aware of why she acts the way she’s acting like she’s becoming more self-aware and that’s working out well for her cause she’s able to redirect her self instead of having to be redirected.

Another teacher described two girls in her class that she believes has difficulty mixing in and ‘stands out’ from the other students. Their behaviour towards the other students, (being sarcastic, putting down other people, being ‘louder and needier’) she believes is a self-esteem issue.

One teacher raised the question of “whether bullies are supposed to be lacking self-confidence or have excessive self-confidence”. She explained her confusion around how aggressive students feel about themselves:

... I thought it was arrogance on the surface that lack of self-confidence underneath. Which is probably the case with girls who are bullies as well. They come across as somewhat arrogant, less overtly than boy bullies, boy bullies come across as more physically aggressive but I would guess that the girls who are bullies would also be lacking confidence in different regards. But I'm not certain that something that they talk about.

It is possible that this teacher's already formed beliefs around the behaviours and levels of self-confidence and self-concept of 'bullies' may prevent her from seeing the behaviour of socially aggressive girls. None of the teachers described girls they believed were socially aggressive with any positive characteristics.

Theme 2: Adult Relationships

The students have positive relationships with parents and teachers. All but one student reported being involved in and enjoying family activities and preferring to talk to their parents about serious social problems above their friends. They respect their teachers and appreciate the extra help and time their teacher's spend with them when learning difficult material as they are committed to doing well in school.

Positive Relationships with Parents. The participants were first asked how they get along with their parents. To gain more insight on their relationship they were then asked about the types of things they do together, and whether they felt like they can speak to their parents about social issues they might have at school. All but one participant reported having a close relationship with their parents. They discussed the types of activities they and their siblings did together on weekends, which demonstrated a moderate level of family involvement and connectedness.

The first question, "How do you get along with your parents" generated short answers such as: "Ah very well yeah" and "really well" and "Fine." A few others elaborated a little more, "Good. We have fights over stupid things like when I sass or something, and that's really it." The one student who admitted from the beginning of the interview that she has had issues with aggression stated, "Me and my mom, we argue a lot, she says that I have an attitude... yeah... but we still like each other." Thus, though she admitted to having a turbulent relationship with her mother, she conveyed that it was still a positive and caring relationship. With the exception of the one student, all participants reported having positive relationships with at least one parent. The following responses are illustrative:

We watch shows together ... and we go shopping together ... just do normal stuff.
(Faith)

S: We get along really good. They trust me and I can tell them like things that happened at school to get their opinion and help if I need it.

I: Okay so... what kind of things do you and your parents do together?

S: Um, we usually take my dog to the dog off-leash park, we sometimes go out for dinner and we go to the movies. (Christine)

S: Well on like weekends we sometimes have a family camp out I guess, so like my parents will sleep on the mattress and the couch and I'll sleep on the floor and we would all sit in one room and watch movies together.

I: Really? That's really cool.

S: Yeah, and we like watch a lot of TV shows together and eat with each other and we go shopping together. We have really close relationship. (Ashley)

S: Sometimes I cook with my mom, or play video games with my dad.

I: What kind of video games do you play?

S: Ummm, like adventure or fantasy or something.

I: Oh that's funny! Who is better you or him?

S: Both of us ... he's better sometimes ... (laughs) (Molly)

Umm ... Well me and my dad get along really good because he raised me like a single parent since I was really little and then I get along with my stepmom really well too. It's just kind of... Yeah get along with both of them really well. (Beth)

Yeah we go to the beach, like we go skating in the winter and stuff like with my family we do lots of stuff outside and stuff... like we had a picnic last weekend at Spring Bank and it was really cool. (Brooklyn)

One student reported having a poor relationship with her mother. Based on her expression and demeanour, the lack of connection and perceived lack of caring and love from her mother was quite upsetting and alienating for her. She spoke about how her mother is home but never has time for her; she is always 'kind of busy.' She stated her mother used to care what she wore and what she did but now, she said,

I don't really hang around her that much and she's, she not really care what I wear, she doesn't tell me what to do all the time, she's not really like... I have to do it all myself now... independent...she lets me do whatever I guess. (Emily)

Further demonstrating a relatively close and trusting relationship with at least one of their parents was the girls' reports that they feel comfortable talking to their mothers about social issues. Many of the girls reported a preference for talking to their mothers over their friends for more serious issues.

I: So if you had a problem at school like a social problem with your friends, would you talk to your friends or your parents?

S: My (pause) parents.

I: You would talk to them first? So when you tell them stuff what do they do?

S: Um... they help me? (Miceala)

S: Yeah I would go to my mom, and I'll talk to her, I will tell her anything really, I have a close relationship with my mom.

I: So when you tell her stuff what does she do?

S: She usually helps me out with it, like she'll like talk me through it and she's like really caring and she'll listen to everything. (Karen)

I: Who would you talk to first? Your parents or your friends?

S: My parents. Well maybe sometimes my friends... But mostly my parents.

I: Why do you choose your parents to talk to?

S: Because they're... I don't know.

I: Okay. So you don't usually talk to your teacher? And why don't you talk to your teacher?

S: I don't know, it's just odd. I like talking to my parents mostly. (Caitlyn)

S: So do you ever talk to him [teacher] about social stuff if you have a problem?

I: Um... Well if it's like really bothering me or if it's a big problem first I'll go my parents than I'll go to my teacher. But like, not really I guess you could say, it's usually my parents.

I: Do you talk to friends first or do you talk to your parents first?

S: Mmm... A little bit of both depends on the situation.

I: Okay so what if you have like problems at school or with your friends or something like that do you feel like can talk to parents?

S: Yeah ... I used to not think that ... but usually now I can, yeah.

I: So you didn't think so before but now you do ... what changed?

S: Uuhh ... I kinda like opened up to them... about like...just my problems and stuff.

Yeah

I: And they listened and you were surprised?

S: Yeah... [nodding]

I: And now you feel like you can talk to them...

S: Yeah mmmm.... (Molly)

I: Okay so if you have social stuff going on at school, would you talk to your mom about it?

S: Yeah.

I: And what does your mom do when you talk to her about stuff?

S: She often relates to how things have been going when she was in school, elementary school, what happened in her life and how she fixed the problems.

I: Oh okay so she listens and she gives you advice about stuff?

S: Yeah.

I: Is the advice that she gives you, do you agree with it? Does it sound right or does it sound ... like a mom?

I: (laughs) Sounds like a mom because my mom often says like, "I know you think that I know nothing and everything is wrong in your life" then she tells me about how her life turned out fine and that she's happy, and then she makes me laugh in the end so ... " (Brooklyn)

It appeared that *being able* to talk to their parents was very important to the girls because of the safety and confidentiality it provided; speaking to friends left them in a place of vulnerability to peer-drama. The girls appeared to trust their friends to a certain point but for more serious issues that could be damaging if the secret or issue was 'leaked' to the peer group, they rely on talking to their mothers. Even if their mother's advice seems dated or wrong, the privacy and the being able to talk to someone without fear of revealing secrets or leaving themselves vulnerable to the dangers of social drama was crucial to many. Not feeling as though they can speak to a parent about stressful social issues at school was quite

upsetting to two girls and they seemed to feel that without that, they had no one to turn to for help.

I: Okay so do you feel like you can talk to dad about stuff?

S: Personal stuff at school? Um... yeah ... I try my hardest too and like, I talked to my mom a lot too but for more girl sort of stuff, but some stuff I feel it's hard to tell them problems and stuff. Sometimes I just feel like they won't understand what like, I'm going through. I feel like I can talk to my friends better than my parents, which isn't really good. Like I have a lot of fun with my parents but I feel like, I don't really know, not that I'll get judged but that they'll be like, 'where did that come from'? Sometimes I just want be able to tell my parents, and like I've told my parents stuff about her and they just say 'oh she's a bad influence stay away from her' but that's why I feel that I can't talk to my parents about stuff because they'll just say... all my friends... all my friends have problems in their life, and so do I, but I just think my parents see them as bad influences and I don't really like that. Like, I have a few friends I can't hang out with because I've talked to them about their problems and they just say 'Oh that person's a bad influence' but they're not. When I talked to them about the good stuff they're always like, 'Oh that friend is such a good caring friend' but then when I say something bad they're both like, 'stay away from that person' and that's the stuff that bugs me. When like, my parents judge my friends just because they have problems. (Lila)

One other girl also spoke of being unable to talk to her mother about social issues at school because her mother reacts negatively to what she says, instead of listening and giving advice.

I: So when you tell your mom stuff, does she listen to stuff? Like, do you feel like she is listening?

S: Yeah.

I: Does she give you advice ... and then you follow it?

S: That's my sister who gives me advice. My mom just is like, 'oh, that's a bad friend I hate her' or something (laughs)... And I'm like mom (laughs).

I: Ah, so you can tell your mom stuff but she kind of reacts?

S: Yeah. (laughs)

I: She doesn't really offer you advice she just kind of reacts...

S: Well, she sometimes she does but she reacts more than she gives advice... So I get advice from my sister... My sister [is older]. (Tia)

Teachers' Views of Girls' Relationship with Parents. Teachers supported the finding that, in general, the female students have positive relationships with their parents. The level of communication between teachers and parents vary greatly amongst the teachers therefore some teachers knew more about the student-parent relationships than others. Some teachers felt that students at this age (aged 11 to 13) should be “old enough to deal with it ... and not have parents involved.” Other teachers had frequent communications with parents and therefore knew quite a bit about the student-parent relationship. Those teachers claimed that the parents were very involved and very supportive in helping their daughters suggesting a good relationship.

Teacher (T): Yeah I talk to them [parents] all the time. I really should keep open communication with all of the parents but the main ones ... I email their parents a couple of times every week.

I: And how do the parents respond?

T: They're great. Very supportive. I've been talking to them all year about everything ...and they are having issues at home too.

While some teachers mentioned one student who “struggled with her relationship with her parents,” most teachers in contact with parents claimed the relationship seemed positive. One teacher stated “most of them in this group [aggressive females] have great relationships with their parents, and yeah, every year that I can recall.” The teachers' beliefs regarding student-parent relationships paralleled the students' statements about their relationships with their parents. A statement from the teacher of the student with a poor relationship with her mother is illustrative:

T: They have confidence for the most part, and they know they're loved so... That I see that transferred to the relationships... I don't see the meanness that I've seen at other schools and the cattiness, and exclusion.

I: You said they know that they are loved... Can you say more about that?

T: At home.

I: So you're saying they all they are all coming from good, caring families?

T: Except for one, there's one and she can just be louder and sort of needier... She definitely stands out with that but she still is for the most part well liked.

This statement demonstrates that the teacher is fairly aware of the student-parent relationships despite her seemingly unawareness of the relational aggression in her classroom (two girls nominated as relationally aggressive were in her class but she was unaware of this). This statement supports the students' answers claiming to have positive relationships, and further supports the one student's statements regarding the poor relationship she has with her mother. One teacher elaborated on the importance of family relationships and the impact family relationships have in the lives of grade eight females:

I would be able to be even more effective [at helping the aggressive females] if I was more informed about that girl students' relationship within her own family unit; how does she fit in? What is her relationship with her mom like? What's her relationship with her dad like? Are they one week living at moms and one at dads? And then one at mom's boyfriend's house sometimes? And how many extended siblings are there in your family that I need to be aware of because that's really going to affect different things.

Respectful Relationships with Teachers. The students reported liking their teachers very much and appeared to have respect for them. Students generally spoke about their teachers in two ways: with regard to them as 'teachers,' and with regard to them as 'helpers with social problems'. In both positions, the students held their teachers in high positions of power with regard to their academic success and in holding the knowledge and experience to know what to do when someone is in trouble.

Teachers/academic success. All but one student had very positive things to say about their teacher; they all reported liking their teacher and the most prevalent reason for liking them was that they were always available to help them if they were having difficulties with the lesson content. After having indicated that they liked their teacher, the following are responses to being asked what they liked about their teacher:

Umm that he like he explains things when you need help in a way that you can understand so like he makes sure that you understand and if you need to stay in for

recess to get extra help then he will and like if you tell him about a problem then he'll try to help as much as he can. (Christine)

S: They are really helpful; they really give you insight on what's going to be coming towards you in high school and stuff... they really prepare you.

I: What about Miss Judy?

S: Yeah she's very very helpful. Like in math if you don't understand something maybe she'll give you an extra few questions to work on and usually that will help you. If not, she'll just sit with you and explain more stuff. (Ashley)

I like her a lot ... Well she's funny, she's good at teaching and she'll like, she'll explain things to you like and she'll help you if you don't understand. (Caitlyn)

That he like...that he like actually cares about you and he takes time out of his day to help you if you have trouble in something at school or something, he'll actually help. (Beth)

Only one student reported not liking her teacher because "she can be a little mean sometimes". Tia appeared to feel misunderstood and confused as to why her teacher "gets mad at [her] for the little things [she does]." For example, playing with her pen while the teacher is talking, or asking her friend's questions during lessons. Tia does not see anything wrong with her own behavior and feels unsupported by the teacher.

I: Oh so she gets annoyed with you? About little things? Would you say that they are little things?

S: Yeah, or like when I'm asking my friend a question that sits beside me she'll get mad because I'm whispering... It's just weird. And annoying sometimes (laughs). And I won't be able to figure out what it was.

I: So are those things, like, no one's allowed to do? Or do other people do those things too and she doesn't get mad at them?

S: Uh sometimes other students do those things and she doesn't get mad at them. Like the other day I told on some guys who were calling me stupid. She was right there beside me, when some guys started calling me stupid because I was copying the answers from James for... I was making a card first for the student teacher because

she was leaving, and I didn't understand anything, so I just wrote down the answers cause I knew the teacher would get mad at me. And they all called me stupid and everything and they're like, 'oh, you copied all the answers down' ... and I told the teacher and then they totally changed the subject. And I kept telling her, like, 'what are you going to do about it they just called me stupid, they've been calling me stupid for the whole year almost?' And she doesn't do anything... she's just like 'okay', and she like talks to them and they just say other things and...

Helpers with other peoples' social problems. The students do not speak to teachers about their *own* social or personal issues. Many students reported teachers as a valued resource for helping *other* people with their issues but would not tell their teachers about their own problems. They appeared to trust their teachers and believe that they had the ability to help. Many students stated that they tell their friends to go talk to the teacher about their problems if it 'something really serious.'

I mostly just am there to listen and if she needs help then Ill help her. I'll encourage her like if it is a big thing to tell the teacher. If it's really big to go tell the principal and to go get help about it, yeah. (Christine)

I try to help them out, talk about it, and if it's like something really serious I tell them to go tell the teacher. (Wendy)

I normally try to give them advice, 'Well if it's bugging you that much and you don't want to come into the classroom I can go get a teacher for you, and you can talk it out and she'll give you the answers'. (Brooklyn)

S: I try to help them...like it has worked sometimes... But then sometimes when they're like really upset I just tell someone, like a teacher.

I: Oh you tell the teacher?

S: Oh ...when they're like really really upset. (Lila)

One student spoke about how she and her group friends went to their teacher to get help and advice on how to solve some problems the group was having.

S: There was this one major fight at the beginning of the year I guess, it was more towards December and there was a group of girls and we were all just talking to Mrs. Smith... And it was resolved and stuff on that day.

I: Oh wow. So did you guys go talk to her or did she call you guys in?

S: No we went to talk to her about it and she brought the rest of the group in and we all sat in the conference.

I: So you talked about it... And how did you resolve it?

S: Umm, we, well actually, we got her in tears.

I: Who? Mrs. Smith? Why was she in tears?

S: Because something [we said] had happened and it related back to her life and then she was talking about how this one thing that happened a group of girls totally separated but then like she told us, 'well if you guys try and start talking together your trust bond might be put back together' and that actually really happen so all the group of girls are really close friends now. (Ashley)

As a group these students felt comfortable talking to the teacher and trusted that she would listen and help them with their problem. Individual students, however, reported speaking to their teachers about their individual problems as 'awkward.' When asked if they would speak to their teachers the girls often developed an odd look on their face as though it was a strange question to ask.

I: Do you ever talk to your teacher about personal stuff?

S: Noooooo (strange look).

I: Why not?

S: I don't know. I feel like it would be awkward through the rest of the year. I normally tell my parents about that kind of stuff. (Molly)

S: Okay. So you don't usually talk to your teacher? And why don't you talk to your teacher?

I: I don't know, it's just odd. I like talking to my parents mostly. (Caitlyn)

Teachers' Views of Students Perspective of them. The teachers' reports of their relationship with their students are generally consistent with information reported by the students. All of the teachers stated that generally, the students treat them with respect, appear

to like them, and overall have a positive relationship. In addition to that, however, three of the teachers stated that they do not entirely trust that the respect is authentic.

One teacher reported, ‘these kids here are very, very respectful of me... And have bought into most things that I did this year without any problems.’ Another teacher at another school reported that the students are “extremely respectful around me, all of them, yet we have a very advanced relationship.” The teacher went on to explain,

T: That means, that the manner in which I speak to them and joke with them and am casual with them is significantly advanced for this time of year. Normally I don’t get to where I am with that with a group of kids until you know the beginning of June but this year it happened very quickly and right away because I could... Ummm ... it’s mostly because I don’t have to manage the behaviors because there really are very few behaviors. And I realize I could be wrong... but I don’t get the sense that it’s uh “I’m going to put on my respectful, while I’m at school good girl face” and then you know be deviant in other areas of my life...umm... I think the girls are ... good.

I: So you think it’s an honest respect?

T: I do believe that it is honest.

Other teachers also discussed a positive relationship with their students. One teacher stated, “Ah ... yes they’re respectful.” About a student the teacher believes is more aggressive than the other students she stated, ‘yes, I think it’s [respect] authentic ... she’s a great kid.’ One teacher explained the relationship between themselves and an ‘alpha’ female in the class. When asked if she is respectful towards him, he replied,

T: Yes, usually quite flirty, um.... Almost every single time they’re developed. Are you talking about physically aggressive?

I: No. Not physically aggressive girls, the girls who are relationally aggressive ...

T: Yeah they tend to be the more attractive girls for the most part and not always the physically bigger, three quarters of the time they are. So that their presence is more intimidating, they tend to have a lot of male admirers because they're developed, I've never seen an undeveloped female be a ringleader bully in this age group. I have in grade 6, but never in this age group.

I: So those girls...They are respectful around you?

T: Yeah usually.

I: Is it a ... fake respect? Can you tell? Or do they actually respect you?

T: Yeah they do, I think they do. I think they are more worried about disappointing me then getting a consequence.

Three teachers stated that while the girls behave respectfully towards them, they are aware of whom the more socially aggressive girls are and they do not entirely trust them. Mrs. Hardy stated “I don’t really trust her and I know other teachers that don’t really trust her either.”

Mrs. Smith explained about a student in her class,

For the most part, respectful. But there have been incidences, several incidences, during the year where she has been disrespectful to a number of staff. She wants to do what she wants to do and not necessarily follow the rules and procedures that others are. So she wants to do her own thing and then kind of lie and make excuses when she knows she's done something wrong.

The teachers also confirmed that, generally, students do not come to them to discuss social issues they might be having. If it is reported, then it is typically by a friend or sibling – never the student. Below are teacher responses to whether the girls in their classes come speak to them about social issues.

Some do and some don’t. So like I said I don’t even know it’s going on but I will have some kids that come up to me and say this has happened... And it’s usually from the girls that are not involved in it.

T: If it’s a safety issue like someone cutting themselves... I always get a couple of those every year or suicide watch then they come to me but if it’s bullying, rarely.

I: Why do you think that is?

T: Um ... A couple of reasons. One, they don’t want to be considered the rat and to go to somebody of authority, and two, my class was a little bit weary and scared of me at first, they are not anymore, but uh, that would be another reason. And three, they don’t think that they need help that it’ll go away on its own. And so by the time they realize that it’s not going to its reached critical mass and then they start reaching out. And it’s usually not the people directly involved, it’s a friend, sometimes a parent or sister or some kind of sibling or family member. It’s hardly ever the person directly involved.

Thus, the teacher perspectives of the students' attitude and level of respect towards them is generally consistent with that reported by the students. One difference is some teachers reporting that they do not always believe the respect is authentic. Most teachers reported having well behaved students who care about their schooling. Teachers confirm that social issues are rarely brought to their attention, and on the rare occasion that social bullying is reported to them, it is never by the students suffering the social aggression themselves, but rather by peers, siblings, or parents.

Theme 3: Achievements and Attitude

The analysis of the data revealed the girls had shared many shared characteristics around achievement and attitude. These include; a competitive nature and drive for high achievement, a strong concern for doing well in their academics, a drive to maintain their social status, and selective empathy.

3.1 Competitive Nature and Drive for High Achievement. Most participants made statements in the interviews that demonstrated that they are competitive or highly driven in some aspect of their lives whether it be sports, school, or another area. Most of the participants (12/18) specifically mention being in high-level competitive sports. Of the remaining six participants, five talked about playing sports for fun with their friends. Responses to what the girls did during recess and free time included sports such as soccer, baseball, gymnastics, and swimming but after school reported being involved in highly competitive sports such as competitive figure skating, participating in competitive volleyball tournaments in other cities, and regional high jump. Only one of 18 participants did not mention sports. The following are comments from the participants:

S: I like to play sports and hang with my friends and play video games.

I: What kinds of sports do you like?

S: Volleyball, baseball, basketball, that's it. Hockey too, I'm goalie.

I: You seem like a very strong person so you're probably a really good person to have on your team.

S: For winning

I: For winning (laughs).

S: Well yeah. (Hannah)

S: Um, I like to play ringette.

I: Ringette, that's the one that's like hockey.

S: Yeah. Okay Except it's not hockey.

I: Oh so that must get pretty aggressive then when you're playing?

S: Yes.

I: Pretty competitive?

S: Yeah. It's harder for defense but then it's easier for offense... Like, um, compared to hockey. Last year we went to Nationals in New Brunswick. (Miceala)

I like that I'm athletic and I am umm I am committed to sports and things and um... I like being athletic because it's good for your health and it is also really fun and you get to meet new people that are athletic. (Karen)

What do you like most about yourself? Umm that I can do like pretty much every sport (Laughs). (Beth)

Most of the girls were also very competitive or 'high-achieving' outside of sports as evidenced when the girls spoke about school or other activities. For example, one of the admittedly more aggressive girls talked about liking the enriched math program she is in this year. Another girl told about how at one time, when her marks began to drop, she decided to separate from her friends to focus on her grades:

I: Um well like in grade 5 when I had no friends but I was getting good in school... (laughs) ... I was getting A's in everything and then in grade 7 when I had too many friends and like my grades started going down.

S: Why didn't you have friends in grade 5?

I: I don't know, like I didn't really talk to them, I'm like (shrugs).

S: Oh I see... you weren't very social.

I: Yeah, so then when I got into grade seven I had too many friends my grades were a bit dropping down and that wasn't good so then I'm like, 'I need like to separate for couple of weeks so I can get my grades up' but they weren't happy with it, but they didn't understand, so then we kind of fight a little bit, an argument. (Reign)

Many other girls were also quite competitive and driven around grades and achievement in school.

I'm kind of going up for the academic award with this other guy who is also my friend in my dad's class and we're the two that are up for the academic award right now... and it's whoever gets the highest average... Gets the award... So I've been kind of, been pushing myself all year, and I know he's gunning for it as well. So that can be a bit stressful at times, just getting bad marks back, well not bad but not perfect. (Christine)

I: So in general do you think you worry a lot?

S: Not really... umm like I will stress about school projects to make sure that they're done and that they look good and that I'm raising the bar and I'm not getting a B. I always try to extend my reach to go to a higher level to like an A or an A- or an A+.
(Wendy)

Outside of school, several of the girls discussed activities and pursuits they were involved in that again, demonstrates a high level of drive and accomplishment. One student was involved in the arts and even had an agent. Several other girls were involved with music; one girl played in a band and played regularly at local venues. Generally, the interests and activities the girls discussed demonstrated that they are quite engaged in accomplishing 'things' whether it be grades in school, winning in sports, or some other personal pursuit like playing in a band at public venues.

3.2 Strong Concern for Doing Well in their Academics. Most of the students stated confidently that they are good at school. Only one of the eighteen students said they were *not* good at school. All but one student seemed to care very much about school; overall, their answers indicated they are attentive to their grades, study for tests, and talked about how they appreciated receiving extra help during class and at recess when they did not understand a concept and needed extra help.

S: I love playing volleyball and I really like school that's the two major things.

I: You really like school?

S: Yeah.

I: Okay so what do you really like about school?

S: I don't know. I love learning... about doing anything, math especially and English.
(Reign)

Um...well kinda. Sometimes I get A's and B's and sometimes if I'm not paying attention like to the unit I get like lower marks like C's or B-'s or D+'s. I think a D+ is the lowest I've gotten last year. No at the beginning of this year I got a D+. And then last June I got an A+ and I felt really good about that. (Caitlyn)

Umm that he like he explains things when you need help in a way that you can understand so like that makes sure that you understand and if you need to stay in for recess to get extra help then he will and like If you tell him about a problem then he'll try to help as much as he can. (Christine)

I: I like how I do in school. I like the way I am in that sense; that I really strive for that... I really strive for... I don't know... perfection I guess.

I: So you're good at school?

S: Yeah. (Reign)

I: Are you good at school?

S: Yes.

I: That was fast. What's your favourite subject?

S: Umm gym Gym...

I: yeah because you're a sporty girl right... so is school easy or difficult then overall?

S: Easy. (Beith)

I: Are you good at school?

S: Yeah

I: Yeah? What subjects do you like?

S: I like Math and science and gym

I: Okay. Is school...is it easy or is it difficult for you?

S: It's easy. (Riley)

I: Are you good at school?

S: Yeah, I get pretty good marks.

I: What's your best subject?

S: My best would be... either math, gym, health, science.

I: So you do pretty good across the board?

S: Yeah. (Karen)

I: Are you good at school?

S: Kinda.

I: What subjects do you like?

S: I'm doing enriched math this year. (Faith)

No students stated that they did not like school or that school was unimportant in any way.

Only two students indicated that school may be more difficult for them but they still seemed to care.

I: Are you good at school?

S: Not really like ...

I: Not really?

S: Some subjects yeah, but like math I don't understand. Not good at that. It's difficult.

I: Are there any classes that are easy?

S: Science I like and art and language... But math is the only one that like confuses me. (Lila)

S: I try my hardest, I'll say that.

I: So what's the subjects you like?

S: I like art and I like gym and I don't really mind math it's fun... and I really like science. (Wendy)

3.3 Maintain Social Status. Throughout the interviews the girls often had within their answers, or elaborations on stories, small statements that indicated instances of asserting their dominant position in their relationships with their friends. Below are excerpts from conversations where the girls subtly assert their position or describe how they 'handle' conflict with their friends.

I wouldn't be that mad because I don't really not like anyone enough to not let my friend play with them or play with us. (Christine)

S: Honestly me and my friends get in arguments for the stupidest things like I don't even know.

I: So when they get mad at you how do you feel about that?

S: It depends on what's done. If I hurt their feelings then I'll say sorry, but if it was really nothing and they're just trying to cause drama then I'll just wait for them to come back. (Wendy)

I: So when you have these arguments with people, or people are mad at you or whatever ... how do you resolve it? How do you fix it?

S: I don't know ... depends on the person.

I: Okay, so with some people you do something to fix it ... and with some people you sometimes you don't?

S: Mmhmm (yes) ... like if it was someone I didn't really like I'd just be like 'oh well' ... and ignore them or something. But if it's like my best friend then ... usually I don't talk to them and they'll text me and just be nice again. That's how it goes.

I: So they contact you...

S: And it usually works. (Smile, bit of attitude – 'I won')

I: So you just don't text them... And don't talk to them and eventually they contact you and say 'hey wanna hang out?'

S: Yup. (Faith)

Because I forgive a lot of people, because a lot of people, you know, they would, um, accidentally push me but like possibly actually do it for fun. And I would like, um, be like, "Stop!" and they'd be like, "Sorry." And then like, "Would you forgive me?" And then for like the whole week, I wouldn't talk to them, then I'm like, "Yeah I'll forgive you." Because they did it on purpose I wouldn't forgive them for a week. (Beth)

And I'm like hey, you know what, I'm not talking to you anymore, that's it and then the next week, 'Oh, I'm sorry for doing what I did' and I'm like 'Okay just promise you're not gonna do it again' and now we're friends. (Emily)

Many comments, such as these, made by the students indicated attitudes and behaviors consistent with a need or drive to maintain a dominant position in their social circles.

3.4 Logical sense of Empathy. Generally, the girls seemed to demonstrate a lower sense of affective empathy. When asked if they could tell when their friends were upset about something, five of the girls (5/18) stated that they could not. These students said that is hard to tell when their friends are upset and that the only way they would know is if their friends told them. Haley's response to this question was a common response:

I: Can you tell when your friends are upset about something?

S: Um (pause)... not usually, sometimes.

I: So you can't tell just by looking at them that they're sad... they have to tell you that they're sad?

S: Yeah probably. (Molly)

Most girls could describe what their friends were like when they were upset, and how they could tell when their friends were upset, but their demeanor appeared flat. For example, when Miceala was asked how she can tell her friend upset about something she responded 'Um... they're not smiling?' Miceala had very little to say about this topic. Reign said flatly, "I'll just be there ... I try not to get really involved, but I'll be there to talk to them and support them if they need it." Another student answered this way,

I: Do you think you can easily tell if your friends are upset about something?

S: Yeah if they're crying (laughs).

I: If they're not crying. If they've got tears dripping down her face that's hard to miss. If they're not crying and just upset about something can you usually tell?

S: Uh, yeah, like her tone of voice or like her face kind of drips when she's talking...uh, like, crying, sad, like kind of like this (demonstrates on her face).

I: Okay so you can tell because her face changes?

S: Yeah.

I: So how do you feel when your friends are sad?

S: Sad... And I try to cheer them up but like if they're not taking anything, then I'm like, 'Just come on!' (laughs).

Tia admitted afterward that she can tell when her friends are upset but doesn't know how to help or what to say; she usually says the wrong thing and either makes the situation worse or frustrates the person. She stated that when her friends are upset she does feel bad, but that is because "we're not having fun when I am supposed to be hanging out with my friends. Like I'm just dealing with somebody crying or being sad about something. I just don't like dealing with that stuff."

Other students seem to have a very logical explanation of empathy (cognitive empathy) and how they felt about empathy depending on the situation. The following are examples of this 'logical approach to empathy' when students were asked what they do when their friends are upset:

Depends on what its about. Okay, cause if it's someone that died, yeah I'd be sad. But if it was like something like they... umm can't think of something. Like a guy they like don't like them, doesn't like them, that sounded really weird... umm then like I feel bad for them but I really wouldn't feel sad. (Hannah)

S: Well what happens a lot is I normally go 'what's wrong' and the *typical answer* you get from *those people* is 'oh nothing', but if you ask them when you're not around people then the truth kind of tends to come out. So I normally ask them what's wrong and if they say nothing I come back when we're alone and they normally tell me.

I: Oh I see, so you come back when you're alone because... You feel bad for them and you want to help?

S: Yeah... I just want to know if it's something like with family problems, or something at school that's bugging them so yeah.

I: So you're concerned about what's going on?

S: Yeah

I: So let's say there are upset about school or whatever and somebody's giving them a hard time, what you do?

S: I normally try to give them advice... 'Well if it's bugging you that much and you don't want to come into the classroom I can go get a teacher for you and you can talk

it out and she'll give you the answers'...

I: So are you just trying to help them solve the problem or do you actually really feel bad about it?

S: I feel bad, but not to the point where you sit by them every single second of the day. (Brooklyn)

Depends on what it is ... like ... Like ...I don't know... if it was family related then I'd be like... if they did it to themselves then I try to help them but I guess I wouldn't really feel bad. But if somebody else is doing something to them then I feel bad and like help them. (Riley)

S: I try to help them as much as I can. If they are still upset it makes me worried what happened to them because sometimes they don't tell.

I: So if they don't tell and they're upset does that like bother you a lot or do you just go do your own thing?

S: No we try to comfort them and then if she just wants us to leave her alone we will leave just the one person with her... and she just wont tell anyone and it doesn't really bother me because I know it's not about the group it's just something personal. (Olivia)

Later in the interview the students were asked if they ever felt stressed or worried about their friends. Asked this way, four of the 18 students answered in a way that demonstrated empathy. All other students replied either 'no, not really' because 'we don't get into arguments' or they don't worry unless 'somebody got hurt or something.' Below are the responses of the four students who did articulate feeling empathy for their friends

I: Do you ever feel stressed or worried about your friends?

S: Yeah, like when somebody's hurt or when somebody has a problem and then I help them a lot to make sure that they don't like, they don't like.... (Molly)

Well, when they feel stressed, I, we're kind of like the same. Like if they're stressed I'll be stressed with them and vice versa, so. (Caitlyn)

Yeah because if they have a lot of stuff going on out of school and they have to deal with all the school stuff like their minds is just in jumbled... For instance I have a friend she's got hockey tryouts, she's got competitive baseball, she has school baseball, she's got physical therapy and all our schoolwork... And it's all happening within this month and their like minds get jumbled and they don't even know what they're doing... It's kind of stressful for them... And I can empathize. (Karen)

I: Do you ever feel stressed or worried about your friends?

S: Yes... Because some of the people in the class can be pretty mean to you if you do the wrong thing or say something wrong or anything.

I: Okay, people, kids in your class?

S: Yeah, or any class really.

I: So, what kinds of things do they do? What does that mean? Rude?

S: Mmm. They'll like kind of talk down to you or something. Like you're not smart or anything. (Jamie)

In summary, five out of 18 girls stated directly that they could not tell when their friend was upset about something. The remaining 13 stated that yes they could tell but whether they felt empathy for their friend or not depended on why they were upset. They felt somewhat empathetic if the upset was about family or if what happened was not their fault. However, if their friend "did it to themselves" then they were not empathetic. Length of time dealing with the issue also mattered; most stated they would try to help for a short time, but did not want to spend a lot of time dealing with it.

Teachers Views on Empathy. The teachers stated that they believe more aggressive girls in their class lack empathy. Mrs. Bailey described a student she believes is highly aggressive,

Not enough empathy... Would be the issue. And I would say a lack of sincerity. So sometimes, you know, sometimes being very sweet on the surface but then I would hear things that are not so sweet. Things that have been done or said that are quite mean, yeah so I would say a lack of empathy would be one of the main characteristics of that person.

Another teacher stated she believes the aggressive girl in her class can identify when and why she should feel empathy for others, but likely does not have the “range of emotion that would allow them to feel” deep empathy. Another teacher stated that while they may not feel empathy initially, they do understand and feel when things are explained to them. They stated, “I think they do get it after but it takes some prompting in order to bring out the empathy and to think about how others are feeling.”

Mrs. Smith discussed empathy within the context of the “complex social world the girls have constructed.” She explained,

... I would guess in here the girl who is crying and often looking for sympathy, a lot of them (other students) would look at it logically, not that they don't have empathy, but that they've seen it so many times. But they start to see it as an act and not genuine because that's what has come out conversations with one particular student getting pulled into it, and she's looking at the drama and seeing that some of the tears are being carefully displayed in front of certain people to get sympathy and that it's not necessarily genuine. So I don't know that it's on empathetic but she has to look to self-preservation and be able to look at it logically and think it's not feeling genuine to me so I'm not feeling genuine sympathy.

Theme 4: Drama

Drama is the most stressful social issue the students deal with at school. Fights and arguments start small but then escalate; private secrets are shared, rumors are spread, friends are excluded and people are mean and hurtful. The girls struggle to avoid being drawn into the drama but it is interwoven within friendship circles and within classrooms. The girls do not appear to see themselves as instigators of drama; they did state, however, that sometimes others get angry at small, stupid things they say or that there are misunderstandings.

4.1 Bullying, Drama and Rude Behaviour. The girls stated that drama and rude behaviour are the biggest issues they have to deal with at school – not bullying. This may be mainly due to the manner and tone in which the words are used resulting in different meanings; the girls do not necessarily see spreading rumours, telling secrets, and exclusion as bullying. Those behaviours are described as ‘being rude.’ The phrases ‘you’re so mean!’ and ‘you’re such a bully!’ are used jokingly whereas saying someone is ‘being rude’ is very confrontational and serious. Ashley described the differences between the terms:

I: Has anyone ever called you mean?

S: As a joke.

I: Yes as a joke?

S: Yes they joke around... like, 'Oh like you're so mean.'

I: Ok, some of the students I talked to said the word rude is better, is rude a better word than saying mean or a bully?

S: Um no because they all mean the same I guess it's just kind of *the way* you that you use it is how more effective it is on someone.

I: So like say you guys are joking around you poke someone and say like, 'oh you so mean why did you do that you're such a bully'... Whereas like, if you guys are in a serious fight there like 'you're so rude I never want to talk to again'.

S: Like yeah, that might affect someone more if you're poking around doing jokes.

I: So rude sounds a stronger word?

S: Yeah, kind of sounds more negative, more bad... yeah.

Drama is described as girls, or groups of girls, talking about other people, telling other peoples' secrets, and causing conflict and fights typically over 'stupid things.' Most drama starts with little fights that 'pass over in 10 minutes.' More serious drama also begins with 'small, stupid things' such as taking someone else's volleyball, but then that person starts saying negative things about the other person and a larger drama ensues. For the most part, drama 'blows over the next day and everyone is fine,' but it happens almost everyday and it is very stressful for the students. Wendy explained about the drama in her circle of friends:

I: Yeah is that (drama) your biggest stress?

S: Yeah... And a lot of drama gets caused with my friends and they get in fights and I'm stuck in the middle and then it's just like I'm just gonna back away and you guys finish fighting and I feel like I have one really good friend, and then one really good friend and then they just start fighting and then there like come, like don't talk to her she's not nice and the other ones like no don't talk to her. I just won't talk to either of you till you solve out your problems.

I: Do you feel like there's a lot of drama?

S: Yeah ... yeah a lot... like I feel like sometimes they just feed for drama like the girl who... yeah, there's a lot of drama.

I: What grade are you in?

S: Eight

I: You are going to high school next year!

S: Yeah hmm...

I: I have a question... It sounds like there is a lot of drama and people doing things that you don't care for... So let's say that you go to high school next year... Would you prefer to have friends where there wasn't so much drama?

S: Yes

I: Or... do you like your friends enough that you'll stick it out?

S: I like my friends but I think sometimes we just need to settle down with the drama like... And I have a few that are not drama, like its just a few certain ones that just love drama, and then there's the ones that just hate it don't want any part of it ... and those people I definitely stick with. We already have plans for high school.

Fear of getting drawn into the drama and the socially vulnerable position that may put them in results in students not wanting to get involved in other people's problems. When asked what they would do if they saw a friend upset about something (questions around empathy) many girls replied that they would be there for them if they needed anything but that they generally don't want to get involved. Selena explained her perspective of what happened when she tried to help a friend:

S: Like if it's something about something serious sometimes but I don't like getting involved but I'll be there for them if they need anything but... I used to get involved in stuff a lot but then that's when I would get in trouble.

I: Oh okay how would you get in trouble?

S: Like when I would get involved in stuff and I would say something bad and...

I: Okay... so you just try to stay out of it?

S: Yeah. (Lila)

Reign also explained how she'll "just be there" for her friends, but that she tries "not to get too into it, especially if it's a problem with another girl or guy. She explained, "I try not to get really involved, but I'll be there to talk to them and support them if they need it." Caitlyn also stated that she tries not to get involved in friends' problems because "that can lead to problems for me."

Students had very different reactions to being drawn into the drama. Some students found it very stressful and upsetting, while other students became angry. Miceala is a very strong, confident student who became obviously irritated when asked if her friends had ever said she'd said or done something to hurt their feelings. She spoke with a monotone voice; this was her response:

I: Have your friends ever said you said or did something to hurt their feelings?

S: Yeah.

I: Yeah?

S: They're usually lying though.

I: Why do they do that?

S: Because someone told them that I said something, but I didn't.

I: Oh okay... They heard that you said something or did something that hurt their feelings... but you didn't actually say that?

S: Yeah.

I: I get it okay. So how does that make you feel when that happens?

S: Annoyed.

I: Annoyed? I bet, I bet. Does that happen a lot?

S: No.

I: Not very often? So what do you do when that happens?

S: I tell them I didn't say it.

S: And then you guys make up?

I: Yeah.

One of the girls explained how the social aggression, drama, and people being rude is prevalent but is hidden from the teachers and other adults, including visitors. She explained how, when adults are not present, the different groups exclude others (her) and 'make faces' and try to make it awkward when others try to join in the conversation. She further stated that there are girls in the school that the teachers and visitors believe are 'super nice to everybody,' she explained,

S: They look like that don't they? They do that with every visitor, eeevery visitor.

Trust me.

I: Oh so they look really nice but they're not?

S: Oh yeah... they have a nice mask.

Teachers' Views on Drama and Rude Behaviour. Three of the seven teachers said they were aware of drama between the girls in their class; one teacher responded “Yes, there’s drama I would say, not bullying” and the other stated, “Yes, lots, I haven’t seen this much girl drama ever before.” The third teacher stated that he doesn’t really see the drama but he knows that it there. He explained,

It's never done in front of staff. It is extremely rarely done in front of staff. It's very underhanded... Now I don't want to paint the picture that this is what all the girls are doing because they're not, but it always happens every single year with every single class, without fail. But not all the girls, but always some, you can't say that about the boys. There are always problems with girls, there is sometimes problems with boys.

The other four teachers stated they do not see drama or bullying between their students and they do not believe it is happening to any real extent. Mrs. Heart explained,

I really don't see... There's not the drama... I mean I tell kids don't bring it into the classroom so maybe they don't bring it into the classroom... They totally don't bring stuff ... I don't see the meanness that I've seen at other schools and the cattiness, and exclusion.

One other teacher who reported having no drama or bullying in their classes stated “definitely there are divisions of power but it’s not a power imbalance.” She further stated that one of the groups is more popular than the other; they don’t alienate the other groups. The final teacher who stated they see no drama explained that he has not had any trouble this year but admits that he is ‘pretty slow in picking it up’ and usually ‘the last one to figure it out.’

Consistent with the student’s reports, most teachers stated that ‘drama’ and not bullying is the most prevalent issue the girls deal with. They stated that perhaps the drama is a precursor to bullying, but from their perspective it rarely crosses into bullying. One teacher clarified what they observed this way; “I wouldn’t say it’s bullying so much as impulsive, rude, disrespectful behaviour.”

One teacher referred to this behaviour and stage of their lives as “grade eight girl-dom” and many teachers agreed with that term because it also differentiates the females’ behaviour they experience in their class and the males’ behaviour. Some of the differences in behaviour the teachers discussed included that generally, the girls are not as flexible when it

comes to forming work groups, and that boys tend to “handle friendship adversity a little better.” One teacher described their experience of male and female behaviour in the classroom:

I think generally, I think boys are able to resolve issues maybe a little quicker. That doesn't necessarily mean that it's better, they seem to be able to set aside some differences and just kind of move on. And it's not necessarily carried out over to the next day or the subsequent week. Boys are a little bit more impulsive, you know, ‘hey I've got a problem with you I'm going to solve it right now.’ Girls sometimes let it fester little bit and then it comes out in more of a private form... not as confrontational, not as face-to-face.

Another teacher stated that it is when the students are unsupervised that they “treat each other quite poorly.” The girls rarely act aggressively in front of the staff, it's “very underhanded.” The teacher went on to explain,

It is extremely rarely done in front of staff. It's very underhanded. Boys we can see it because it will come out, the girls we hear about it because someone's crying, it's when someone else comes to us to tell us about it, and then we find out about it after. So girls are very good at... If they don't like someone they sneakily go after them without authority being able to notice.

Several teachers did acknowledge that they had *alpha females* who are more dominant in their classrooms, but that they are “kind to the other girls ... they are just a bit more aggressive and there's a little bit more leadership.” In another class, the teacher also stated that there is no bullying occurring but acknowledges that aggressive behaviour does occur:

There are girls in the class that have strong personalities ... umm... and they're not perfect girls they all have flaws and they all have forms of aggression they just show it in very socially acceptable, almost invisible ways. But I do know that it's there.

In summary, four of the seven teachers reported very little aggressive behavior occurring in their class (although they acknowledge it may happen on the school yard). They reported that the class they currently have is exceptionally well behaved and that they didn't believe there were any serious social issues. Two teachers reported having serious issues with drama on a daily basis, and one teacher reported having ‘some’ drama but nothing serious.

Not one of the seven teachers reported having any bullying whatsoever between the girls in their classrooms.

4.2 It's Rude to be 'Rude.' Many of the girls recounted instances where they have been called rude by their peers because they stood up for someone who was being picked on or made fun of. This is one of the reasons, they stated, that they often do not want to get involved; being an 'Upstander' can have very negative consequences. Lila described a situation where, after she told one of her friends they were being rude and to stop making fun of someone, she began receiving "bad text messages" and getting harassed.

S: Well I don't know, like one of my friends she just like was messaging me rude stuff so I said stop and then she was calling me names and stuff and then I showed the principal and stuff and then they talked and said, 'okay if this happens again there were to call the parents' and stuff. And then a few days later she was like 'I'm so sorry...'

I: Why was she messaging you rude stuff?

S: Like, I don't know, it started because she started making fun of someone and I told her like, that was rude what you did today, and then she was like 'oh because you're any nicer' and stuff like that. And I was like, 'I don't make fun of people so you should probably stop' and then she started getting really mad.

Another student told of a situation where other students began targeting her and "making up lies" about her when she tried to help another student. She stated that she is often called rude when she is "doing something right." For example, one time when her helping a person in her class who was crying resulted in a lot of drama from her friends.

It's when I'm usually doing something right, and, it's when somebody's crying and I was helping that person but then somebody came over saying, "What's wrong?" And I'm like, "Don't say that or like he'll, burst into tears," that's what I said, and he's like, "Why do you get to talk to him?" and everything. Then they were making up lies by saying that I was talking behind his back and I wasn't. I clearly felt bad for him and then like they would start talking back and they like talking behind my back or like saying mean stuff.

Reign talked about how she has to 'watch her tongue' because, she believes, if she says the 'wrong thing' the other students will get angry at her. She gave the example of how she stood up for her coach when her friends were talking badly about him.

I remember one time they were talking badly about my coach. He's kind of an older guy and he's kind of nuts, but he's got these teaching methods that don't really work, they're not very good, but he's such a great guy and he's an amazing coach, they were talking very badly about him and I made them stop. I said, "No you can't talk about him like that". I will defend my coach, I don't like hearing that stuff, and I think they were kind of a bit ticked off. They were really mad at me but nothing came out of it. Speaking against the group is considered rude. According to the students, you have to be careful because if you say how you feel, even if you think it is the 'right' thing, you can get into a lot of trouble with your friends and other peers.

Theme 4: Perspectives on Own Behaviour

How do they think others see them? How do they see themselves behaving with their friends? The girls report that they and their friends do argue quite frequently, but the arguments and fights are only about "small, stupid things". If their friends do actually get angry over such "dumb" things, they don't always care. They believe their friends like them because they are funny and they make people laugh. The themes that emerged regarding the girls' perspectives on their own behaviour and interactions with friends include; a) Arguments with friends, 2) They are liked because they are funny, 3) They are not mean, rude, bully, 4) Views of mean, rude people.

5.1. Arguments with friends. The girls reported having arguments and fights almost everyday. When asked about arguments, a common response was that yes they argued but it was always over "stupid things," usually only lasted a short time and then it's over. Jamie explained the little arguments she gets into with her friends,

S: Yes, but it's over like... dumb things ha ha ha

I: Yeah? What kind of dumb things?

S: Just like who has better things than another person.

I: Who's got better things?

S: Yeah. So how long do these arguments last?

S: Not very long

I: Like a day?

S: No probably like a couple of hours ha ha ha

I: A couple hours? That's not very long... so you never have arguments over serious

stuff?

S: No

Christine explained the short arguments she has with her friends: “Well sometimes she gets like annoyed by things I do, and then she like, we haven’t really got into a big fight just like little arguments and then in 10 minutes we forget about them.” Most of the girls were able to recount at least one time when their friends were mad at them. They also stated that either it was not their fault, or that they really did not care that their friend was angry with them. The following are responses around ‘friends being angry with them:’

S: Umm just recently I pulled a prank on my friend after we had just gone to see a horror movie and she doesn’t like horror movies so she was already scared and I pulled a prank that was probably not the smartest thing to do. (laughs)

I: Can I ask what you did?

S: There’s this guy in my class and there’s like this relationship between the two of us and he wanted to pull a prank on her so we did and then she thought it was all because of her... and then she got *really* mad and yeah (laughs). I don’t know how much more to explain that. (laughs)

I: So when she was mad at you did that bother you?

S: Umm kind of, because she is like my only close friend! (laughs)

Hannah explained how sometimes her friends get mad at for ‘being annoying.’ She knew she was being annoying but because “we all do it to each other,” it was funny. Another girl said her friends get mad at her when she “accidentally [says] something that hurt their feelings.” She explained one incident:

S: I remember in grade 4, I said, ‘Taylor, what’s that thing on your face?’ And she started crying because it was a birthmark and she hates it. (Laughs) Like, it was like a little square, mole thing.

I: Oh, so you didn’t, did you say it on purpose? Or you didn’t know what it was?

S: I didn’t know what it was... I’m like, ‘oh there’s something on your face.’ And then I felt really bad after. Tia

Karen, who has a dry, sarcastic type of humour, explained that some of her peers are sensitive, so she tries to only make her jokes and comments to people who are ‘ok’ with it:

I: You said you have a very dry sarcastic sort of sense of humor, does that usually go over okay? or do some people sometimes get bothered?

S: Well, my friends, they will be like ‘Oooh!’ (Surprised reaction from friends) And then we’ll just laugh it out and I’ll be like ‘I’m just kidding’ yeah. Then other people felt just like, (laughs) and be like oh my god! And I’m like ‘oh I’m just kidding!’
(Laughs)

I: So do you think some people are a little bit sensitive about jokes?

S: Some people are yeah but like, but if I know the person is sensitive I’m not going to say it but if I know they’re not...

I: Oh okay, so you joke like that with people who you think are okay with it?

S: Yeah.

I: And then if you think somebody is too sensitive you don’t joke like that?

S: Yeah. Because I know it’ll just get into this really big thing... *Drama and stuff.*

I: Oh okay... So, I was thinking that maybe you were worried about hurting their feelings?

S: Oh yeah, and that too.

Other reasons the girls gave for their friends getting mad at them included not reporting for lunchroom help when she really didn’t want to go. Her friends got angry and “spazzed out” but she explained that they were “not even a part of it, they were just subs” so it was none of their business. Reign stated her friends get mad at her for ‘saying how she feels’ about things so she really has to ‘watch her tongue’ for fear of saying the wrong thing.

Two other students said that sometimes their friends do get mad at them but they do not know why. Caitlyn said her old best friend ‘used to ignore me and never tell me why.’ And now her old best friend and her new friend ‘ignore me sometimes for no reason when I’m trying to be friendly. Molly stated, ‘I don’t feel like I did anything wrong’ when her friends are mad at her. She further stated that she feels bad because it makes her feels like she’s ‘not being the best friend or something’.

Thus, the girls report frequently arguing or fight with their peers over what they perceive to be ‘small, stupid things.’ They appeared to not see fault with their own behaviour; the other person in the argument was either overreacting, being sensitive, or, some reported not knowing why the other person was angry with them.

5.2 They are liked because they are Fun/Funny. The girls believe that they are well liked by their friends because of their personalities; they are fun to be with, they make people laugh, and they are always ‘there’ for their friends. The following are responses from the girls as to what their friends like about them:

Well sometimes I make them laugh when they are not happy or when they are sad about something and like sometimes they say that I just listen when they need to and I'm always there for them. (Christine)

I think they like my personality, how like how I can be fun around but then if somebody does something I can stick up for myself, and them, cause they're scared to do it. (Faith)

Umm... I've been told they like my personality... Just like that I'm always like happy and not down and like I always help them out and yeah. (Jamie)

Mmmm... my personality? Or just like...I'm not sure, I don't know... So... Like I don't get mad at them easily and they like that. Like...they're like, I'm fun to hang around with so stuff like that I guess. (Lila)

That I'm like fun and outgoing. (Riley)

S: "... I'm more like loud and open I guess you could say, um... And like I don't know... I don't know... I don't know... I guess you could say I'm funny... I don't know... I don't really want to talk good about myself (Laughs) (laughs) Um... I'm nice... I'm kind of mean in a friend kind of way, but like, not like mean,... I'm like ‘oh you're so ugly... Just kidding! I love you (laughs)’ things like that (laughs).

I: okay, so you've got a really sarcastic sense of humor?

S: Yeah yeah... but I'm really nice to them. It's okay. I'm not mean. (Karen)

I like do everything, anything, everything I don't care, I normally have a lot of fun doing whatever. (Brooklyn)

Um, I think probably my sense of humor, I like to make people laugh. And I will be loyal to them I will be there when they need me, if they're sad on over to their house and I will talk with them I think I did give advice I guess. (Reign)

Well, they like my humor (laughs). They like that I'm there for them and everything, like to help them when they're going through some stuff, I'm just there to play with them if they're alone, and um, I'm just always there for them, so yeah. (Beth)

5.3 They are not Rude or a Bully. The girls believe that their peers see them as fun and funny, outgoing, loyal, and “always there for them.” In terms of aggressive behaviour, six of the eighteen girls said that they have been called a bully or mean, but “only as a joke”. A common response was, “Mmm, as a joke but not like for real” or “jokingly they have, but not actually.” For example, Christine responded, “Um not a bully, but some people call mean but in a fun way like when I do something that they think is like... when I give food to someone else instead of them, then they sulk around and say you're mean”. (Laughs). Two girls simply said that “Not that I know of.” Five girls responded that yes, people have called them rude or mean in a serious way. Their responses will be presented at the end of this section.

The students who stated they had never been called a bully or mean or rude were then asked what makes them *not* a bully or mean or rude. The students described what they thought were very positive, pro-social behaviours they demonstrate towards their friends:

That I don't really exclude people, if they want to hang out with us even if they are not that popular I'll say yes. If they want to borrow my stuff I'll yes and it doesn't really matter who it is. (Riley)

Because I respect others and I like, help people when there are in a sad time or something. (Hannah)

Well, I try and like say, if I was going to tell somebody something that was not going to be nice, I would say it in the most polite way, like trying to explain it like nicely like instead of saying ‘oh your mean’ maybe say ‘you weren't just being the nicest at that moment’. But yeah I try not to be rude but... (Miceala)

Just because I think I'm nice and thoughtful. I'm always there for people. I always make people smile. I don't know, I don't really, I've never really thought about it... I always try to be nice, but if they're rude to me, then what I'm going to do? Be nice to you? No, I'm going to be rude to you too... What comes around goes around.

Yeah...(Emily)

Well I, first of all I don't make fun of people for what's wrong with them. I'll try to help them instead of pointing it out. Like Joey, sometimes has trouble with his work and he'll ask for help from the from his peers like me and stuff and everybody will be like 'oh that's easy' but I just go over and I say let's go in the hall and I'll help you instead of sitting there and making it worse for him. (Wendy)

Miceala responded to this question with a very flat affect,

I: Has anyone ever called to mean or rude or a bully before?

S: No.

I: If not... What makes you not mean? Or not rude?

S: I'm nice.

I: Yeah? Well you seem nice... So you're nice to everybody?

S: Yeah.

I: Anything else?

S: No.

I: Okay.

Five of the students stated their peers had called them rude or mean in a serious way. They gave different reasons for why they may behave that way including; they do it without noticing they are doing it at the time, they are joking but people take it the wrong way, they were standing up for themselves so they said mean things, or 'yes' they were mean but they were either having a bad day, or felt bad and apologized after they did it. Tia admitted that she can be rude and explained a few specific examples:

S: I can be rude sometimes without noticing it and, yeah.

I: That's a very honest answer, thank you. So you can be rude sometimes and then after, when you find out you've been rude?

S: I say s-sorry. Or if I'm right, I just stand there and like, 'oops', (laughs) like if somebody I don't like, or like, Fiona will come up to me and, 'Lilly, that was really rude' and I'm like 'Well, he deserved it, he was being really mean' and she's like, 'Still' and I'm like 'oops' (laughs).

I: Oh, okay. So if you think that you were right saying it, then you don't feel bad, and if you notice it-

S: Well, I kind of feel bad.

I: Notice it was a mistake...

S: Yeah. But like, if it was like really really mean, but like I was right, I would say sorry if they were like crying, but if they, like if they, if it would hurt their feelings, yeah. I would. Because like, I said that, I said something rude to Gordon, like when after he said that, I'm like, 'Dude, that's really not nice, like stop bragging about all your money because it's not going to get you any friends here if you do. And Fiona was like, 'Lilly, that's not very nice.' And then, yeah.

Karen explained why she is not a bully even though her peers would say she is.

S: Yeah. Umm, mean – yeah, rude - sometimes, a bully ... like they will joke about it umm like some people would say I'm a bully but I'm not.

I: Okay if not, what makes you not?

S: Umm I joke about things... Umm... And if say, I've been mean to someone I won't do it constantly; I'll do it one time cause like maybe it's a bad day. Yeah. But I won't do it constantly like a bully kind of thing. Maybe I'm just having a really bad day. I have those.

I: Okay so you do stuff maybe you're not supposed to but it's not constant. What else makes you not?

S: I don't know... umm I don't really like, I'm not, I don't want to hurt someone's feelings. I'm not that kind of person. Say someone hurt me I don't go and take out my anger on someone; I'll kind of like settle down. You know how bullies, like their parents, and like they go take it out on someone. I'm not like that. I don't take out my anger on someone.

I: Okay so would you say you are a kind person?

S: You could say that yeah.

I: So you're a kind person, a nice person.

S: Sometimes. (Laughs)

I: Sometimes you're nice? (Laughs)

S: I can be nice; I can be nice if I want to be.

I: So you *can* be nice... What is your normal state then?

S: Normal? If it's like, I like that person I'll be nice to them and joke with them but if it's like I don't like them I'll still be kind to them but I won't be like, 'oh my god I like your shirt.'

I: So "nice" is going over, and you're just normal.

S: Not like I hate you... Just, 'Oh hi how you doing'. Lisa

Another girl explained a situation where she knew she was a bully to another girl. While she admits to being mean to Lena, in the end she places the blame on Lena for not accepting her apology.

Last year in grade 6, like the summer of grade 5, we were all mad at Lena because, this is really weird, it's all boyfriend stuff. I wasn't involved with this but I was really mad because Rebecca was my friend. Rebecca was dating Matt... and Lena was, like, all hanging out with Matt trying to get him, like they were sharing Slushy's and being boyfriend girlfriend-ish and Rebecca was really mad. And then like, yeah it was really mean. At the beginning of the school year, there was Lena on the list and I was beside her name and at the end of the school year and, we got, I, uh, I regretted it instantly cuz I was being a bully. I said, 'Lena, when I first signed your name on the list, I had kind of regretted it I didn't like being in your class'. Yeah I just felt really bad after that. And like, I tried to apologize right away and told the teacher she won't accept my apology or anything, I have been saying it 500 million times over the past year and she won't accept my apology.

Two of the girls explained how, yes, their peers have called them a bully but it is not "necessarily true" because they were either sticking up for another student or standing up for themselves. Lila stated that when she stands up for other kids in the class, her peers get angry at her and start "making up lies," saying mean things, and call her a bully. Lila told of a time when her peers called her a bully. She explained,

S: Oh yeah they have called me mean I guess in grade 6. I was kind of rude and they, like, they used to call me a bully because they would make fun of me. Like they would be like... “oh look, you have a moustache or oh look you don’t do your eyebrows” and all that and then I’m like ... yeah ... well then I got kind of got mean cause I’m obviously going to get upset and then they would call me the bully. But I wouldn’t say anything like rude to them. They would be like the mean person and like....

I: So you feel like you were standing up for yourself?

S: Umhmm

I: So maybe you said mean things but you are standing up for yourself?

S: Yeah.

5.4 Views on Rude People and Bullies. All of the girls said they knew someone who is mean or rude or a bully. Most of the girls said they think the rude girls *sometimes* know that others think they are mean, but they do not always know at the time they are being mean. Karen stated, “Yeah... I know some people who do know and some people who don’t.” Ashley explained that they “probably know, but not at the time they are doing it.”

I don’t think they realize how much they are actually affecting a person until they go home and then they look back on the day and realize, ‘oh well what have I just done? I may have made that person really upset’ and start crying or something... They are probably not thinking before what they’re saying. They’re just saying it.

Another student stated similarly, that sometimes the rude people know they are being mean and sometimes they don’t. She further stated that mean people are not always mean; sometimes the mean people are “really nice.” Lila said that the mean people she knows probably know they are mean because everyone says they are mean, but they don’t care. Only one student said they knew a mean person who does not know everyone considers her mean and rude.

Conversely, some girls said the mean girls definitely *do* know they are being mean. Wendy stated that because the mean girls do not want to consider themselves mean or rude they make excuses for their behaviour. She stated that they “try to make it look like they’re not doing anything wrong, which they know they are but would never admit to it and that’s

the worst part.” Quaker explained why she believes the mean girl she knows doesn’t care what other people think.

S: Hmmmm ... Well this girl really doesn’t care about what her image is she just sort of says what's on her mind... she has a few friends no matter what so she doesn't really care if some people don't like her.

I: So you don't think she cares that people think that she's rude?

S: I don't think so. Like if a person's mad at her she just automatically becomes mad at them because she's mad at her so she doesn't really care; think about it that much.

Generally, the girls said they do not like the mean girls and try to stay away. One student said about a girl in her class, “she's just really mean I don't talk to her very much because I know she’s really mean.” Another girl told of a situation where they had created a fun new lunch group of girls but when two mean girls later joined the group, she and another girl “stepped out because we didn't like them. We disliked them.” It also appears it may be difficult to simply separate themselves from the mean girls as the mean girls are often a part of their social circle. One girl explained how a mean girl in her group upsets her,

S: She kinda sometimes has mood swings, and she’s like... rage.

I: Is she in your class?

S: No.

I: So she's in a different class and she's not a popular girl...

S: But like, she has friends. She's in my group of friends, my friends are friends with her, but like I don't really like her. I don't know why I just... She sets me off every time I see her. I don’t know...

I: Well, you said she's kind of moody.

S: Yeah, she is. One of the reasons... she always, she's always like, I don't know, just always on the edge, just so mad all the time, I don’t know why.

I: Is she mad with everybody or just you?

S: I don't know... She just looks mad every time I see her, she’s just like always just like mad, I don’t know why, and just, cranky ... And when I try to be funny, she’s like always serious and like (mocks girl) ‘That’s not funny...’ Just like, I feel, like she just ruins my day every time she looks mad.

Generally, the girls reported that most of the “rude girls” sometimes know they are being mean and sometimes they don’t. They said they think that when the rude girls think about their behaviour later in the day they may realize they hurt someone’s feelings. Sometimes the rude girls can be really nice. Some rude girls, however, are not nice; either they do not care what other people think or, if someone were to get angry with them for acting rudely, they would just “automatically become angry at them.”

Teachers’ Views on Rude People and Bullies. Teachers generally responded that the outcast ‘mean girls’ that do not have friends probably do not know that their peers do not like them because they are mean. One stated “I think if you were aware that kids think of you as being kind of mean... then maybe you wouldn’t be if it mattered.” The teacher went on to explain,

I don’t know that she knows that she’s not especially well liked because she’s not very kind. I don’t think she knows that she doesn’t have a large group of friends because she’s not kind. I have so many kind kids in this class and they don’t tolerate that ... and I don’t know if she’s made that connection. At a certain point they’re going to say ‘I don’t want to hang around with her because I don’t think she’s very nice’... and I don’t know if she would think back over her past actions and analyze where she’s gone kind of wrong to have so few friends. I don’t know if she would put those pieces together.

One teacher believed that the aggressive girls with no friends do not know others see them as aggressive and mean and rude, they are “absolutely oblivious because they are so immature in their own emotional relational development.” Teachers did believe, however, that the more powerful mean girls are aware of their behaviour and they don’t care. One stated, “I think they are egocentric and more concerned about meeting their own needs... and not caring so much about the needs of others... it’s the empathy piece...”

Chapter Summary

Chapter Five presented the key themes that were uncovered in the content analysis of the qualitative interview data. Figure 2 depicts a summary diagram of the 5 main themes and subthemes. The chapter was organized to first present each theme with supporting evidence from the student interviews, and subsequently, where teachers had expressed opinions or observations about that theme, the teachers’ perspectives were included. The results presented in this chapter demonstrate the high level of complexity of the girls’ social

environment, and further, of one's position and perspective of oneself within that social environment.

The next chapter includes a summary of the major findings of the quantitative and qualitative data, and addresses the five research questions that framed this study. Chapter 6 concludes with the limitations of the study, directions for future research, and implications for bullying prevention and school practices.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of relational aggression. Five research questions guided this phenomenological study: How do girls who are relationally aggressive perceive their own behaviour? Do they see themselves as aggressive or do they see others as being too sensitive? Perhaps they feel they are misunderstood? What is their perspective of others who interact with them? Are they trying to hurt others? Or are they trying to do something else?

Chapter 6 begins with a brief summary of the study and the major findings. Next, the five research questions that directed this study are addressed. While addressing the five research questions, the findings around empathy and self-concept (two concepts that have demonstrated inconsistent findings in previous research) will also be discussed. The final section of this chapter presents limitations of the study, implications for future research, and implications for bullying prevention and school practices. Chapter 6 ends with the final conclusions of the study.

Summary of the Study and Major Findings

This study explored and examined the lived experience of relational aggression for girls aged 11 to 13. A mixed-methods design, using quantitative measures of relational aggression, empathy, and self-concept combined with qualitative interviews with both the students and their teachers provided multiple sources of data exploring the participants' experiences in their social environment and their perspectives and beliefs about those experiences; a contextualized picture of what their world looks like from their perspective – what it is like to be them. The interviews with the students and the teachers enabled a deeper exploration and contextualization of the quantitative results. Combining both quantitative and qualitative methods enabled a deeper, more robust, and holistic understanding of the participants' complex experiences than either method would have alone.

The major findings of the study are most clearly explained in two sections; first, a description of the findings in qualitative phase (the interview data) with regards to the three psychological constructs (relational aggression, empathy, self-concept) measured in the quantitative phase. Next, the major themes that emerged from the interview data will be presented.

The participants, who were nominated as relationally aggressive by their peers, do not consider themselves aggressive; they report being nice, fun, and loyal. Regarding empathy, the quantitative data indicated that the girls who are relationally aggressive (RA girls) are more empathic than the boys in their class, but no different from the girls that were not nominated as aggressive (Non-RA girls). This finding was not consistent with findings in the interviews. During the interviews, the RA girls appeared to demonstrate low affective empathy; whether they felt empathy for someone was dependent on several factors such as whose fault the situation was, and how long their friend was sad. Self-concept data from the quantitative phase showed no difference in general self-concept between the RA girls and the Non-RA girls. In the interviews, however, the RA girls spoke quite confidently about themselves, described qualities they admired about themselves, and generally appeared to feel good about their social position. A closer examination of the quantitative data revealed that the RA girls did score significantly higher on 2 self-concept subscales: physical abilities and opposite-sex relations. In further exploring this finding in the interviews, the qualitative data produced supporting data; the RA girls reported being highly physically active especially with regards to competitive sports. In terms of opposite-sex relationships, the RA girls spoke of relationships with boys as co-competitors in sports during recess and as friends as opposed to speaking of boys in terms of boyfriend relationships as one might think if only the quantitative data was considered.

The qualitative interviews provided rich data on other relevant qualities of the participants themselves, and other important experiences in their lives. In addition to substantiating and furthering the exploration of the quantitative measures, five major themes emerged including: 1) self-concept and friendships (social circles, valued qualities in friends, and beliefs about themselves); 2) adult relationships (beliefs around relationship with parents and teachers); 3) achievements and attitudes (competitive nature, highly driven in academics, importance of social status, and selective empathy); 4) intense drama in grades six to eight; and 5) their perspectives on their own behaviour (their views of who they are and what qualities they possess; what makes them likeable, and their views on mean people).

This section provided a brief summary of the major research findings. The five specific research questions and how the major findings of the study relate to existing research will be presented in the next section.

Addressing the Research Questions

The five research questions and answers to those questions based on the findings of the quantitative and qualitative data are presented below.

1. How do girls that are relationally aggressive perceive their own behaviour?

They appear to see themselves, generally, as behaving similarly as their peers. They believe they have a lot of friends and one or two best friends who know and understand them well. They discussed the qualities they admire about themselves (loyalty, kindness, humour, competence at sports) and stated that people like them because they are fun, funny, loyal, and trustworthy. This replicates previous research findings where “powerful students and bullies by and large feel good about themselves and their social interactions” (Hawley, 1999; Vaillancourt, 2003; Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006).

They reported that they generally try to do the right thing and are quick to stand up for themselves or their friends if they are wronged in some way. The girls spoke often about drama and the importance of loyalty; their perspective often seemed to come from a position of avoiding and navigating the drama. They also appeared to perceive themselves as having strong personalities. They said that usually peers like their strong personalities but sometimes they know their words or actions can be mean. The participants stated that sometimes they can be mean but it is either not intentional or it is unjustly provoked.

The peer-nomination data and the data from the teacher interviews confirm that the participants do have friends. Only one participant did not receive votes of being someone who is liked. In all of the other classes, participants were voted as having between one and several friends. Conversely, all of the participants received votes of being disliked by their classmates – an average of 30% of the class does not like them. The participants often spoke about being funny and about how people like the way they make people laugh although the peer-nomination data showed that nine of the participants received no votes for being funny, five girls received one vote, and two girls received only two votes. This suggests that while the girls who are relationally aggressive believe they are funny, their classmates do not. Their one or two friends might have voted for them, but overall their assessment that people like them because they are funny appears to be incorrect. They may believe people like them because they are funny because most of the girls nominated as relationally aggressive are perceived as popular, and this positive attention from others may reinforce their perception that they are liked because of their funny personalities.

These findings are generally consistent with current research showing that while relationally aggressive girls may not be liked by many of their peers (Boulton, 1999; Pelligrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999; Vaillancourt, 2003), they still do have one or more friends (Rys & Bear, 1997; Ellis & Zarbatany, 2007), they are often perceived as popular (high-status) (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2003; Andreou, 2006) and they often believe they are “well integrated into the peer group” (Vaillancourt et. al., 2003, p. 168).

Also observed in the findings was evidence of what Hawley (1999) referred to as the *peer regard-aggression paradox*. This concept refers to the observation that while some aggressive students are rejected by their peers (Hughes, White, Sharpen, & Dunn, 2000; Almeida, Correia, & Marinho, 2009) and experience psychological maladjustment (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick, 1997), other research has demonstrated that many aggressive children are not rejected (Coie, Dodge, Terry, Wright, 1991) and are actually regarded as popular by their peers (Hawley et al., 2007). Some aggressive children who are labeled as *bullies* are very well socially adjusted have high self-esteem (Pollastri, Cardemil, & O’Donnell, 2009). Thus, there are youth who are highly aggressive yet popular, central figures in their school. The peer nomination findings in this study demonstrated that over 50% of the RA participants received a high number of popularity nominations (> 20% of participants). It was also found that three of the girls nominated at relationally aggressive received zero popularity votes. Given that bully-victims tend to be rejected by their peers (Marini et al., 2006) it is possible that these three girls are bully-victims. Thus, consistent with peer regard-aggression paradox, while most of the relationally aggressive girls were nominated at popular, central figures within their class, some of the girls perceived of as aggressive appear to receive no such attention, not even from their friends.

These findings are also consistent with resource control theory (Hawley, 1999) and it’s concept of bistrategic controller (Hawley, 2003b; Hawley et al., 2002). Bistrategic controllers are “not only highly adept at resource control, they also challenge commonly-accepted views of social competence (Hawley et al., 2007). They appear to be well-liked by peers but are actually receiving positive attention because they are social resources. Adolescents are drawn towards those with high-status and social resources being because alliance with high-status girls is socially advantageous. Being a member of high-status groups offers social recognition, attractive social partners, and social power (Hawley, 1999).

In only one class did the RA girls nominate each other as someone with whom they like to play. This finding is surprising because research has shown that aggressive youth tend to form friendships with other aggressive youth (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest, & Garipey, 1988; Pellegrini, Bartini, Brooks, 1999). In this study, however, five of the RA girls did not nominate the other RA girls as someone they'd like to play with; instead, they nominated other people in the class. Five of the RA girls nominated the other RA girl in the class as someone they *do not like*. Perhaps the girls nominated as aggressive have other aggressive friends in other classes, however, within the social hierarchy of their immediate class, the "other" RA girl may be perceived as competition. This explanation is consistent with RCT theory (Hawley, 1999), which states that schoolyards, and by extension, classrooms, are "little microcosms of the larger society" and aggression and bullying serve the function of establishing one's position in the social hierarchy. Thus, it may be expected that the presence of two dominant, aggressive females within one classroom would create feelings of dislike and possibly competition for attention and regard from their peers.

According to social interaction (SI) theory (Blumer, 1969/1989; Snow, 2003), how people act towards others is based on how they perceive that person; the meanings they have previously ascribed to that person (based on previous interactions) or the situation in which they find themselves. Within the context of this study, SI theory provides an explanation for the apparent discrepancy between the girls' description of their friendships and social environment and the results of the peer nominations. The peer nomination data showed that many of the girls nominated as relationally aggressive are quite popular and thus likely receive a lot of positive peer attention. This positive attention and peer regard create positive meaning for their behaviour; a belief and perception of their behaviour as that of goodness, loyalty, and likeability. They may have ascribed the other RA girl in their class with the meaning of competition or threat in some way. As stated in their interviews, they believe they are good people with a lot of friends. The meaning they have constructed, of who they are and their relationships with others, was constructed as part of a social process within their little microcosm of their classroom or social network. Their highly competitive nature (see Theme 3) and want for social dominance forms the drive for relationally aggressive behaviour, and the positive meanings they co-create with their peers reinforce and support their beliefs and understanding of their social environments.

2. Do they see themselves as aggressive or do they see others as being too sensitive?

Unknown at the time of formulating the research questions, the girls do not use the word *aggressive*; they use *mean* or *rude*. Reformulating the question using the language the participants use, the answer is no – the girls nominated as relationally aggressive do not see themselves as mean or rude. A few girls admitted that they can be mean once in a while, but it is either unintentional, provoked, or they were standing up for a friend. They appeared to believe they are fun, loyal friends who are liked by their peers.

To the question, “do they see others as being too sensitive?” Many of the participants said yes, sometimes their peers are too sensitive and they overreact and get *dramatic* about small, “stupid things”. While they state they are not mean or rude themselves, they do report that they know mean, rude people at their school. They believe most of those mean girls are aware that people think they are mean but they don’t care because they already have friends so it doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks. This finding suggests that they girls who are relationally aggressive in this study are unaware that their peers perceive them as aggressive.

The small, “stupid things” the girls spoke about, the things their friends sometimes get upset about, may be perceived as small and stupid by the girls due to lack of consideration for their friends thoughts and feelings. Past research investigating empathy and relational aggression is inconclusive; research has found youth who engage in indirect and relational aggression to achieve high scores on social intelligence which is a component of cognitive empathy (Bjorkqvist et al., 2000; Kaukiainen, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, Lagerspetz, 1996; Kaukiainen et al., 1999; Bjorkqvist, Osterman, Kaukiainen, 2000; Androu, 2006) but no difference in affective empathy from their peers (Bjorkqvist et al., 2000). One study investigated empathy and aggression specifically in girls and found no relationship (Gini et al., 2007) while Joliffe & Farrington (2006) found female bullies to score significantly lower on both affective and total empathy.

This mixed-methods design enabled further investigation of the quantitative measure of empathy during the interviews. The results of the Basic Empathy Scale from phase 1 of this study showed the girls nominated as relationally aggressive not to have lower cognitive nor affective empathy than the girls not nominated. This finding is consistent with Gini et al.’s (2007) research finding females who are relationally aggressive not to be lower in affective empathy than their peers. The interview data, however, suggested the girls to have low affective empathy. One of the subthemes (in Theme 3) that emerged from the interviews

was *Logical Sense of Empathy*; the girls appeared to have empathy for others depending on the situation and reason their friend was upset. If it was a family matter then yes, they stated they felt empathy but if the friend “did it to themselves” then they did not feel empathetic. Time was also a factor. The participants stated they would feel bad for their friend for a short time, but did not want to spend a lot of time dealing with it.

The Basic Empathy Scale (BES) was chosen for this study because the scale was designed in such a way as to avoid social desirability bias, which has previously been problematic in self-reports of empathy (Kaukianen et al., 1999; Bjorkqvist et al, 2006; Gini et al., 2007). The interview data, however, suggested the girls had slightly different answers when asked to speak freely about situations that occur at recess when their peers were upset, or when their friends were upset by something they said or did.

3. Perhaps they feel they are misunderstood?

Generally no, the girls reported that their friends know them very well, as Ashley said, “I’m basically like an open book to all my friends. I don’t have much to hide (laughs) or there is nothing I need to hide so that is good.” Another girl stated, “I like to show everyone who I am and if they don't like me for who I am then that's kind of their loss I guess.” It is possible that many did not understand this question or take the time to really reflect on whether they feel understood by their friends. It is also possible that they do not feel misunderstood because they see themselves as nice, loyal, fun people and therefore there is nothing to misunderstand. Four of the participants, however, stated that yes, they do sometimes they feel they are misunderstood. Two situations where they indicated feeling misunderstood are when they are joking, and when they are standing up for someone. Many participants stated that sometimes their peers think their jokes are mean or not nice when they were actually just trying to be funny and did not mean to hurt anyone. The other situation where their actions are misunderstood is when they are standing up for someone. When they speak up for someone who is being picked on, they report that their peers see their behaviour as mean and rude. The participants feel their *good* behaviour, standing up for someone, is misjudged as acting badly or speaking meanly to people.

Overall, during the interviews, the participants appeared to be confident in themselves, believe they are honest, good people and feel that they are socially well-adjusted. This supports the findings of the quantitative measure of self-concept that showed the RA girls to have the same level of self-concept as the Non-RA girls and further supports existing

research that claims relationally/indirectly aggressive youth to not have low self-concept (Moretti, Holland, & McKay, 2001; Osterman et al., 1999) and even a higher self-concept in some abilities (Pollastri et al., 2009; Vaillancourt et al., 2003). For example, on the individual self-concept subscales, the RA girls were found to have significantly higher levels of self-concept in terms of physical abilities and opposite sex relationships. This was supported during the interviews where almost all participants spoke confidently about their success at sports and high athletic ability. Interestingly, only one participant mentioned interest in boys. The other 17 participants, if they mentioned boys at all, did so with reference to sports during recess. Thus, it appears that their high self-concept in terms of opposite sex relationships may be more with regards to competing with boys in sports or a shared interest in sports that fosters comfortable relationships.

The girls did not appear to feel misunderstood by their peers, possibly because they are unaware of how they are perceived by their peers. Again, they believe they are well-liked by their peers and that their peers think they are funny while the peer nomination scores showed they are *not* liked by >30% of their peers, and most of the girls did not receive *any* nominations for being funny. This finding lends support to the contention that females who are relationally aggressive do not self-report as aggressive (Huesmann & Eron, 1986/2013; Lagersptez et. al., 1988) likely because they do not believe they are aggressive. The findings of this study further indicate that self-report measures are not effective methods of assessing relational aggression.

4. What is their perspective of others who interact with them?

Overall the girls reported positive, healthy relationships with peers, teachers, and parents. They appeared to respect their teachers as authority figures and as people who have the professional and personal knowledge to help their friends with their problems. They also appeared to have respect for their parents; they seemed to like their parents and care about what they think. This finding was generally supported by the teachers; the teachers stated the girls in their classes seem to have close, supportive relationships with their parents. The teachers further stated that while yes, the girls treat them respectfully, some teachers stated they were not sure it is always a genuine respect.

They reported that their friends are sometimes too sensitive and that they get into arguments with their friends almost every day. The arguments are over “dumb things.” Sometimes their friends just get angry and don’t tell them why. Many participants said they

don't care if their friends are mad because they "didn't do anything." However, when the participants feel their friends have wronged them in some way, they ignore them or exclude them until their friend comes to them and apologizes. Sometimes this lasts 10-minutes, and sometimes it takes a week for their friend to come to them to apologize. Statements indicating a desire to maintain dominance in their relationships were repeatedly made throughout the interviews.

5. Are they trying to hurt others? Or are they trying to do something else?

When things are going their way, they appear to be happy, well-adjusted teens and pre-teens, mainly concerned with their friends, sports, and school. They spoke very positively about their social situations and about their teachers. Based on the data from the interviews and the themes that emerged, it does not appear that hurting others is their primary intention. It appears that when they hurt others it is either not deliberate (for example making poignant jokes or comments that they believe to be funny or just truthful), or they hurt others in defence of themselves or others.

When asked if their friends had ever said they said something or did something to hurt their feelings, most of the participants answered no. These participants received high ratings on relational aggression from their peers thus, either their friends do not tell them when they say something or do something to hurt their feelings, or they do tell them but the girls that are relationally aggressive either disagree or do not care. It is possible the peers do not tell the girls they are hurtful in fear of the repercussions (e.g. withdrawal of friendship, breaking of confidence) that may come with confronting them. Some of the participants stated that they have made comments or jokes that have unintentionally hurt others. For example, Kim gave the example of the time she pointed at a girl in her class and asked loudly, "What is that thing on your face?" Kim claims she honestly didn't know what it was but when it turned out to be a birthmark she realised she had hurt the other girl. Several teachers stated they often saw this type of "thoughtless behaviour." Mr. Eckleman stated,

There's lots of drama, constant drama ... and I wouldn't say that it's bullying so much as impulsive, rude, disrespectful behaviour ... it's just impulsive, they don't... she doesn't think before she does this stuff."

One other way the girls that are relationally aggressive may hurt others is when they feel challenged or threatened; their highly competitive nature and drive to assert and maintain

their social position was heard repeatedly in the interviews. Sarah's comment is demonstrative of many comments made by the participants,

I always make people smile. I don't know, I don't really, I've never really thought about it... I always try to be nice, but if they're rude to me, then what I'm going do? Be nice to you? No, I'm going to be rude to you too... What comes around goes around. Yeah...

The constant drama, and danger of being drawn in the drama appears to create a sense of distrust and guardedness. In the face of even small conflict with their peers, the participants often acted in ways to assert their dominant positions, often through withdrawal of friendships or social exclusion. This is not, however, considered bullying behaviour by the girls. Holding back their friendship, ignoring their friend until their friends come to them to apologize appears to be an example of *winning* as opposed to *bullying*. For example, after an argument with friends, Fire explained what usually happens, "... like if it was someone I didn't really like I'd just be like 'oh well' (shrugs) ... and ignore them or something. But if it's like my best friend then ... usually I don't talk to them and they'll text me and just be nice again. That's how it goes... And it usually works." (Smile). Fire's main concern appears to be in winning the argument and coming out on top. Whether ignoring her friend hurt her friend appeared not to be a concern.

All of the participants know mean people and do not like them – but they don't see themselves as mean people. Only two participants recounted an instance or instances of knowingly being mean to someone. The first claimed she can be mean but only if she's having a bad day – but even then, she doesn't mean to hurt anyone and she's only mean once; not repeatedly mean like a bully. The second girl stated she did say a very mean thing to another girl, but she has apologized "500 million times over the past year and she won't accept my apology." None of the other 16 participants stated, or believed, that they had ever done anything intentionally mean. Thus, to the question "Are they trying to hurt others? Or are they trying to do something else?" the general finding the data reveals is that trying to hurt others is not their primary intention, but others may get hurt when they are seeking attention, trying to be funny, or when they (or their social position) are challenged.

This section addressed the five research questions that framed this study. The interviews with the girls nominated as relationally aggressive allowed the further exploration and contextualization of the findings from the quantitative surveys of relational aggression,

empathy, and self-concept. For example, while the quantitative results showed the participants not to have lower empathy than their peers, the elaborations to social situations involving empathy the girls gave in the interviews demonstrated low affective empathy. Perhaps the participants were adept at answering the test questions correctly but exposed their actual level of affective empathy when freely describing situations and interactions with their friends. The results of the relational aggression measure (peer nominations) provided a “peer-view” of the girls that was further examined in the interviews. These results demonstrated that the perceptions the girls (that are relationally aggressive) hold regarding how their peers perceived them is in many ways false. Their classmates do not perceive them as the funny, nice, loyal people they believe, or assert themselves to be. These findings provide considerable support for the contribution of qualitative research in further exploring quantitative data. As Torrance (2000) has argued, “if researchers and practitioners are to develop an in-depth understanding of bullying within a social setting, supported by findings which lead to a better understanding of intervention strategies, greater emphasis needs to be placed on qualitative research.” (p. 16).

Limitations of the Study

The students in this study provided valuable information about their experiences and perspectives on the relationships they have with the salient people in their day-to-day lives. However, there are limitations to the study related to the selection of participants, time limitations, and to the student interviews.

This study involved a small, purposeful sample of girls in a school district in Southwestern Ontario. Initially, five school principals agreed to participate in the study, which would have included a greater range of students. However, one school was unable to collect enough consent forms to participate in the study (60% participation rate per class). One other school was excluded following phase 1 because the results of the peer nomination surveys showed that no one in the class was considered relationally aggressive. Thus, only three schools participated in the study. Due to the participants being ‘nested’ with groups (classes) the data would be better analyzed using a multilevel analysis (MLM) procedure. A MLM analysis, however, requires more cases and clusters (classes) than was gathered for this study therefore conducting a MLM was not possible. Thus, the quantitative data in this study must be looked at as supplementary to the qualitative data. Future research with students

nested within classes should include more cases (students) within more classes than were included in the present study (Mass & Hox, 2005).

Time was a slight limitation when it came to the teacher interviews; all teachers consented to participating in the interviews but time only allowed for seven interviews. The last interview was conducted on the morning of graduation and the end of the school term.

Lastly, this study acknowledges that there are a number of difficulties conducting research with adolescents asking them about behaviour that they may know is frowned upon by their peers, parents, teachers, and the interviewer. Thus, social desirability and response bias need to be carefully considered. Triangulation of the peer nomination measure and teacher interviews helped to provide support for some statements and shed light on statements that may not have been true, however, this is acknowledged as likely occurring.

Implications for Future Research

The findings from this study suggest several directions for further exploration of the lived experience of girls who are relationally aggressive. Past research on empathy has been inconclusive especially with regards to affective empathy. This study found girls who are relationally aggressive to have *selective empathy* in that, while overall they may experience low affective empathy, they do empathize with their peers when the source of the harm is outside their control. Another research direction is investigating the possibly desensitizing effects of drama on affective empathy. Further exploration of the intense drama that reportedly occurs on a daily basis may shed light on a group dynamic that fosters indifference. Further research on quantitative measures of affective empathy is also suggested. This study also directs attention to the positive experience enjoyed by most girls who are socially and relationally aggressive. It is recommended that future research consider reconceptualising social aggression and bullying as adaptive and strategic as opposed to a social deficit; investigating the social functions of bullying within the microcosms of classrooms, within the larger social context of school, and society.

Implications for Bullying Prevention and School Practices

The findings of this study suggest that intervention programs aimed at bullying may be more effective if they were to differentially consider and address the very different arenas of reactive, physical, direct bullying and the more manipulative, secretive relational

aggression and bullying. The findings of this study suggest three major implications for school practices and prevention programming. First, school practices should include opportunities for highly competitive, relationally aggressive students who currently enjoy a leadership position within their peer groups to learn to use their leadership skills in positive, prosocial roles. Second, family programming should include education for parents about how to provide support for students dealing with drama. Finally, programming should include a social and emotional learning component that includes research-based skills and strategies around how to deal with the complex arena of drama. These three major implications are discussed in the following section.

Implications

The participants in this study, including the teachers, did not consider acts of relational aggression as bullying. The girls stated themselves that they do not use the word bully; they do not have any *bullies* at their school, but they do have “really mean girls that everyone knows is mean.” This was further evidenced by another girls’ statement that she can be really mean to people, but she’ll only “do it one time cause like maybe it’s a bad day, But [she] won’t do it constantly like a bully kind of thing.” The relational bullying that occurs is considered drama, and being mean or rude. Drama precludes girls from standing up against relational bullying because it puts them at risk of being targeted themselves. Further, as stated by participants, “the mean girls have lots of friends so they don’t care what anyone thinks – they’ll just get mad at you.” One other difference between predominately male physical bullying and relational bullying was clearly demonstrated in this study. The relational bullies nominated by their peers were also voted as the most popular girls in the class. They have many friends and most are successful sports and school; they enjoy high status and a social power that leads them to view themselves as likeable, funny, and even *nice* (most of the time). This finding is consistent with research demonstrating many relationally aggressive youth to have a position of high status and social power; they are often quite popular and influential (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Hoff, Reese-Weber, Schneider, & Stagg, 2009; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003; Vaillancourt, 2003). This relationship between relational aggression and popularity and high status has also been found in boys (Reese-Weber et al., 2009; Puckett, Aikins, & Cillessen, 2008). Relational bullies enjoying this amount of social success and positive attention will likely not respond to current bullying prevention programs that appear to be aimed more towards deviant bullies that are often not

popular and have lower status. They may not respond not only because of the rewards of their position, but also because most consider themselves nice, loyal, supportive friends and therefore believe they do not need to change.

Thus, a crucial factor in developing an effective intervention program is to include opportunities for relationally aggressive students, who currently enjoy a position of leadership through negative means, to learn to use their leadership skills in more positive, prosocial roles.

The findings of this study also support the advisement that intervention programming include a family programming and support. Leff et al., (2010) advised the inclusion of a family-programming component based on the research finding that early experiences with siblings and parents influence the development of relationally aggressive behaviours (Stauffacher & De-Hart, 2006). Several of the participants in this study made statements about interactions with their mothers and sisters which suggested that dealing with conflict in relationally aggressive ways to be a normal behaviour in their family. The findings of this study further our understanding of the crucial role parents (usually their mothers) play in providing a safe, supportive outlet for students to talk about and express their feelings about dealing with the day-to-day drama at school. Most of the participants in this study stated that they prefer to speak to their mother about social issues mainly because they felt their mothers would understand their situation better than their fathers would. Not feeling they can speak to a parent about stressful social issues at school was quite upsetting to the participants in this study and they seemed to feel that without that, they had no one to turn to for help. This points to an additional role of family-programming in school interventions; providing education and counselling for parents around providing positive support and a safe place to discuss and vent problems or stressful situations their daughter (or son) may be dealing with.

Finally, this study points to the crucial role of the social-ecological context in the promotion and support of relationally aggressive behaviour. Drama is interwoven in friendship circles so that it is difficult to avoid. Fear of being drawn into drama has the effect of students not helping other students when being victimized, and not speaking out against bullying behaviour in part because speaking against the group is considered rude. This finding is consistent with research findings on peer group dynamics (Ellis & Zabatany, 2007; Ellis et al., 2012). The girls who were nominated as highly relationally aggressive in this study were also rated as most popular in the class. Thus, they are likely members and/or

high-status members of highly central groups. Ellis et al. (2012) found that members of highly centralized groups expressed fewer opinions than lower status groups, likely because members of these groups exhibit the most frequent use of direct controlling behaviours. Thus, these groups have clearly defined norms of behaviour that ensures conformity – and “all members that learned that individual freedom is not acceptable” (p. 262). How the girls in this study described their peer group, the persistent drama, and the feeling of being trapped within the drama due to fear of the social consequences of speaking out is consistent with current research findings. The constant exposure to drama where students are exposed to being victimized by, or observing others being victimised by, social and relational bullying may have the effect of desensitizing these students. Many students in this study reported seeing their peers upset but not wanting to get involved in fear of getting “dragged in” to the problem. This finding points to the need for programming that helps develop skills, strategies and confidence to manage the complex dynamics of their peer groups; this may include incorporating social and emotional learning (SEL) in school practices. Current SEL programs have demonstrated significant increases in successful coping strategies and critical thinking around bullying situations (Crick et al., 2015). Extending SEL further, to include a focus for students dealing with the complicated dynamics of drama, as demonstrated in this study, is suggested. Further, because both students and teachers in this study supported the distinction of drama as separate and different from bullying, more effective intervention programming may need to address drama separately from bullying. Most teachers and students in this study did not consider the relationally aggressive behaviours that occur in drama as bullying; they saw drama and bullying as separate behaviours, which thereby served to condone the drama. Directly addressing drama, including mean and rude behaviours (using their words because their words have more meaning to them) is suggested.

Programs for youth are likely to be more effective if they take into account the more complicated nature of relational aggression and the arena of drama within which it fosters. While the focus of this study was on females who are relationally aggressive, research has shown both girls and boys to engage in relationally aggressive behaviour thus school-based intervention programming is needed for both boys and girls. One consideration, however, is that the social arena for boys may be different than the social arena (drama) of girls. While this study acknowledges that differential social arenas for boys and girls are likely the result of gender socialization, it still may need to be considered for effective program design. Given

that relational aggression creates school environments where students feel unsafe (Kuppens, Grietens, Onghena, Michiels & Subramanian, 2008) it is important to differentially target relational aggression using a whole-school approach to change the peer culture and an individual approach offering opportunities for aggressive youth to channel their skills towards more prosocial, productive avenues.

Conclusion

Most research has investigated bullying from the perspective of victims and bystanders. This study was unique in that it provided a glimpse of the social world of eighteen girls, who are relationally aggressive, from *their* perspective. As it was anticipated that the girls may not be completely honest or even completely aware of others' feelings and perspectives, their peers and teachers also provided their insights on the individuals' behaviours and the social dynamics in the classroom in order to provide the most valid, robust data. The girls in this study were surprisingly eager to participate in the interviews. They seemed keenly interested in discussing the social issues occurring within their groups of friends, the problems they encounter every day dealing with drama, and further, they seemed to enjoy and be engaged in reflecting on their own feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. Comments often made by the participants when asked about their thoughts and feelings were, "Oh wow, no one has ever asked me that" and "I've never thought about that about myself." Many of the girls divulged more personal information and admissions of negative thoughts and behaviours than was anticipated. The teachers also seemed quite intrigued with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and perceptions around the social aggression.

The literature on bullying and relational aggression often emphasizes psychological maladjustment, internalizing problems and relationship difficulties on the part of both the victim and the bully. However, in the current study, most of the female bullies, nominated by their peers as relationally aggressive, did not appear to experience these difficulties. On the contrary, most of the girls in this study had general self-concept scores similar to their non-aggressive peers and even significantly higher self-concept scores on physical ability and opposite-sex relationships. They reported having many good friends, being active in many social activities, and more than half of them were nominated as *the most popular* by their

classmates. The teachers confirmed that all but two participants were very respectful of their teachers, were attentive in class, and had good relationships with their parents.

Several interesting themes emerged from the interviews with the girls that were perhaps unexpected. From the answers and discussion around several topics, the girls revealed the personal qualities in friends and beliefs about themselves that they are proud of and think others respect about them. Kindness, trustworthiness, loyalty, support were among the most frequently mentioned valued qualities. Somewhat disconcerting was the finding that most of the girls in the study believed they were well liked by their friends, in part because they are *nice* and *funny*. The peer-nomination data shows that the peers in the class actually feel the opposite; the nominated girls are not liked and they are not necessarily nice. Further, most of their peers do not think they are funny. The girls were also found to be highly competitive. A competitive nature was anticipated in terms of friendships and other social issues, however, it was not anticipated that this highly competitive nature and high need to achieve would span across other extracurricular endeavours or academics. A concerning finding in this study was the pervasiveness and influential force of drama at school. Fear of getting drawn into drama, having secrets revealed, and otherwise being victimized results in students not wanting to get involved in other people's problems; many students stated they cared if their friend was upset but did not want to get involved. This finding has significant implications for Upstander programs where students are encouraged to stand up against bullying. The participants in this study, who are the highly relational bullies according to the nomination surveys, revealed the social dangers and personal risks in getting involved in other people's issues. Speaking against the group or against an individual is considered rude and likely has devastating consequences. Lastly revealed in this study, was finding that most participants preferred to speak to their parents, usually their mothers, about social problems at school. Being able to talk to their parents was very important to the girls because of the safety and confidentiality it provided; speaking to friends left them in a place of vulnerability to peer-drama. Girls who felt unable to speak to their parents reported feeling stressed and alone in dealing with "stuff at school."

To conclude, the findings of this study provide additional support to research orientating towards the peer group as a dominant driving force of adolescent behaviour. Further, this study demonstrated that understanding the perceptions of females who are relationally aggressive is crucial to understanding the dynamics of that dominant driving

force. This study further found that while girls that are relationally aggressive may not share everything, they are willing to share a great deal about themselves, what is important to them, their feelings or indifferences towards people, the meanings certain people and situations have for them, and how these meanings enable them to treat people either poorly or well. More research, directly exploring the perceptions of female aggressors is required. A deeper understanding of relational aggression and the positive and rewarding social functions it serves may suggest alternative, differentiated approaches to bullying prevention.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Western University Ethical Approval



**Western
Research**

Research Ethics

**Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board
NMREB Full Board Initial Approval Notice**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Peter Jaffe
Department & Institution: Education\Faculty of Education,Western University

NMREB File Number: 105379
Study Title: Tell me about your class: Understanding the social behaviour of students aged 11 to 13.
Sponsor:

NMREB Initial Approval Date: August 15, 2014
NMREB Expiry Date: August 31, 2016

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

| Document Name | Comments | Version Date |
|---|---|--------------|
| Instruments | Intent Attributions and Feelings of Distress | 2014/05/20 |
| Instruments | Student Interview Protocol | 2014/05/20 |
| Instruments | Basic Empathy Scale | 2014/05/20 |
| Instruments | Tell me about your class. Peer nomination instrument. | 2014/05/20 |
| Revised Western University Protocol | PDF Romeo revisions | 2014/07/02 |
| Instruments | Appendix G Teacher Interview PDF | 2014/07/01 |
| Revised Letter of Information & Consent | Parent consent PDF | 2014/07/01 |
| Revised Letter of Information & Consent | PDF student consent | 2014/07/01 |
| Revised Letter of Information & Consent | Parent LOI PDF | 2014/07/01 |
| Revised Letter of Information & Consent | Student LOI PDF | 2014/07/01 |
| Instruments | Self Description Questionnaire PDF | 2014/07/02 |
| Recruitment Items | Recruitment email PDF | 2014/07/01 |

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the HSREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of HSREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

[Redacted Signature]

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

[Redacted Contact Information]

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

Appendix B: Invitation Email to Principals

Dear Principals of TVDSB,

My name is Laura Hogarth and I am a Ph.D. Candidate under the supervision of Dr. Peter Jaffe at the Faculty of Education at Western University. I am looking for three elementary schools to participate in a research study I am conducting looking at social aggression in girls in grades 6, 7, and 8. The study is entitled,

*Tell me about your class:
Understanding the Social Behaviour of students aged 11 to 13*

Time required:

2 hours to complete surveys (one day only)

30 - 45 minutes for teacher interview

30 - 45 minutes to interview each student (outside of lesson time)

As I'm sure you are well aware, the social world of students today can be quite turbulent and often leaves teachers, parents, and the students at a loss in terms of understanding what is happening or what they can do to help them. Because of this need, I am conducting research to further understand the social experiences of boys and girls aged 11 to 13 (grades 6 to 8) to learn about the perspectives and motivations behind their behaviour.

The first part of the study includes both boys and girls. The second part of the study focuses on the girls' experience. Our interest in girls is based on their overall tendency to interact differently in social situations than do boys. Girls may engage predominately in indirect means of behaviour (teasing, spreading rumours, excluding someone from activities).

The aim of the study is to better understand the dynamics of their social world so that we may be better equipped to answer questions asked by both teachers and parents such as, 'what can I do to help my daughter/student?' The data derived from this research project may help shape evidence-based intervention programs, lead to higher quality decision making, more informed policies, and improved outcomes for students as a result.

Please find details regarding participants and procedures attached. At the end of the study I will hold a feedback/information session where I will present the results of the study to the students, parents, and educators. I believe this will be a wonderful learning experience for everyone!

I look forward to hearing from you,
 Laura Hogarth
 Ph.D. Candidate, Educational Psychology
 Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario
 1137 Western Road, London, Ontario

Appendix C: Parent Letter of Information and Consent



*Tell me about your class:
Understanding the Social Behaviour of students aged 11 to 13.*

PARENT/GUARDIAN - LETTER OF INFORMATION

Introduction

My name is Laura Hogarth and I am a Ph.D. Candidate at the Faculty of Education at Western University. I am conducting research on the social experiences of student's aged 11 to 13 (grades 6 to 8) and would like to invite your child's class to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study

The social world of children today can be quite turbulent and often leaves parents, teachers, and the students at a loss in terms of understanding what is happening or what they can do help.

The aims of this study are to learn about the perspectives and motivations behind children's social behaviour. The first part of the study includes the entire class; the second part of the study includes only girls. If we, as parents, can better understand the dynamics of their social world, we will be better equipped to answer questions such as 'why do they do what they do?' and 'what can I do to help my daughter?'

Who are the investigators?

Dr. Peter Jaffe

Laura Hogarth



If you agree to participate

The study consists of 2 Phases. All students who agree to participate will take part in Phase 1 of the study. Only female students will be asked to participate in Phase 2. If you choose for your child to not participate, he/she may do seatwork at their desk while the study takes place.

Phase 1: Tell me about your class surveys

This first day consists of the class completing the "Tell me about your class" survey (30 minutes). The survey includes examples of positive and negative behaviour, and asks the students to indicate 3 people in the class that fit various descriptions such as those who are leaders, are helpful to others, and those who start fights or say mean things about others. Similarly, your child may be identified by their classmates as being a leader, helpful to others, or starts fights or says mean things. After a short break, students will complete two assessment surveys (45 minutes) measuring empathy and self-concept. All participating female students will be asked to participate in the second phase of the study. All participating students' names will be entered into a draw for various prizes (including a \$10 Indigo gift card or a \$10 Cineplex gift card) as a thank you for contributing their insights on the social environment of their class.

Phase 2: Interviews

All girls in the class will be asked to participate in 30-minute interviews where I will ask them to tell me about themselves and their friendships for the purpose of better understanding their social world. The interview will be audio-recorded and kept confidential. Interviews will be conducted at a time most convenient for your child – whether they choose to have the interview at school or at a convenient time and location outside of school. Again, as a thank you, all participating female students' names will be entered into a second draw for prizes (\$10 Indigo gift card or a \$10 Cineplex gift card). Teachers will also be interviewed to ask their perspective on the students' interactions at school.

Confidentiality: All of the information your child provides will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Your son or daughter never will be mentioned by name in our reports of our results. All of the questionnaire information and video footage will be kept under lock and key, and access will be restricted to members of our research group. All information will be destroyed six years after the study is published.

Risks: There are no known risks to participating in this study. Adults occasionally have concerns around asking children to identify the behaviors of others – a concern that children may treat each other differently as a result. Studies around this concern have repeatedly shown this not to be the case. Children have reported that the testing does not bother them. Further, both children and their teachers reported they saw no difference in the way students treated each other inside or outside the classroom after the testing.

Benefits: In better understanding what is happening and why, we can more confidently offer suggestions and strategies to girls to deal with difficult situations. Further, we can find ways to assist girls having a difficult time socially become more integrated with their peers in a positive way.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You and/or your child may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

Sharing the results of the study: At the end of the study I will hold an “*Understanding Pre-teen Social Behaviour*” feedback session for students, parents, and educators to learn about the results of the study. Anonymity will be preserved as the results are the collection of data from at least eight classes at two or three schools. Students will be able to see firsthand the product of their contribution, and parents and educators can learn about what is going on in the children's social environment.

Questions: If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may

[REDACTED] or

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Laura Hogarth at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Sincerely,
Laura A. Hogarth, M.A.
Faculty of Education, Western University



*Tell me about your class:
Understanding the Social Behaviour of students aged 11 to 13.*

Laura Hogarth, Ph.D. Candidate
Faculty of Education, Western University



Parental/Guardian Consent

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I consent to my child participating in the study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name of Student (please print): _____

Name of Parent/Guardian (please print): _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian:

Date: _____

Summary of the study

___ No thank you.

Yes, I would like a copy of the summary of the study of results of the study sent o:

Email: _____

Or

Street address:

Appendix D: Student Letter of Information and Consent



*Tell me about your class:
Understanding the Social Behaviour of students aged 11 to 13.*

STUDENT - LETTER OF INFORMATION

Introduction

My name is Laura Hogarth and I am a student at Western University. I am doing research on grade six, seven, and eight classes (students aged 11 to 13) to find out more about your friendships and how you all get along together both in the class and outside at recess. I would like to invite your class to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study

Students your age can have some very good friends, but sometimes others are not good friends and this can be upsetting and stressful. Sometimes you may not understand why other kids do what they do, or say what they say, or know what to do about it. Your teacher and your parents often have the same questions and concerns. Some students are very helpful to others and make very good leaders. Some students have many friends and some students have difficulty making friends. The purpose of this study is to learn about you and your class. There are two parts to the study I am inviting you to participate in.

The first part of the study includes the entire class; the second part of the study includes only the girls. The second part includes only girls because girls' friendships, what girls like to talk about, and what is important to girls is often different than boys.

I hope to learn all about you and your class; your friendships, who you like to be friends with, things that make you happy in friendships and also, things that might make you unhappy.

Your answers to questions like these can help teachers and parents understand better what it is like to be an 11 – 13 year old student.

Who are the investigators?

Dr. Peter Jaffe
Laura Hogarth

If you agree to participate

The study consists of 2 Phases. All students who agree to participate will take part in Phase 1 of the study. Only female students will be asked to participate in Phase 2. If you choose not to participate, you may do seatwork at your desk while the study takes place.

Phase 1: Tell me about your class surveys

This first day consists of the class completing the “Tell me about your class” survey that takes 30 minutes. The survey includes examples of positive and negative behaviour, and asks you to indicate 3 people in the class that fit various descriptions such as those who are leaders, are helpful to others, and those who start fights or say mean things about others. Similarly, you may be identified by your classmates as being a leader, helpful to others, or starts fights or says mean things. After a short break, students will complete two surveys (45 minutes) measuring empathy (how you understand the feelings of others) and self-concept (your thoughts about yourself, what you are good at or not good at). All participating

students' names (both boys and girls) will be entered into a draw for either a \$10 Indigo gift card or a \$10 Cineplex gift card as a thank you for participating in the study.

Phase 2: Interviews

All girls in the class will be asked to participate in 30-minute interviews where I will ask you to tell me about yourself and your friendships. The interview will be audio-recorded and kept confidential. We will do the interviews at a time most convenient for you – whether you choose to have the interview at school or at a convenient time and location outside of school. Again, as a thank you, all participating female students' names will be entered into a second draw for prizes (\$10 Indigo gift card or a \$10 Cineplex gift card).

Confidentiality: All of the information you provide will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You will be mentioned by name in our reports of our results. All of the questionnaire information and audio footage will be kept under lock and key, and access will be restricted to members of our research group.

Risks: There are no known risks to participating in this study. Adults sometimes worry about asking students to identify the behaviors of others – a concern that students may treat each other differently after the survey. Psychologists have done research to see if this happens and they found that teachers and students in those studies said they saw no difference in the way people treated each other after the testing.

Benefits: In better understanding what your friendships are like, and how different people behave (the positive and the negative), teachers and parents may be better able to understand what it is like to be a student your age. We can learn very positive, effective ways to behave from some students, and we can use your answers to perhaps help some students to be included in groups and perhaps make friends in more positive ways.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is completely voluntary and has nothing to do with school Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. If teachers would like to see a summary of the results of this study, they may include their address on the attached form and we will send a summary as soon as it is available. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time.

Sharing the results of the study: At the end of the study I will hold an “*Understanding Pre-teen Social Behaviour*” feedback session for students, parents, and teachers to learn about the results of the study. At this feedback session, you will be able to see the results of the study, and you can learn about the thoughts and feelings of other students your age.

Questions: If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may [redacted] of Research Ethics, Western University at [redacted]

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Laura Hogarth [redacted] or [redacted]. This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Sincerely,
Laura A. Hogarth, M.A.

PhD Candidate, Applied Psychology, Faculty of Education, Western University



*Tell me about your class:
Understanding the Social Behaviour of students aged 11 to 13.*

Laura Hogarth, Ph.D. Candidate
Faculty of Education, Western University



Parental/Guardian Consent

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I consent to my child participating in the study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name of Student (please print): _____

Name of Parent/Guardian (please print): _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian:

Date: _____

Summary of the study

___ No thank you.

Yes, I would like a copy of the summary of the study of results of the study sent o:

Email: _____

Or

Street address:

Appendix E: Teacher Letter of Information and Consent



*Tell me about your class:
Understanding the Social Behaviour of students aged 11 to 13.*

TEACHER - LETTER OF INFORMATION

Introduction

My name is Laura Hogarth and I am a Ph.D. Candidate at the Faculty of Education at Western University. I am conducting research on the social experiences of student's aged 11 to 13 (grades 6 to 8) and would like to invite your child's class to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study

The social world of children today can be quite turbulent and often leaves parents, teachers, and the students at a loss in terms of understanding what is happening or what they can do help.

The aims of this study are to learn about the perspectives and motivations behind children's social behaviour. The first part of the study includes the entire class; the second part of the study includes only girls. If we, as parents, can better understand the dynamics of their social world, we will be better equipped to answer questions such as 'why do they do what they do?' and 'what can I do to help my daughter?'

Who are the investigators?

Dr. Peter Jaffe
Laura Hogarth

**If you agree to participate**

The study consists of 2 Phases. All students who agree to participate will take part in Phase 1 of the study. Only female students will be asked to participate in Phase 2. If you choose for your child to not participate, he/she may do seatwork at their desk while the study takes place.

Phase 1: Tell me about your class surveys

This first day consists of the class completing the "Tell me about your class" survey (30 minutes). The survey includes examples of positive and negative behaviour, and asks the students to indicate 3 people in the class that fit various descriptions such as those who are leaders, are helpful to others, and those who start fights or say mean things about others. Similarly, your child may be identified by their classmates as being a leader, helpful to others, or starts fights or says mean things. After a short break, students will complete two assessment surveys (45 minutes) measuring empathy and self-concept. All participating female students will be asked to participate in the second phase of the study. All participating students' names will be entered into a draw for various prizes (including a \$10 Indigo gift card or a \$10 Cineplex gift card) as a thank you for contributing their insights on the social environment of their class.

Phase 2: Interviews

All girls in the class will be asked to participate in 30-minute interviews where I will ask them to tell me about themselves and their friendships for the purpose of better understanding their social world. The interview will be audio-recorded and kept confidential. Interviews will be conducted at a time most convenient for your child – whether they choose to have the interview at school or at a convenient time and location outside of school. Again, as a thank you, all participating female students' names will be entered into a second draw for prizes (\$10 Indigo gift card or a \$10 Cineplex gift card). Teachers will also be interviewed to ask their perspective on the students' interactions at school.

Confidentiality: All of the information your child provides will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Your son or daughter never will be mentioned by name in our reports of our results. All of the questionnaire information and video footage will be kept under lock and key, and access will be restricted to members of our research group. All information will be destroyed six years after the study is published.

Risks: There are no known risks to participating in this study. Adults occasionally have concerns around asking children to identify the behaviors of others – a concern that children may treat each other differently as a result. Studies around this concern have repeatedly shown this not to be the case. Children have reported that the testing does not bother them. Further, both children and their teachers reported they saw no difference in the way students treated each other inside or outside the classroom after the testing.

Benefits: In better understanding what is happening and why, we can more confidently offer suggestions and strategies to girls to deal with difficult situations. Further, we can find ways to assist girls having a difficult time socially become more integrated with their peers in a positive way.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You and/or your child may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

Sharing the results of the study: At the end of the study I will hold an “*Understanding Pre-teen Social Behaviour*” feedback session for students, parents, and educators to learn about the results of the study. Anonymity will be preserved as the results are the collection of data from at least eight classes at two or three schools. Students will be able to see firsthand the product of their contribution, and parents and educators can learn about what is going on in the children's social environment.

Questions: If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, Western University at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] questions about this study, please contact Laura Hogarth [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Sincerely,
Laura A. Hogarth, M.A.
Faculty of Education, Western University



*Tell me about your class:
Understanding the Social Behaviour of students aged 11 to 13.*

Laura Hogarth, Ph.D. Candidate
Faculty of Education, Western University



Teacher Consent

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I consent to my child participating in the study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name of Student (please print): _____

Name of Parent/Guardian (please print): _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian:

Date: _____

Summary of the study

___ No thank you.

Yes, I would like a copy of the summary of the study of results of the study sent o:

Email: _____

Or

Street address:

Appendix F. Peer Nomination Survey

Tell me about your class!
Indicate up to three people in your class who...

1. Do nice things for others. ____ ____ ____
2. Try to cheer up other kids when they are sad or upset ____ ____ ____
3. Try to make other kids not like a certain person by spreading rumours about them or talking behind their backs. ____ ____ ____
4. When they are mad at a person, get even by keeping that person from being in their group of friends. ____ ____ ____
5. Are good leaders. ____ ____ ____
6. When they are mad at a person, ignores the person or stops talking to them. ____ ____ ____
7. Have lots of friends because they are always nice and friendly. ____ ____ ____
8. Tell their friends that they will stop liking them or hanging out with them unless the friends do what they say. ____ ____ ____
9. Seem happy at school. ____ ____ ____
10. Who try to keep certain people from being in their group when it's time to play or do an activity. ____ ____ ____
11. Who make jokes about other people and hurt their feelings. ____ ____ ____
12. Starts being someone else's friend in revenge. ____ ____ ____

Friends

13. Who are the people in your class that you like to play with the most?
You may indicate up to 5 people. ____ ____ ____ ____ ____
14. Who are the people in your class you like least and prefer not to play with?
You may indicate up to 5 people ____ ____ ____ ____ ____
15. Who is/are the most popular girl(s) in your class? ____ ____ ____
16. Who do you think are the best leaders in your class? ____ ____ ____
17. Who is the funniest person in your class? ____ ____ ____

Appendix. G Basic Empathy Scale

| | | Strongly disagree | Mostly disagree | Sometimes agree/ sometimes disagree | Mostly agree | Strongly agree |
|-----|--|-------------------|-----------------|--|--------------|----------------|
| 1. | My friend's emotions don't affect me much | | | | | |
| 2. | After being with a friend who is sad about something, I usually feel sad. | | | | | |
| 3. | I can understand my friend's happiness when she/he does well at something. | | | | | |
| 4. | I get frightened when I watch characters in a scary movie. | | | | | |
| 5. | I get caught up in other people's emotions easily. | | | | | |
| 6. | I find it hard to know when my friends are frightened. | | | | | |
| 7. | I don't become sad when I see other people crying. | | | | | |
| 8. | Other people's feelings don't bother me at all. | | | | | |
| 9. | When someone is feeling 'down' I can usually understand how they feel. | | | | | |
| 10. | I can usually see when my friends are scared. | | | | | |
| 11. | I often become sad when watching sad things on TV or in movies. | | | | | |
| 12. | I can often understand how people are feeling even before they tell me. | | | | | |
| 13. | Seeing a person who has been angered has no effect on my feelings. | | | | | |
| 14. | I can usually see when people are cheerful. | | | | | |
| 15. | I tend to feel scared when I am with friends who are afraid. | | | | | |
| 16. | I can usually quickly understand when a friend is angry. | | | | | |
| 17. | I often get caught up in my friend's feelings. | | | | | |
| 18. | My friend's unhappiness doesn't make me feel anything. | | | | | |
| 19. | I am not usually aware of my friend's feelings. | | | | | |
| 20. | I have trouble figuring out when my friends are happy | | | | | |

Appendix H: Self-Description Questionnaire 11 Factors

| Factor | Description |
|----------------------------|---|
| Math | Student ratings of their skills and abilities and mathematics |
| Appearance | Student ratings of their physical attractiveness, how their appearance compares with others, and how others think they look. |
| General | Student ratings of themselves as effective, capable individuals, who are proud and satisfied with the way they are. |
| Honesty/Trustworthiness | Student ratings of their honesty and trustworthiness. |
| Physical Abilities | Student ratings of their skills and interest in sports games and physical activities. |
| Verbal | Student ratings of their skills and ability in English and reading |
| Emotional Stability | Student ratings of themselves as being calm and relaxed, emotional stability, and how much they worry. |
| Parent relationships | Student ratings of how well they get along with their parents, whether they like their parents, and the quality of the interactions with the parents. |
| School | Student ratings of their skills and ability in school subjects in general. |
| Same-sex relationships | Student ratings of their popularity with members of the same sex and how easily they make friends with members of the same sex. |
| Opposite-sex relationships | Student ratings of their popularity with members of the opposite sex and how easily they make friends with members of the opposite sex. |

Appendix I: Self-Description Questionnaire Survey

Your Student # _____

Tell me about you!

False
Mostly False
More False than True
More True than False
Mostly True
True

EXAMPLES

1. I like to read comic books.....
(Madison put a tick in the box under the answer "TRUE". This means that she really likes to read comic books. If she did not like to read comic books very much, she would have answered "FALSE" or "MOSTLY FALSE".)

2. In general, I am neat and tidy.....
(Madison answered "MORE FALSE THAN TRUE" because she is definitely not very neat, but she is not really messy either).

3. I like to watch T.V.....
(if you really like to watch T.V. a lot you would answer "TRUE" by putting a tick in the last box. If you hate watching T.V. you would answer "FALSE". If you do not like T.V. very much, but watch it sometimes, you might decide to put a tick in the box that says "MOSTLY FALSE" or "MORE FALSE THAN TRUE".)

| | | False | Mostly False | More False than True | More True than False | Mostly True | True |
|----|--|-------|--------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------|------|
| 1 | MATHEMATICS is one of my best subjects | | | | | | |
| 2 | I have a nice looking face | | | | | | |
| 3 | Overall, I have a lot to be proud of | | | | | | |
| 4 | I am honest | | | | | | |
| 5 | I enjoy thinks like sports, gym, and dance | | | | | | |
| 6 | I am hopeless in ENGLISH classes | | | | | | |
| 7 | I worry more than I need to | | | | | | |
| 8 | I get along well with my parents | | | | | | |
| 9 | I get bad marks in most SCHOOL SUBJECTS | | | | | | |
| 10 | I am not very popular with member of the opposite sex | | | | | | |
| 11 | It is difficult to make friends with members of my own sex | | | | | | |
| 12 | I get good marks in MATHEMATICS | | | | | | |
| 13 | I am good looking | | | | | | |
| 14 | Most things I do, I do well | | | | | | |
| 15 | I often tell lies | | | | | | |
| 16 | I am good at things like sports, gym, and dance | | | | | | |

| | | False | Mostly False | More False than True | More True than False | Mostly True | True |
|----|---|-------|--------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------|------|
| 17 | Work in ENGLISH classes is easy for me | | | | | | |
| 18 | I am a nervous person | | | | | | |
| 19 | My parents treat me fairly | | | | | | |
| 20 | I learn things quickly in most SCHOOL SUBJECTS | | | | | | |
| 21 | I make friends easily with boys | | | | | | |
| 22 | I make friends easily with girls | | | | | | |
| 23 | I have always done well in MATHEMATICS | | | | | | |
| 24 | Other people think I am good looking | | | | | | |
| 25 | Overall, most things I do turn out well | | | | | | |
| 26 | I sometimes cheat | | | | | | |
| 27 | I am awkward at things like sports, gym, and dance | | | | | | |
| 28 | ENGLISH is one of my best subjects | | | | | | |
| 29 | I often feel confused and mixed up | | | | | | |
| 30 | My parents understand me | | | | | | |
| 31 | I do well in tests in most SCHOOL SUBJECTS | | | | | | |
| 32 | I have lots of friends of the opposite sex | | | | | | |
| 33 | Not many people of my own sex like me | | | | | | |
| 34 | I do badly in tests in MATHEMATICS | | | | | | |
| 35 | I have a good looking body | | | | | | |
| 36 | I can do things as well as most people | | | | | | |
| 37 | I always tell the truth | | | | | | |
| 38 | I am better than most of my friends at things like sports, gym, and dance | | | | | | |
| 39 | I get good marks in ENGLISH | | | | | | |
| 40 | I get upset easily | | | | | | |
| 41 | I do not like my parents very much | | | | | | |
| 42 | I am good at most school subjects | | | | | | |
| 43 | I do not get along very well with boys | | | | | | |
| 44 | I do not get along very well with girls | | | | | | |
| 45 | If I really try I can do almost anything I want to do | | | | | | |
| 46 | I sometimes take things that belong to other people | | | | | | |
| 47 | I learn things quickly in ENGLISH classes | | | | | | |
| 48 | I worry about a lot of things | | | | | | |
| 49 | I make friends easily with members of my own sex | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|----|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| 50 | Overall I am a failure | | | | | | |
| 51 | I sometimes tell lies to stay out of trouble | | | | | | |

Appendix J: Student Interview Protocol

Student Interview Protocol

The individual interview takes approximately 30 minutes. Before the interview begins, the participant is asked to choose the pseudonym that will be used to ensure confidentiality and protect their identity during the data collection process. The interview will begin with an explanation about how the interview will proceed and a reminder to the participant of the purpose of the study. The principal researcher will use the following introductory script with each interviewee.

(Turn on voice recorder)

This voice recording is of (insert pseudonym) on dd/mm/yyyy. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this study. This interview will be recorded and will last approximately 30 minutes.

I am a student at Western University. My research aims to learn about how girls in grades six to grade eight get along with other girls in their classes, how their friendships work, what they do when they have disagreements with their friends, and how they think other people see them so I'd like to ask you some questions around those issues.

I am going to ask you questions designed to encourage you to speak freely and openly about your experiences and perceptions. During this interview you do not have to answer any question that you don't want to and if you wish to stop at any point, please let me know and I will turn off the voice recorder. You have the right to withdraw from this project at any time without penalty. Your real name will not be used during the recording of this interview and only the pseudonym that you chose prior to this interview will be used to identify you. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

Student Interview script

1. Tell me a little about the things you like to do. (talking about social activities)
 - Probe
 - What do you like to do at recess?
 - What do you like to do after school?
 - Do you play a sport?
2. Tell me about your best friend.
 - What do you like to do together?
 - What do you do together at school? After school?
 - What do you like most about having friends?
3. Do you and your friends go to each other's birthday parties?
 - Do you and your friends go places together outside of school?
 - Where do you like to play with your friends?
4. What do you like most about having friends?
5. What do you think is important in a friend?
6. Do you feel like your friends understand you?
7. What is one thing you would you like your friends to know about you?
8. How do you and your parents get along?
 - What kinds of things do you do together?
 - Do you feel you can talk to your parents about stuff?
9. Do you ever get mad at your parents?
 - Can you give me an example?
 - What do you do when you are mad at your parents?
10. Do you like your teacher?
 - If yes, what do you like about your teacher?
 - If no, what don't you like about your teacher?
11. Have you and your friends ever been in a fight? Not a physical fight, an argument?
 - Tell me about that
 - What happened?
12. Have your friends ever been mad at you?
 - What was that about?
 - How did that make you feel?

13. Have your friends ever said that you said something or did something that hurt their feelings?
14. Has anyone ever called you a bully before?
If so, how did that make you feel?
If not, what makes you *not* a bully?
15. What is one thing that you think the kids in your class think about you that you think is not true?
 - Why do you think they think that?
16. What do you like most about yourself?
17. Are you good at school?
 - What subjects do you like?
 - Is school easy or difficult?
18. Do you ever feel stressed or worried about school?
 - Tell me about that.
 - Can you give me an example?
19. Do you ever feel stressed or worried about your friends?
 - Tell me about that.
 - Can you give me an example?
20. Do you think you worry about stuff a lot?
21. Tell me about something really fun you like to do with your friends.
22. Do you think you can easily tell when your friend is upset about something?
 - How can you tell?
23. What do you do when your friend is sad about something?
 - How do you feel when your friend is sad about something?

Appendix K: Teacher Interview Protocol

Teacher Interview Protocol

The teacher interview takes approximately 30-45 minutes. Before the interview begins, the participant is asked to choose the pseudonym that will be used to protect their identity during the data collection process. The interview will begin with an explanation about how the interview will proceed and a reminder to the participant of the purpose of the study. The principal researcher will use the following introductory script with each interviewee.

(Turn on voice recorder)

This voice recording is of (insert pseudonym) on dd/mm/yyyy. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this study. This interview will be recorded and will last approximately 30-45 minutes.

I am a student at Western University. My research aims to learn about how girls in grades six to grade eight get along with other girls in their classes, how their friendships work, what they do when they have disagreements with their friends, and how they think other people see them.

I am going to ask you questions about your observations and perspectives of the behaviours and social dynamics of the girls in your class. During this interview you do not have to answer any question that you do not want to. If you wish to stop at any point, please let me know and I will turn off the voice recorder. You have the right to withdraw from this project at any stage without penalty. Your real name will not be used during the recording of this interview and only the pseudonym that you chose prior to this interview will be used to identify you. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

The following are possible questions only.

Questions around friendships

Tell me about your observations of the social dynamics of the girls in your class. Do the girls all appear to have friends?

Do you have any concerns you would like to discuss?

Questions around level of self-awareness/empathy

What are your observations regarding your female students' level of self awareness?

What are your observations regarding your female students' level of empathy for others?

Questions around the girls' perspective on teachers/parents understanding of them.

How do the female students behave around you?

Are they respectful when they speak to you?

How do they react when you are upset/angry with their behaviour?

What do you know about the students' relationships with their parents?

Are their parents involved with their schooling?

Questions around self-concept

What are your observations regarding your female students' level of self-concept?

What kinds of things do they like to do? What are they good at? Do they like school?

Do some appear to be upset or worried easily? Do some appear quite confident in themselves?

Appendix L: Description of Total Participants

| School | Class | Grade | Age | N | % Female |
|--------|-------|-------|----------------|----|----------|
| 1 | 1 | 8 | 13 | 15 | 60 |
| 2 | 2 | 8 | 13 | 16 | 75 |
| | 3 | 7 | 12 | 18 | 72.2 |
| | 4 | 7 | 12 | 14 | 64.3 |
| | 5 | 7/8 | 12.36 (SD=.62) | 16 | 43.8 |
| | 6 | 8 | 13 | 17 | 64.7 |
| | 7 | 6 | 11.05 (SD=.22) | 20 | 55 |
| 3 | 8 | 7/8 | 12.59 (SD=.80) | 17 | 84.4 |
| 4 | 9 | 7 | 12 | 17 | 47.1 |
| | 10 | 8 | 13.28 (SD=.46) | 18 | 66.7 |
| | 11 | 7/8 | 13.36 (SD=.49) | 22 | 81.8 |
| | 12 | 6 | 11(SD=.77) | 24 | 62.5 |
| | 13 | 7/8 | 12.70 | 23 | 56.5 |

Total participants in Phase 1 = 237 (including boys and girls)

Curriculum Vitae

Laura A. Hogarth, M.A.

PhD candidate, Educational/Applied Psychology

University of Western Ontario, London Ontario

Web profile: http://www.edu.uwo.ca/research/phd_profiles/laura_hogarth/index.html

EDUCATION:

- Doctor of Education Studies, Western University** 2011 – 2016 (anticipated)
Applied Psychology. Supervisor: Dr. Peter Jaffe
- Master of Arts, Psychology (Cognition) – with Distinction, Western University** 1998
Focus: Principles of Learning, Cognition, Statistics
Supervisor: Dr. William Roberts
Thesis: Spatial localization of a goal: Beacon homing vs. landmark piloting by rats on a radial maze.
<http://link.springer.com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/article/10.3758/BF03199771>
- Bachelor of Arts, Honors Psychology - Dean's Honor List, Western University** 1997
Focus: Learning and Behavioral processes, Statistics

PUBLICATIONS

- Crooks, C., **Hogarth, L.** & Kassen, J. (2014). Student Mental Health in Canadian Boarding Schools. Canadian Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) Conference, October, Muskoka, Canada.
- Baker, L.L, Straatman, A., Campbell, M. & **Hogarth, L** (2013). (Eds.) The Learning Network Lexicon. Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children. <http://www.learningtoendabuse.ca/learningnetwork/violence-against-women-lexicon>. Researcher and contributing editor.
- (R) Hogarth, L. A.**, Roberts, W. A., Roberts, S., & Abroms, B. (2000). Spatial localization of a goal: Beacon homing versus landmark piloting. *Animal Learning & Behavior*, 28(1), 43-58.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

- Head Researcher** 2011 - current
Research Project: Social Aggression in Females Aged 11 to 13
Designed and implemented mixed-methods research study with 257 participants from four different schools in Southwestern Ontario. The study includes a quantitative phase (questionnaires/surveys) and a qualitative phase (interviews). Quantitative data analyzed using SPSS software, qualitative interviews coded and analyzed using

MaxQDA software. Interpreted and write results, present at various conferences in Canada and the United States (see Paper and Poster presentations for conferences).

Research Assistant Positions

Research Assistant for Dr. Claire Crooks, Faculty of Education, Western University 2014
 Research Project: Student Mental Health in Canadian Boarding Schools.
 Duties: database searches, literature review, coding of data using SPSS, analyze data and create graphs for presentation of results to stakeholders, editing of final presentation documents for content clarity, APA style.

Data Analyst for Professionals and Managerial Association, Western University 2014
 Project: PMA Negotiations Survey
 Duties: Organize, code, and analyze qualitative data using MAXQDA data analysis program, create summary report and present findings.

Research Assistant for Dr. Susan Rodger, Faculty of Education, Western University 2014
 Research Project: Centre for School Based Mental Health Conference
 Duties: Organize, code, and enter data from pre-service teacher Mental Health Conference into SPSS (PAWS) program. Analyze data and write summary reports, present findings to chair and faculty.

Research Assistant for Dr. Baker & Anna-Lee Straatman, Western University 2012 – 2013
 Research Project: Learning Network
 Duties: Collect and analyze data and write summary reports on events; preparation of agenda and knowledge exchange documents; selection and assembly of materials for knowledge exchanges; attend and conduct evaluations of events; conduct data base searches and write literature reviews.

Research Assistant for Dr. Roberts, Psychology, Western University 1997 – 1999
 Dr. William Roberts, Department of Psychology
 Duties: Organized and prepared experimental results for presentation to department head; analyzed and interpreted data using SPSS program; trained new research assistants to conduct psychological testing, code and record data.

Research Methods Teaching Assistant

Teaching Assistant: Psychology Research Methods and Design 1997 - 1999
 Lead students through the process of conducting actual psychological experiments including; research and development of proposals; statistical programs (SPSS); interpretation of data; oral presentation of experimental results.

RESEARCH GRADUATE COURSES COMPLETED

Western University, PhD

SS9045L Statistics

GRADED 9701 Research in Education

GRADED 9702 Doctoral Seminar – Research Methods

GRADED 9705 Quantitative Research Methods

PSYCH 9540 Research Design and Statistics in Psychology

PAPER PRESENTATIONS

- (R) Hogarth, L.** (2015). Affective Empathy in Indirect/Relationally Aggressive Females. Paper presented at the *2015 Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE)*, Ottawa, Canada.
- (R) Hogarth, L.** (2013). All aggression is not bullying; In defence of the bistrategic controller. Paper presented at the International Conference of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI), University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, USA, May.
- (R) Hogarth, L.** (2012). Am I a bully? Or are you just overly sensitive? The female bully's perspective. Paper presented at the *Teacher Education Division (TED) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)*, Grand Rapids, MI, November.
- (R) Hogarth, L.** (2012). The bully's perspective; the experience of the grade 7 female bullies circumventing the competitive social dynamics at school. Paper presented at the *Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE)*, Kitchener, ON, May.
- Hogarth, L. (2012).** Why do bullies do what they do? Motivation for aggression in girls. Paper presented at *2012 Research in Education Symposium, Faculty of Education*, Western University, London, ON, April.
- (R) Edmunds, A.L., Edmunds, G.A., & Hogarth, L.** (2012a). The behaviour management network: KNAER knowledge mobilization. Paper presented at the *2012 Ontario Education Research Symposium*, Toronto, ON, February.
- (R) Hogarth, L. A. & W. A. Roberts.** Spatial localization of a goal: Beacon homing versus landmark piloting. Presented at the *Canadian Society for Brain, Behaviour, and Cognitive Science Conference*. Ottawa, 1998.

POSTER PRESENTATIONS

- Kassen, J., Crooks, C., **Hogarth, L.**, (2015). Mental health challenges in Canadian boarding schools. Poster presented at *PREVNet Conference 2015, Toronto, ON, November 12-13, 2015*.
- (R) Hogarth, L.** (2014). Am I a bully? Experiences and perspectives of relationally aggressive females. Poster presented at the *2014 International Society for Research on Aggression (ISRA)*, Atlanta Georgia.
- (R) Hogarth, L.** (2013). Why bullying programs are ineffective. Poster presented at the *2013 Conference for Exceptional Children*, Niagara Falls, ON, November.
- Hogarth, L.** (2012). Girl bullying; Examining bullying behaviours (relational aggression) in girls from age eight. Poster presented at *2012 Research Day*, University of Western Ontario, London, ON, February.
- (R) Edmunds, A.L., Edmunds, G.A., & Hogarth, L.** (2012b). The behaviour management network. Poster presented at the *2012 Ontario Education Research Symposium*, Toronto, ON, February.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS:

- Maracle- Buis, B. & **Hogarth, L. A.** Effective Communication and Leadership Development for Student Mentors. Presented at Future Aces Conference, Barrie, Ontario, 2010.
- Maracle- Buis, B. & **Hogarth, L. A.** Who's Not Listening? Active Listening Strategies to Facilitate Open Communication with Teens. Presented at the Home Based Family Service Network Conference. Children's Mental Health Ontario, Cobourg, Ontario, 2010.
- Maracle- Buis, B. & **Hogarth, L.A.** Mentor Leadership. Girls Helping Girls Internship Study. Presented at Women's Crisis Centre. London, Ontario, 2009.
- Hogarth, L. A.** Principles of Learning and Memory Processes. University of Western Ontario, Canada, 1998.
- Hogarth, L. A.** Global and Local Processes in Visual Perception. University of Western Ontario, Canada, 1997.

INVITED TALKS/PRESENTATIONS

- Hogarth, L. A.** Classroom Management Strategies for Teachers: Managing Bullying and Drama. Presented at Brock University, November 2015.
- Cloutier, S., **Hogarth, L. A.**, & Gregory, K. "I Wish I Knew": Strategies for ethics approval, data collection, analysis, and completing your thesis/dissertation. Presented at Western University, February 2015. Presentation recorded, available at <https://cas.bbcollab.com/p.jnlp?psid=2015-0227.1020.M.ACA644A09FA5ABF2F8BC7345B61008.vcr&sid=2011320>
- Hogarth, L. A.** The Academic Supervisor-Student Relationship. Presented at the Doctoral Seminar Series, Western University, October 2013

ACADEMIC HONOURS AND AWARDS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Western Graduate Research Scholarship \$9,000 | 2014 |
| Faculty of Education Conference Travel Award (competitive) \$1000 | 2014 |
| Ontario Graduate Scholarship \$15,000 (competitive) | 2013 |
| Faculty of Education Conference Travel Award (competitive) \$700 | 2013 |
| Western Graduate Research Scholarship \$9,000 | 2012 |
| Society of Graduate Students Conference Travel Award (competitive) \$400 | 2012 |
| Western Graduate Research Scholarship \$9,000 | 2011 |
| Academic Fellowship, University of Western Ontario, \$8,000 | 1998 |
| Academic Fellowship, University of Western Ontario, \$8,000 | 1997 |
| Dean's Honour List | 1996-1997 |
| Awarded for academic excellence (maintaining full course-load average above 80%) | |
| Clarke and Mary J. Wright Award | 1996-1997 |

Awarded by competition for outstanding achievement in Honors Psychology program
PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| American Psychological Association (APA) | October 2014 - present |
| International Society for Research on Aggression (ISRA) | February, 2013- present |
| Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) | January 2013 - present |
| Society for Research on Adolescence (SRA) | January, 2013/2014 |
| Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) | September, 2013/2014 |

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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| TESL Canada Certificate | April 2016 |
| On-line Instruction Skills Workshop | June 2015 |
| Western Certificate in University Teaching and Learning Assessment Series | June 2015 2014 - 2015 |
| Constructing Rubrics, Assessing Online Learning, Writing Multiple-Choice Questions | |
| Statistics 9045: Teaching Statistics | 2014 |
| 9500: Theories of Practice of University Teaching, Western University | 2013 |
| Social Media and Sexual Violence: Understanding the links to students' mental health and well-being. Centre for Education and Research on Violence | 2013 |
| Teaching Assistant Training Program (TATP), Western University | 2013 |
| Now that I Have It, What Do I Do With It? Exploring Techniques for Interpreting, Writing Up and Evaluating Qualitative Data. University of Illinois, USA. | 2013 |
| Human Trafficking Forum, London Ontario | 2013 |
| Violence Against Women Workshop. Dr. Peter Jaffe, London Ontario | 2012 |

SERVICE TO THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION/COMMITTEE'S

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| New Admissions profile evaluator, Faculty of Education, Western | 2015 |
| Incoming Student Mentorship Committee, Western University | 2011 - 2015 |
| Althouse Press Publication Committee, Western University | 2011 – 2014 |
| Doctoral Seminar Series Chair | 2012 – 2013 |
| Graduate Research Symposium Steering Committee | 2012 - 2013 |
| Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) Reviewer for 2013 CSSE Annual Conference, Victoria, British Columbia | 2012 – 2013 |
| Queens University, Kingston, Ontario Reviewer for Queens University Graduate Symposium Publication | 2012 – 2013 |

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of Western Ontario (London, ON)

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| Instructor: EDUC 5005 – Educational Psychology/Special Education | 2014-2015 |
| Basic concepts, principles, and theories of learning and human development as they apply to teaching and learning; particular attention to the education of students with | |

exceptionalities. Topics include establishing exemplary learning environments, selecting teaching strategies, assessment and evaluation, classroom management, differentiated instruction, and universal instructional design.

Duties/Responsibilities: Preparing and delivering two 2-hour lectures (Behavioural Views of Learning & School Based Mental Health); creating weekly lesson plans; reviewing key elements and creating engaging activities for weekly seminars that allow students to apply key concepts to teaching practice; creating and assessing seminar assignments; create and manage on-line WebCT/SAKAI learning management system, addressing student issues/concerns.

Teaching Assistant: 2011 - 2014

EDUC 5499Q – Classroom Management and Student Assessment

An overview of classroom management, assessment, and evaluation and to highlight how specific principles and practices from both domains become integral parts of one's overall approach to instruction. Emphasis on connecting theory to practice across the following topics: Behaviour and classroom management; Teacher constructed assessment and evaluation tools; Creating a comprehensive approach to instruction – professional perspectives.

Duties/Responsibilities: Create and deliver 1-hour lecture on principles of classroom management; manage WebCT/SAKAI on-line learning management system including uploading of all supplementary materials, lecture slides, and maintenance of gradebook; coordinate all course assessment, evaluate results, make assessment decisions (test question validity), co-create bi-weekly quizzes based on lecture and course textbook, calculate and submit final grades; **address student issues/concerns**

Instructor: Leadership Education Program, Facilitation 2011

Students learn how to facilitate discussion for the purpose of consensus and decision making; manage a group's momentum; develop strategies for managing group dynamics.

Coaches Training Institute (Toronto, Canada)

Teaching Assistant: Coaching Fundamentals 2006

Participants learn to design effective relationship alliances; enhance communication skills by distinguishing three levels of listening; learn various coaching tools to use with clients for acquiring and maintaining work/life balance.

Teaching Assistant: Balance and Process Coaching

Students learn new techniques and structures to get clients into sustainable, effective action; tools to teach clients to plan action from perspectives of possibility rather than circumstance.

Osaka Furitsu University (Osaka, Japan)

Instructor: ENG2990- Oral Communication 2001- 2004

Prepared and delivered two 2-hour weekly lectures; created dynamic, experiential based learning environment for engineering students with English speaking skills ranging from beginner to advanced levels; create and grade all assignments and examinations.

Instructor: ENG3120 Creative Writing 2001 - 2004

Prepare and deliver two 1-hour weekly lectures, and two 1-hour writing workshops; academic counseling sessions to provide students with critical feedback; designed, administered, and graded all assignments and examinations.

Kunei University (Osaka, Japan)

Instructor: Writing & Grammar/Oral Communication 2001 – 2003
See above. Similar duties/responsibilities as at Osaka University with the exception that I designed the curriculum for students at a lower-level ability.

Canada Club Japan (Osaka, Japan)

Instructor: Oral Communication for Kids 2000 - 2004
Designed and taught, through games and interactive activities, children ages 3 to 16 oral communication, and Canadian culture and mannerisms.

Instructor: Adult music English 2000 - 2004
Prepared weekly two- hour lessons designed around music; students increased listening skills, practiced natural pronunciation, and colloquial speech found in music, movies, and everyday interactions.

Mitsubishi Osaka (Osaka, Japan)

Instructor: Business English, Social Networking 2000 – 2002
Prepared and delivered two 2-hour weekly interactive oral communication classes focused on Business English (verbal and written) including; conversation and grammar, business orientated vocabulary, writing emails and business letters, and western business mannerisms.

University of Western Ontario (London, Canada)

Teaching Assistant: Introduction to Learning and Behaviour 1997 - 1999
Delivered one-hour weekly lectures on principles of learning, memory, and spatial cognition

Teaching Assistant: Learning and Behaviour 1997 - 1999
Created all course assessments; marking all tests, assignments, and essays; addressed student concerns/issues

SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

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| Team Manager, Women's Soccer, Southwest Indoor/Outdoor Soccer League | 2014 – current |
| Team Building Events Coordinator, North London Soccer Club | 2014 - current |
| Head of Fundraising, U11 and U13 Girls Elite, North London Soccer Club | 2014 - 2015 |
| School Volunteer at Kensal Park French Immersion Public School | 2011 - 2014 |
| London Home Stay Host | 2008 – current |
| Host International Students studying at London Language Institute and at CultureWorks ESL school. | |
| Soccer Coach (London, Canada), Byron Optimist League | 2010 - 2012 |
| Music Reigns Committee, London, Canada | 2007 - 2009 |
| Auction organizer/Committee member (Fundraising organization for Kings College and Orchestra London) | |

Osaka-Shi Parents Committee (Osaka, Japan)
Committee to organize various cultural events for children and teens.

2002 - 2005