A Dissertation

Entitled

Relational Aggression: What Administrators Know and How

Student Needs Are Addressed

By

Lauren R. Hurst

Submitted to Graduate Faculty as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Administration and Supervision

____________________________________________________
Dr. Edward Janak, Committee Chair

____________________________________________________
Dr. Nancy Staub, Committee Member

____________________________________________________
Dr. Randall Vesely, Committee Member

____________________________________________________
Dr. Lisa Kovach, Committee Member

____________________________________________________
Dr. Amanda C. Bryant-Friedrich, Dean
College of Graduate Studies

The University of Toledo

May 2017
Copyright 2017, Lauren Rose Hurst

This document is copyrighted material. Under copyright law, no parts of this document may be produced without expressed permission of the author.
Relational aggression is a form of bullying that is based on covert aggressive behaviors, which are difficult for school administrators and/or educators to recognize. The more prevalent form of bullying, overt aggression, has played a role in students’ lives for hundreds of years, and has a place in school policy, along with harassment and, in some policies, date violence. Taking into consideration that the negative experiences of students (and in most cases, female students) dealing with relational aggression may result in harm to students’ lives, it is important to understand the nature of relational aggression separate from overt bullying. The study looked at the phenomenon of relational aggression from the perspective of school administrators by means of an online questionnaire to gain insight into their knowledge of the issue and what is being done to address student needs.

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand relational aggression compared to other forms of aggression. In addition, this study strived to provide a view of aspects of relational aggression and the resulting impact this incivility may have on victims. Congruent with the purpose of this study, the systems-ecological method was
used. This method helped illuminate and understand the nature of the relational aggressive behaviors in their environment, predominately schools.
Acknowledgements

The prospect of completing this doctoral degree or writing this dissertation would not have existed without the help and support of so many people. First, I wish to thank my best friend and wonderful husband of 34 years, Thomas. Your unconditional love, support, and encouragement gave me the strength to complete this journey. Thank you for believing me and standing by me as I pursued this dream.

To my children, Daniel and Timothy, thank you for your moral support as I moved through this journey and for realizing this was my purpose and dream. I hope I have instilled in you the importance of life-long learning, striving to be the best you can be, and to never give up on your dreams. With hard work and dedication, anything is possible. I love you very much.

To my Book Babes, and other special friends, you know who you are, thank you for your words of support and encouragement. Your friendship was truly a blessing as I pursued this doctoral degree.

I would like to acknowledge my doctoral committee who made this experience worthwhile. Thank you to Dr. Edward Janak, Dr. Lisa Pescara-Kovach, Dr. Nancy Staub, and Dr. Randall Vesely.

Finally, I want to acknowledge young women who are experiencing relational aggression and do not know where to turn for support. I hear you.
**Table of Contents**

Abstract iii  
Acknowledgments v  
Table of Contents vi  

I. Introduction 1  
   A. Statement of the Problem 1  
   B. Definition of Terms 5  
   C. Research Problem 6  
   D. Research Questions 10  
   E. Justification of the Research Problem 10  
   F. Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations 14  
   G. Theoretical Framework 16  
   H. Organization of the Study 17  
   I. Summary 18  

II. Literature Review 19  
   A. Origins and History of Bullying 19  
   B. Cyberbullying and Social Media 35  
   C. Relational Aggression 46  
   D. Female Relational Aggression 51  
   E. Gender, Schools, and Relational Aggression 54  
   F. Laws and School Policies 60  
   G. School Interventions and Programs 70  
   H. The Systems-Ecological Framework 73
Chapter One

Introduction

Chapter One provides an overview of the phenomenon known as relational aggression and discusses the concept of relational aggression, including common characteristics and critical attributes of relational aggression. In addition, this chapter discusses how various aspects of relational aggression relate to females in educational settings. Highlighted are the problem identification, justification of the research problem, and research question. Also provided are assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and definitions of terms. Included is the theoretical framework that guided this study and the organization of the study.

Statement of the Problem

Taunting, mockery, exclusion, gossip, and rumors (whether on-line, or in school) are forms of violence – emotional and psychological violence. The wounds they inflict can be deep and fester for years (Yoon, Barton & Taiariol, 2004; Gomes, 2011). The phenomenon relational aggression refers to harm within relationships with an individual that is caused by covert bullying or manipulative behavior (Young, Nelson, Hottle, Warburton, & Young, 2010). Females tend to use more covert forms of aggression to express their anger. With the problem of relational aggression, the aggressor hurts the target individual by manipulating relationships (Gomes, 2011). In the past, relational aggression was viewed as a normal part of the process of socialization. Some examples of relational aggression include threatening to stop talking to a friend (the silent treatment), isolating a peer from his or her group of friends (social exclusion), or spreading gossip or rumors within the peer group, which are covert forms of aggression (Young, Boye, &
Nelson, 2006; Gomes, 2011). Females tend to use the more covert forms of aggression to express their anger.

Research has shown that girls are just as likely as boys to be aggressive (Crothers, Field, & Kolbert, 2005), though they are likely to be involved in aggressive behaviors that are covert, which include gossiping, giving dirty looks, spreading rumors, and employing social exclusion. In other words, girls’ aggressive behaviors seek to damage another girl’s friendship or inclusion in a certain group; hence the term *relational aggression* (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). It is this term, which will take precedence over the others in the remainder of this document.

As the name implies, relational aggression is not a physical abuse but rather a social abuse of connections and influence to keep the victim as low in social standing as possible. Exclusion is the common manifestation of relational aggression, but it also involves exaggerating the alienation, as well. The phenomenon referred to as relational aggression is the predominate strategy used by girl bullies (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006; Wenger, 2013). Girls reported being the victim of mean teasing or of relational aggression at higher frequencies than being the victim of physical violence or threats of physical violence than boys (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006). Evidence suggests that relational aggression may create just as much or more damage than physical aggression among male youth and should be considered an important focus of bullying/aggression prevention and intervention in schools (Young, Nelson, et al, 2010). Young and colleagues (2010) warned that relational aggression can cause as much or more destruction as physical aggression and should be targeted in bullying prevention.

With increasing media and public interest in conflict and violence in school, there
have been many demands for creating positive, safe school environments that facilitate students’ learning activities (Yoon et al., 2004). One such area includes bullying. In spite of this, the phenomenon of relational aggression is often overlooked in the educational setting because it is more difficult to identify and admonish (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006; Young et al., 2010). Therefore, it is imperative that schools include relational aggression when they define aggressive behaviors and create anti-bullying policies in order to address the hurtful, painful experience of this type of aggression.

Given that students’ perceptions of physical and psychological safety precede their academic engagement and adjustment, initiatives in terms of the court system and school curriculum should address relational aggression (Yoon et al., 2004; Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006). Much of the past discussion in these efforts was limited to more noticeable forms of conflict such as school violence and physical bullying. However, electronic aggression has currently become somewhat of a public health problem. Recently, extreme episodes of electronic aggression disseminated through blogs and on-line video postings have gained nationwide attention (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2009). This attention sent parents, educators, and policy makers scurrying to find ways to protect children from electronic aggression. Instant messaging appears to be the most common way young people perpetrate electronic aggression. Fifty-six percent of perpetrators and 67% of victims said the aggression they experienced or perpetrated was through instant messaging (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2009). Victims of electronic aggression also reported relational aggression occurring through e-mail (24%) and text messages (15%) (Kowalski, 2007). Instant messaging was used as a mechanism to harass a peer as a form of relational aggression when the victims and perpetrators knew each
other from in-person situations (64%); instant messaging was used less often (37%) when the young people only knew each other on-line (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2007), yet another form of relational aggression.

Research on electronic aggression has emerged. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) 2006 expert panel and the Journal of Adolescent Health, Volume 41, Issue 6, represent the first steps taken to critically examine what we know and to identify the next generation of research issues that warrant further investigation. Like traditional forms of youth violence, electronic aggression is associated with emotional distress and conduct problems at school (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2011). Studies need to further explore the following: a) the relationship of electronic aggression to other types of violence, such as in-person bullying, relational aggression, physical aggression, and sexual harassment; and, b) the relationship between electronic aggression and exposure to violence through the media and in the home, school, and neighborhood environments. This research will aid in the conceptualization of electronic aggression, determining whether or not electronic aggression is a discrete phenomenon or another type of aggression along the continuum of violence (Williams & Guerra, 2007) and relational aggression.

While the “bully” has been around taunting his victims for years, girls tend to use forms of relational rather than physical aggression in contrast to boys who appear to use relatively higher proportions of physical compared to the relational aggression phenomenon (Young et al, 2010; Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006). A slam into a locker, a shove down the stairs - studies have shown that males tend to use more physical aggression and victimization (Underwood, Galen, & Paquette, 2001; Young et al., 2010). Females tend to use more covert forms of aggression to express their anger (Young et al.,

4
2010). These expectations can lead to finding more discreet ways to express feelings. Psychosocial maladjustment may be a predicted outcome for both boys and girls who use relational aggression (Young et al., 2010). A sense of loathing leads to physical and emotional illness (Underwood, Galen, & Paquette, 2001; Young et al., 2010). Female targets of relational aggression suffer increased depression, lower school grade point average (GPA), increased anxiety and sadness, more anger, eating disorders, and loneliness. These female students who tend to be relationally aggressive or experience the phenomenon referred to as relational aggression have shown to become increasingly more depressed, rejected, withdrawn, and delinquent (Werner & Nixon, 2005; Young, Boyle, & Nelson, 2006).

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, clarification of some commonly used terms would be helpful. The words and terms are defined as follows:

**Aggression** – behavior, which includes two criteria: it is intended to harm and the victim feels hurt (Underwood, 2003).

**Bullying** - unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time (stopbullying.gov, 2014).

**Cyberbullying** – bullying that takes place using electronic technology. Electronic technology includes devices and equipment such as cell phones, computers, and tablets as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat, and websites. Examples of cyberbullying include mean text messages or emails, rumors sent
by email or posted on social networking sites, and embarrassing pictures, videos, websites, or fake profiles (stopbullying.gov, 2014).

**Relational Aggression** – harm within relationships that is caused by covert bullying or manipulative behavior. Examples include social exclusion, “the silent treatment,” or spreading gossip and rumor via email. The phenomenon tends to be manipulative or subtle and may not appear as typically aggressive behavior (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

**Social media** - forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos) (stopbullying.gov, 2014).

**Statutes** – an ordinance or law (Mirriam-Webster, 2014).

**Research Problem**

In the past decade, the message has been that the phenomenon of relational aggression is only a female issue (Managio, 2010). With the publication of *Odd Girl Out* (Simmons, 2002), and the movie *Mean Girls* (Messick, Michaels, Fey, & Waters, 2004), it is easy for the public to associate relational aggression as a female only issue. While research proves that relational aggression is prevalent in boys and girls (Managio, 2010; Ledbeater, 2010), girls are especially sensitive to the effects of relational aggression due to their strong desire for connectedness (Anthony & Lindert, 2010). As a result, this study focuses on girls who tend to use relational aggression more often than physical aggression (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006; Anthony & Lindert, 2010; Managio, 2010).
The phenomenon referred to as relational aggression was viewed as a normal phase of growing up; however, current research has shown that relational aggression can be just as harmful as physical aggression (Werner & Nixon, 2005; Young et al., 2010). Now researchers recognize relational aggression as a serious form of violence because of its devastating effects (Gomes, Davis, Baker, & Servonsky, 2009). Leff and Crick (2010) state that the problems range from academic and behavioral issues to adjustment issues later in life. Girls who experience the phenomenon of relational aggression victimization must learn positive coping strategies from parents and educators to prevent the use of ineffective coping strategies, which lead, in turn, to more long-term problems such as depression, anxiety, drug use, delinquent behaviors, and to suicides among girls (Gomes, 2011). Although now there is awareness of relational aggression, it continues to be very difficult to observe because of the covert nature of the problem (Beebout-Bladholm, 2010). Although relational aggression is not gender specific, information specifically pertinent to the developmental trajectory and vulnerabilities associated with females who use relational aggression has been established (Galen & Underwood, 1997; Vaillancourt et al., 2007). If these behaviors are ignored and girls are not instructed on what to do when faced with relational aggression, they may develop coping strategies that are unhealthy, leading to emotional harm as they grow older (Beebout-Bladholm, 2010; Managio, 2010).

The combination of new findings and the advent of the recognition of the effects of relational aggression among young people have made it inevitable that the situation and public education would intertwine. Numerous studies document the pervasiveness of bullying and aggressive behaviors and their detrimental impact on students’ learning and
mental health. Since 2000, more than twenty states have enacted anti-bullying legislation because of concerns about connections between school violence and bullying (Young et al., 2010; Simmons, 2011). Like the mandate under the federal zero-tolerance law, these state laws require local school districts to include an anti-bullying policy in their discipline codes (Aud, Hussar, Kena, Bianco, Frohlich, Kemp, Tahan, 2011). Out of the 46 states with anti-bullying laws in place, 36 have provisions that prohibit cyberbullying and 13 have statutes that grant schools the authority to address off-campus behavior that creates a hostile school environment (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006; Aud et al, 2011).

"Every state should have effective bullying prevention efforts in place to protect children inside and outside of school," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (Aud et al, 2011). While most states have enacted legislation around this important issue, a great deal of work remains to ensure adults are doing everything possible to keep our children safe (Aud et al, 2011). Most of the state laws provide a broad definition of what constitutes bullying behavior. According to the Ohio Revised Code 3312.66 (2012), an electronic act means an act committed through the use of a cellular telephone, computer, pager, personal communication device, or other electronic communication device. Harassment, intimidation, or bullying means either of the following: any intentional written, verbal, electronic, or physical act that a student has exhibited toward another particular student more than once and the behavior both: causes mental or physical harm to the other student; or any act which is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for the other student. The laws refer to intentional, aggressive behavior, repeated over time, that involves an imbalance of power and strength.
Typically, proscribed verbal or written behavior includes name-calling, teasing, intimidation, ridicule, humiliation, physical acts, and taunts. State laws usually do not identify the specific penalties for bullying behavior, leaving local schools significant discretion (Young, Boye, & Nelson 2006). School personnel have always had the authority to discipline students for bullying behavior. The new laws, however, formalize the responsibility for disrupting and deterring bullying behavior. Since the anti-bullying state laws are relatively new, case law is quite limited in interpreting students’ rights and school districts’ liability. Nonetheless, in developing and administering anti-bullying policies, school officials must take into consideration students’ procedural due process rights. Policies for imposing short-term suspensions must comply at least with the minimum requirements of *Goss v. Lopez*, 419 U.S. 565, 583 (1975), which state that under the Fourteenth Amendment’s due process clause, public-school students facing suspensions are entitled to notice and a hearing. More extensive disciplinary measures for bullying behavior will necessitate formal hearings according to the policy.

Due to the newness of state laws and case law, the impact that the phenomenon of relational aggression and bullying have had on public education is considerable. Several aspects of public education are impacted. Anxious boards of education have spent time and effort trying to develop policies to assure fair treatment to victims and perpetrators. Participation in extracurricular programming is also affected. While these issues are important, the main focus of the study will be the progress Ohio boards of education have made in terms of policy and procedure directed toward the issue of the rights of victims of relational aggression. As a rather limited legal history of relational aggression and the
resulting impact on public education policy and practices have revealed, the topic is one that requires attention by school boards and administrators.

Important corollaries to the issues of the implementation of board policy and procedure addressing the needs of relational aggression afflicted students is that of educating students on both ends of the spectrum. A logical step would be to explore whether educational efforts are adequate in addressing the issues. A second appropriate area of investigation would be to determine whether adequate efforts in educating youngsters about the effects of relational aggression and legal aspects surrounding any bullying are being made.

**Research Questions**

Now is the time for school boards to act for a variety of reasons: first, legislators and litigation have established that failure to confront the issue poses some liability concerns for a school district that violates the rights of students. Second, the National School Board Association has established statutes that should be followed. Finally, taking action is also the right path to take to ensure the safety of students. Given the statements of the problem, the primary research question is: Have Ohio school boards and administrators developed policies and procedures designed to protect the rights and meet the needs of students affected by relational aggression and, if so, how are they being implemented? A second research question is curricular in nature: What is the status of relational aggression education efforts or curricular programs in Ohio schools? To address these questions, administrators in Ohio were asked a number of survey questions to measure attitudinal aspects of the administrative approach to the identified problem.

**Justification of the Research Problem**
Phoebe Prince, a 15-year-old girl from South Hadley, Massachusetts, hanged herself on January 14, 2010, after being continuously harassed and taunted by her classmates (Norman & Connolly, 2011; Goldman, 2010). The aggression was perpetrated by a group of girls who were angry about Phoebe having a relationship with a popular boy in school. The group of girls taunted, teased, and physically bullied Phoebe for three months before she went home from school one day and took her own life (Hargrove, 2010; Goldman, 2010). While this case of aggression may be extreme, a national survey conducted on this topic by the American Justice Department, an organization devoted to educating the public about bullying issues, found that one out of every four students is bullied mentally, verbally, and physically (Bullying Statistics, 2010). Other findings from this study, demonstrate that (1) ninety percent of fourth through eighth graders are victims of some type of bullying; (2) on any given day, fifteen percent of students who are absent from school report that it is because they fear being bullied; and (3) teenagers, twelve to seventeen years of age, perceive an increase in school violence (Bullying Statistics, 2010). The findings above, including Phoebe Prince’s suicide and other stories highlighted by the media in order to raise awareness about this pervasive issue, suggest a cause for concern and action.

The number of bullying incidents being reported nationwide is growing and the consequences associated this aggressive behavior are becoming more visible. Being victimized by peers can cause emotional distress in the form of depression and anxiety (Yoon, Barton, & Tariarol, 2004; Davidson & Demaray, 2007), which can lead to other problems. Students who suffered from emotional distress as a consequence of aggression developed academic issues such as poor attitudes toward school and school phobia,
which, in turn negatively affected their grades (Nishina, Juvonen, & Witkow, 2005). The authors also report that students who were victimized, in addition to suffering from both emotional issues such as depression, social anxiety, and suicide risk, also suffer physically with headaches and stomach aches (Nishina et al., 2005).

The state of Massachusetts began examining the issue of bullying and aggression more closely following the tragic death of Phoebe Prince in South Hadley. An official investigation discovered that despite knowing she was being harassed, the school district had neither responded to her victimization nor had they protected her from her abusers (Hargrove, 2010). The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) issued a directive in response to the incident; all Massachusetts schools were charged with developing anti-bullying policies to address the problem of bullying in schools. These policies, which would address intervention and prevention programs, were to be written and implemented by December 2010. The policies, signed into law by the Governor, address five areas: a prevention and intervention plan, internet safety, bullying prevention instruction, professional development, and requirements for students with disabilities (DESE, 2010).

There seems to be enough case law to clarify that students being bullied have certain rights when it comes to their education. The National School Boards Association (2012) published its Bullying Definitions in State Anti-Bullying Statutes of April 2012, which provides a variety of data on the fifty states’ statutes, year(s) implemented, conduct covered, reaches off-campus, cyber addressed, state agency, local school board must, local school board may, and reporting immunity. Some of the uncertainty regarding the implications for schools’ response to the relational aggression problem has been
clarified somewhat by these national statutes, and the realization has been established that these afflicted students do exist.

For a variety of reasons, school boards have not followed through in dealing with the issue of relational aggression. School administrators seem to feel that they lack the basic knowledge about relational aggression and perceive a need for training as well as the development of policies and procedures. Despite efforts to design and implement various intervention programs to address relational aggression as a phenomenon, there is a lack of randomized controlled studies to establish their efficaciousness (Leff & Crick, 2010). Although such programs are typically modeled after those that address physical aggression, Leff and Crick (2010) suggest it is more appropriate for interventions to address the social and emotional problems commonly associated with relational aggression.

When a student claims to be bullied, the overt types of bullying are often what first come to people’s minds (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995); however, there is a covert type of aggression identified by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) to which girls in particular are ostensibly prone. Various authors refer to the covert bullying as *bullying, covert bullying, peer aggression, female aggression, indirect aggression,* and *relational aggression* (Skrzypiec, Slee, Murray-Harvey, & Pereira, 2011). In order for school districts to move forward in providing effective intervention and prevention programs for relational aggression in their schools, there needs to be comprehensive qualitative examination of the perception of the stakeholders involved.

The public in general appears to uninformed. As a result, girls who are victimized may be dealing with their victimization alone, without support. Attention has been given
to the role that violent media exposure has on physical aggression, and this is certainly a
crucial public health issue that requires attention (Anderson & Bushman, 2001). We
should not limit our focus to the role of violent media or just focus on physical aggression
or violence. When girls are aggressive, they are much more likely to display relational
aggression relative to physical aggression (Putallaz et al, 2007).

Educating children and the community as a whole is significant. Because of the
need to understand the phenomenon of relational aggression more extensively, there has
been an increasing amount of interest in the behavior of aggressive girls in recent years
(Ringose, 2006). However, the work specific to the phenomenon of relational aggression
is limited in spite of the findings of Marshal, Varjas, Meyers, Graybill, and Skoczylas
(2009) who argued that a qualitative study investigating teachers’ and administrators’
perceptions of relational aggression would add a great deal to the body of literature on
aggression in girls. Literature continues to be lacking in the area of studies that
investigate teachers’ perceptions, as well as in studies examining administrators’
perceptions of relational aggression. In order for school districts to move forward in
providing effective intervention and prevention programs in their schools, there needs to
be a comprehensive qualitative examination of the perceptions of all stakeholders
involved.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The study attempts to assess the progress that boards of education in the State of
Ohio have made in confronting the issue of the phenomenon called relational aggression
in public schools. To gather this data, the study focused on district administrators, as they
are the school boards’ tools in the implementation of policy. For the purpose of gathering
data, an email survey instrument was emailed to the 615 Ohio public school district superintendents to gather specific information pertaining to relational aggression with the goal of being able to improve standards of the professional education field by revealing certain findings.

Survey research is one of the most important areas of measurement in research (Trochim, 2006). The broad area of survey research encompasses any measurement procedures that involve asking questions of respondents. The purpose of the survey is to try to infer from the sample data what the population thinks. A survey instrument can be viewed as an example of a restriction on one’s research. One of the more common assumptions made in survey research is the assumption of honesty and truthful responses. Both assumptions and limitations affect the inferences drawn from a study. For certain sensitive questions, this assumption may be more difficult to accept, in which case it would be described as a limitation of the study.

Delimitations are set so that goals do not become impossibly large to complete. Examples of delimitations include objectives, research questions, theoretical objectives, and populations chosen as targets to study (Glesne, 2006). This section allows the writer to explain why certain aspects of a subject were chosen and why others were excluded (Simon, 2011). By including mostly closed-ended Likert scale responses in the survey, rather than including additional open-ended responses, the hope was that some people might be more willing to take and complete the online survey.

The findings of this study are limited to the school districts that participate in the data collection process. The study is not limited to any specific range in terms of size of the district and care was given to survey school districts within the entire range.
designated in the survey instrument. However, it would not be appropriate to generalize
the results outside the State of Ohio due to differences in state laws and school district
policies.

Theoretical Framework

As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explain, a theoretical base used as a guide to the
collection and analysis of data results in high quality research. The dynamics of peer
aggression can potentially permeate throughout the entire school community. The
ultimate goal is to stop aggression before it begins. Prevention requires understanding the
factors that influence violence. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) uses a four-level
social-ecological model to better understand aggression and the effect of potential
prevention strategies (2016). This model considers the complex interplay between
individual, relationship, community, and societal factors. It allows us to understand the
range of factors that put people at risk for aggressive behaviors or protect them from
experiencing or perpetrating such aggression. Because of this, a systems-ecological
framework is necessary to address the complex issue of relational aggression and the
ways in which people respond (Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Mishna, 2004; Sawyer et al.,
2011; Barboza et al., 2009). According to the systems-ecological framework (also
referred to as the social-ecological framework) (Barboza et al., 2009), the dynamics of
relational aggression extend beyond the aggressor and victim and include the school
community and individuals involved (Sawyer et al., 2011). Consequently, Davidson and
Demaray (2007) stated that any research in the area of peer aggression should be
grounded in this framework and subsequently examine the impact of the peer group,
family, school and community influences in order to effectively develop intervention programs.

According to the systems-ecological framework, the relationship between a child and one system is the microsystem. The microsystem is the relationship the child has with his or her immediate environment (Swearer & Espelage, 2004), which can be described as a child being at the center of the social ecological model – such a a school environment. Thus, a child’s microsystem can change throughout the day depending on where he or she is – with a peer group or the school environment or even at home. There are individual factors, such as gender and age that can encourage or discourage relationally aggressive behavior. Gender, for example, has the influence on relationally aggressive behavior such that girls, as a consequence of the ways in which they have been socialized, are more likely to engage in relational, rather than physical aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

A child’s social ecology includes his or her peer group and school setting. The systems-ecological framework affords the researcher the opportunity to look at the culture of the peer group and school to examine the impact on aggression. It is important to investigate if the community (i.e. school) is supporting aggressive behavior or helping to inhibit the behavior. This system-ecological framework allows the researcher to examine all of these aspects of a child’s life.

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter Two will present a review of relevant literature, including a history of bullying, cyber bullying, relational aggression, school policies, and interventions and programs that served as a background and inspiration for this study. Chapter Three will
describe the methodology in designing this study. Chapter Four will present the findings of the study based on the presentation of data collected. The last part, Chapter Five, will include a summary detailing conclusions, questions, and recommendations for further research.

**Summary**

Chapter One presented an introduction to the concept of relational aggression, with a specific overview of the issues of bullying and relational aggression related to all aspects of education of female adolescents. The purpose of this study is to describe and understand the experiences female students have with relational aggression and how that transfers to the school environment. The overall focus of the study is to illuminate the lived experience of relational aggression victims as seen through their eyes and reveal how school administrators are meeting their needs. In addition, it was hoped that knowledge gained from this study would assist the development of effective policies and interventions in the academic setting to deal with and prevent relational aggression. The problem identification, purpose of the study, significance of the study to education, and research question were outlined. Also presented is the theoretical framework that guided this study. Discussed are the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations for this study, and definitions of terms relevant to this study have been provided. What follows is a review of the literature exploring these topics in more depth.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review explores the available literature related to various aspects of aggression with a specific focus on the phenomenon of relational aggression in females. This allows for a better understanding of the multifaceted phenomenon of relational aggression and the array of circumstances that contribute to relational aggression, with special attention devoted to relational aggression and its place in the public schools. This review is divided into the following sections: origins and history of bullying, cyber bullying and social media, and relational aggression.

Origins and History of Bullying

According to etymology, the term *bully* was originally defined, in the 1530s, as “sweetheart,” applied to either sex, from Dutch *boel* “lover; brother,” probably a diminutive of Middle Dutch *broeder* “brother.” In English texts, *bully* surfaced around the middle of the sixteenth century and meant ‘sweetheart, darling,” originally applied to either sex but later only to men (the sense was “good friend; fine fellow”) (Liberman, 2012). If a feudal lord or town squire in the 1500s spoke of his “bully,” he was referring to his sweetheart, a definition that applied to both sexes (Nunn, 2013). Shakespeare treasured this word and used it regularly beginning in 1600. One can suspect that at that time, the word was jocular street slang. Judging by phrases like *lovely bully* and “what saiest thou, bully, Bottom,” the word occupied a place comparable to that of today’s ubiquitous *dude*. The puzzling thing is that bully “lover; friend; fine fellow” disappeared about two hundred years after it had its heyday in English. Its meaning deteriorated in the 17 century through “fine fellow” and “blusterer” to “harasser of the weak” (Liberman,
Yet another term, *mobbing*, relates to emotional abuse that involves ridicule, isolation, intimidation, and humiliation. Nobel Laureate Konrad Lorenz originated the term mobbing in the 1960s to describe the behavior in animals. One example is geese forming a group to terrorize and drive away a predator, such as a fox. The book *Mobbing: Group Violence Among Children*, published in Sweden in 1972 by Dr. Peter Paul Heinemann, was based upon research involving bullying behavior among school children in Sweden. Dr. Heinemann, an accomplished physician and Holocaust survivor living in Sweden, developed a theory about bullying after witnessing the local community’s hostility toward his adopted son, David, who is black. Heinemann looked to the behavior of animals – specifically *mobbing*, a violent, instinctual behavior of birds assaulting a weaker member of their own species – and, in turn, applied the concept to a group’s aggression against a particular child. The book introduces the principles of dignity and respect as an approach to bullying or mobbing situations than may look confusing or complicated. The book is intended to promote insight and awareness in students, teachers, counselors, parents, and school professionals. The book is also intended to be a springboard for schools to be able to create programs addressing bullying behavior that will be effective (Nunn, 2013).

Swedish academic Dan Olweus considered Heinemann’s theory, but he disagreed with the idea that mobbing was a “crowd” behavior. Instead, Olweus contended that the opposite was true: Typically, a small group of two or three students would do the majority of the bullying that occurred in a class, and as many as 30 percent of children

2012; Nunn, 2013). Not until the 20th century did the word take on the more scholarly definitions we use today (Liberman, 2012; Nunn, 2013).
who were bullied had been victimized by the same person (Olweus, 1978, 1999, 2001).

Over time, Olweus originally chose the English word *bullying* to describe these cruel schoolyard behaviors. He refined the meaning of *bullying* to include three conditions:

Bullying is (1) repeated (2) deliberate verbal or physical abuse by (3) someone with more power than his or her target (Olweus, 1978, 1999, 2001 as cited in Nunn, 2013).

Following the pioneering work of Olweus, bullying is defined as a subcategory or interpersonal aggression characterized by intentionality, repetition, and an imbalance of power, with abuse of power being a primary distinction between bullying and other forms of aggression (Vaillancourt, Hymel & McDougall, 2003). Scholars generally endorse these characteristics, as does the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014), the American Psychological Association (VandenBos, 2007), and the National Association of School Psychologists (2012).

In its most basic sense, bullying involves two people, a bully or intimidator and a victim. The bully abuses the victim through physical, verbal, or other means in order to gain a sense of superiority and power. These actions may be direct (i.e. hitting, verbally assaulting face-to-face, etc.) or indirect (i.e. rumors, gossip, etc.) (Donegan, 2012; Whitson, 2004; Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Since the beginning of time, there has been a constant drive to out-perform others and overcome obstacles. This survival instinct, along with a competitive atmosphere, has remained the same as the human race has evolved.

Both of these forces have flowed over into educational, social, and economic realms (Donegan, 2012; Hymel & Swearer, 2015). This competitive hierarchy, though prevalent in most societies, varies across cultures depending on their ethical systems, traditions,
and the type of control exerted by a governing power (Donegan, 2012; Hymel & Swearer, 2015).

There are approximately 55 million primary and secondary school students in the United States. Seventy percent of 55 million equals 38,500,000 students; this is how many students are bullied or treated aggressively at some point in school (Langman, 2014; Hymel & Swearer, 2015). The effects of bullying have been researched and well-publicized. Children who are bullied are much more likely to experience depression and anxiety, or even attempt suicide. Bullying has also been linked to disordered eating patterns and even clinical eating disorders (Smith, & Morita, 1999; Solberg, & Olweus, 2003; Cornell, Gregory, Huang & Fan, 2013).

Although relational aggression is not gender specific, information specifically pertinent to the developmental trajectory and vulnerabilities associated with females who use relational aggression has been established. The phenomenon relational aggression is not unique to adolescents; preschoolers have been observed to be quite savvy in their use of relational aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Young et al, 2006; Cote, 2007). However, relational aggression requires verbal, cognitive, and social skills. During the preschool years, relational aggression is usually obvious and unsophisticated due to the language and cognitive development typical of this age group. Girls use more relational aggression during preschool (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Ostrov et al, 2008). For example, a child may refuse to play with a classmate. Girls have been shown to increase their use of relational aggression across time during late elementary school (Young et al, 2006; Murray-Close, Ostrov, & Crick, 2007). During elementary school years, the behaviors become more complex and girls use covert strategies such as lying or spreading rumors.
Girls begin to show increases in relational aggressive behavior during middle childhood (Underwood, Galen, & Paquette, 2001; Young et al, 2006; Vaillancourt et al., 2007). As these students mature, they better understand how to target victims and how to strategize to achieve their goals.

Most studies of peer victimization and bullying have been conducted in elementary and middle schools, with relatively less attention to high schools (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006). Relational aggression tends to be manipulative or subtle, and may not appear as typically aggressive behavior (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Young et al, 2006). In the past, the phenomenon known as relational aggression was viewed as a normal part of the process of socialization (Cote et al, 2007 as cited in Murray-Close & Ostrov, 2009). However, evidence suggests that relational aggression may create just as much or more damage than physical aggression among youth (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Young et al, 2006; Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006) and should be considered an important focus of bullying/aggression prevention and intervention in the schools. Espelage and Swearer (2004) introduce the social-ecological framework in which bullying occurs. They emphasize that bullying does not occur in isolation. The authors stress that relationships across family, peer, school, and community contexts will influence the engagement, or non-engagement, in bullying and victimization behaviors. According to Cornell et al (2013), teasing and bullying at the high school level is a noteworthy problem that is associated with the most serious negative outcome, failure to graduate (Underwood, Galen, & Paquette, 2001; Werner & Nixon; Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006).
According to the American Psychological Association, bullying can have long-term effects on students’ academic achievement (Graham, 2015). Children who have few friends, who are actively rejected by the peer group, or who are victims of bullying are unlikely to have the cognitive and emotional resources to be able to do well in school (Underwood, Galen, & Paquette, 2001; Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006). According to Do Something.org, 3.2 million children are affected by bullying each year; 1 out of 10 drop out of school because of bullying; and over 67% of students thing that schools don’t do enough to prevent and stop bullying. We cannot fully understand the factors that lead to academic achievement without knowing about the social environment of children in school (Underwood, Galen, & Paquette, 2001; Juvonen & Graham, 2014, as cited in Graham, 2015). Bullying can have long-term effects on students’ academic achievement (Young et al, 2006; Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). Over the past forty years, stereotypes of bullies as socially incompetent adolescents who rely on physical coercion to resolve conflicts have diminished as studies document wide individual differences among children who bully (Young et al, 2006; Hymel & Swearer, 2015).

Olweus (1978, 1993), in his early research, distinguished between children who bully others and those who both bully others and are victimized. These bully victims have been characterized as hyperactive, impulsive, and as experiencing more peer rejection, more academic difficulties, and more stressful and harsh home environments but represent only a small portion (1% to 12%) of students (Dulmus, Sowers, & Theriot, 2006; Solberg & Olweus, 2003 as cited in Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Over the past four decades, research has shown that many bullies are socially intelligent and enjoy considerable status in the peer group (Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2003) leading
to distinctions between socially marginalized and socially integrated bullies (Farmer, Petrin, Robertson, Fraser, Hall, Day & Dadisman, 2010 as cited in Hymel & Swearer, 2015).

Students often learn corrupt ways to get ahead in the highly competitive educational and social environments that school presents. These bullying tactics may include pressuring others for answers on assignments to attain higher grades, or spreading social rumors about fellow students (Donegan, 2012). These tactics are dangerous because, once a student realizes their effectiveness, he or she may construct a life style from them. Adults may be less able to recognize bullying perpetrated by students who appear to be socially competent, well-functioning individuals (Werner & Nixon, 2005). If bullying is viewed as a reflection of power and status in a peer group, it is difficult to convince students to abandon such behaviors (Rodkin, Espelage, & Hanish, 2015 as cited in Hymel & Swearer, 2015).

The concept of students being bullied or aggressively treated is not new, but the methods being used have become more subtle as anti-bullying efforts have increased in schools (DESE, 2010; Nishina et al, 2005). Rather than taunts in the classroom, methods of bullying may now be less obvious such as remarks on social media (Underwood, Galen, & Paquette, 2001; Donegan, 2012; Johnson, 2015). Research over the past forty years on school bullying has contributed to our understanding of the complexity of the bullying problem as well as the challenges we face while addressing the problem (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). “A school where children don’t feel safe is a school where children struggle to learn. It is a school where kids drop out, tune out, and get depressed. Not just
violence but bullying, verbal harassment, substance abuse, cyber bullying, and disruptive classrooms all interfere with a student’s ability to learn” (Duncan, 2012).

One example of bullying behavior surrounds the innocuous act of eating lunch. Dana Thompson, a registered dietitian who works with families through her practice, reports a significant amount of peer pressure exerted by certain girls to “not eat lunch” for fear of rejection by cliques (Johnson, 2015). Thompson explains this is an act of bullying because it appears to be pressure applied purposefully. The victim is targeted with dirty looks if she eats her lunch or indirect statements intended to make her feel ashamed about how much she eats (Johnson, 2015).

Dr. Dan Olweus, a research professor of psychology from Norway, is often considered the “pioneer” in bullying research. He spent several decades researching the issue of bullying to help keep children safe in schools and other settings. Today, Dr. Olweus is best known for the most researched and widely adopted bullying prevention program in the world, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. In the early 1970s, Dr. Olweus initiated the world’s first systematic bullying research. The results of his studies were published in a Swedish book in 1973 and the United States in 1978 under the title Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys (Luxemberg, Limber, & Olweus, 2015). According to Olweus (2001), a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students.

Dr. Olweus has long seen school safety as a fundamental human right. As early as 1981, he proposed enacting a law against bullying in schools so students could be spared the repeated humiliation implied in bullying. By the mid-1990s, these arguments led to
legislation against bullying by the Swedish and Norwegian parliaments (Olweus, 2001). In 1983, three adolescent boys in northern Norway died by suicide. The act was most likely a consequence of severe bullying by peers, prompting the country’s Ministry of Education to initiate a national campaign against bullying in schools. As a result, the first version of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program was developed (1983). Olweus began to publish studies related to male aggression and bullying (Dake, Price & Telljohann, 2003). The initial prevention program was carefully evaluated in a large-scale project involving 2,500 students from forty-two schools followed over a period of two and a half years (Olweus, 1999, 2001). The prevention program was refined, expanded, and further evaluated in five additional large-scale projects in Norway. Statistics continued to show successful prevention of bullying in schools. Since a 2001 initiative by the Norwegian government, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has been implemented on a large-scale basis in elementary and lower secondary schools throughout Norway (Olweus, 2003).

By the 1980s, research studies on bullying emerged from countries such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, and England (O’Moore & Hillery, 1989). In the 1990s, research on bullying and its many categories such as indirect aggression, social aggression, and relational aggression began to emerge in the United States (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Due to Olweus’ program’s success in Norway and other countries, Dr. Olweus began working closely with American colleagues in the mid 1990s to evaluate and implement the program in the United States. With the help of Dr. Susan P. Limber of Clemson University in South Carolina and others, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) was adapted and implemented for U.S. schools
with positive results (2004). The first systematic evaluation of the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* in the United States was conducted in the mid-1990s, involving 18 middle schools in South Carolina (Limber, 2004) and in 12 elementary schools in Philadelphia area (Olweus, 1999; Olweus, 2003; Black, 2003).

The first evaluation of the OBPP in the United States involved students in elementary and middle schools in South Carolina in the mid-1990s (Limber et al, 2004; 1998; Olweus & Limber, 2010). After seven months of implementation of the OBPP, significant Time x Group (intervention versus comparison schools) interactions were found for students' reports of bullying others. Researchers observed a 16% decrease in rates of bullying among students in intervention schools and a 12% increase in bullying among students in comparison schools, resulting in a 28% relative reduction of bullying others in intervention versus comparison schools. Researchers also documented significant differences between intervention and control schools in self-reported delinquency, vandalism, school misbehavior, and sanctions for school misbehavior. There were no significant program effects for students’ reports of being bullied (Limber et al, 2004; 1998; Olweus & Limber, 2010).

According to Bauer, Lozano, & Rivara, (2007), to examine the effectiveness of a widely disseminated bullying prevention program, a nonrandomized controlled trial with 10 public middle schools in Indiana (7 intervention and 3 control) was conducted. Student-reported relational (e.g., spreading rumors, social exclusion) and physical aggression, and whether the program improved student attitudes and perceptions toward bullying were assessed pre- and post-implementation using available school survey data.
The program had some mixed positive effects varying by gender, ethnicity/race, and grade but no overall effect. According to a summary of findings presented at the International Bullying Prevention Association in 2013, an evaluation of the Olweus program took place in 12 elementary school in the Philadelphia area and found significant reductions in observations of bullying at recess and lunch.

Researchers have recently conducted the largest evaluation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) to date in the United States. Analysis included more than 72,000 students at baseline assessment in grades 3-11 from 214 schools. Findings revealed positive effects of the OBPP on student reports of being bullied and bullying others. Program effects were longer the longer the program had been in place. Several research teams have synthesized evaluation results across various bullying prevention programs or conducted meta-analyses of programs. The meta-analysis by Ttofi and Farrington (Ttofi et al., 2008; Ttofi & Farrington, 2009) is widely recognized as the most comprehensive and rigorous to date on bullying prevention programs. A conclusion from this meta-analysis is that whole-school programs can be successful but also that there are great variations in the effects of different programs. The authors concluded that that programs “inspired by the work of Dan Olweus worked best” (Ttofi et al., 2008, p. 69) and that future efforts should be “grounded in the successful Olweus program.” Schools implementing the program, especially with a heterogeneous student body, should monitor outcomes and pay particular attention to the impact of culture, race and family influences on student behavior (Bauer, Lozano, & Rivara, (2007).
In his book, *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do*, Dr. Olweus defines bullying as “A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself” (1993). This definition includes three important components:

1. Bullying is aggressive behavior that involves unwanted, negative actions.
2. Bullying involves a pattern of behavior repeated over time.
3. Bullying involves an imbalance of power or strength.

According to Olweus (2001), there are seven different levels within the bullying hierarchy, or ladder: the students who want to bully and initiate the action, their followers or henchmen, supporters or passive bullies, passive supporters or possible bullies, disengaged onlookers, possible defenders, and defenders who dislike the action of bullying and help those who are victimized. Bullying can take on many forms. As part of the *Olweus Bullying Questionnaire* (2003), students are asked if they have been bullied in any of these nine ways:

1. Verbal bullying including derogatory comments and bad names
2. Bullying through social exclusion or isolation
3. Physical bullying such as hitting, kicking, shoving, and spitting
4. Bullying through lies and false rumors
5. Having money or other things taken or damaged by students who bully
6. Being threatened or being forced to do things by students who bully
7. Racial bullying
8. Sexual bullying
9. Cyber bullying (via cell phone or Internet)

School bullying has been a topic in Western literature for over 150 years. In Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* (Dickens, 1839), Oliver spends the first nine years of his life in a badly run home for young orphans and then is transferred to a workhouse for adults. After the other boys bully Oliver into asking for more gruel at the end of a meal, Mr. Bumble, the parish beadle, offers five pounds to anyone who will take the boy away from the workhouse. Oliver narrowly escapes being apprenticed to a brutish chimney sweep and is eventually apprenticed to a local undertaker, Mr. Sowerberry. When the undertaker’s other apprentice, Noah Claypole, makes disparaging comments about Oliver’s mother, Oliver attacks him and incurs the Sowerberrys’ wrath. Thomas Hughes’ *Tom Brown’s School Days*, is a popular British novel featuring a violent “bully” named Flashman who snatched up lottery tickets and taunted schoolmates (Hughes, 1857). By the turn of the century, “bullies” were certainly no longer sweethearts or lovers; they were looming figures – like Flashman – who evoked fear among their peers.

More recently, young adult novels such as *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1963) portray good looking Ralph as a logical leader, Jack as a bully who turns the choirboys into savages, and Piggy who is bullied due to his weight and vision problem and is treated as an outsider. Another current young adult series, *Harry Potter*, introduces Draco Malfoy and his gang who frequently antagonize Harry Potter and his friends, and Malfoy also used his position as prefect to bully some first years when he got the power in his fifth year. Bullying continues to permeate popular culture in the form of novels (as in the past), reality television, and violent video games (Whitson, 2014; Luxemberg, Limber, & Olweus, 2015).
Empirical research, however, on bullying is a relatively recent focus, the earliest studies emerging in the 1970s in Scandinavia (Olweus, 1978). In North America, public concern about school bullying increased dramatically in the late 1990s, owing, in large part, to the tragic deaths of youth by suicide or murder, especially the 1997 murder of Reena Virk, a 14-year-old Canadian murder victim (Godfrey, 2005), and the Columbine massacre in 1998 (Cullen, 2009). In November 1997, a crowd of mostly girls swarmed and drowned Reena, who was 14, under the Craigflower Bridge in Saanich. Since then, bullying has received overwhelming attention in the media and in academia, both nationally and internationally (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010) and remains a significant concern among parents and educators.

In recent years, a series of bullying-related suicides in the United States and across the globe have drawn attention to the connection between bullying and suicide. Though too many adults still see bullying as “just part of being a kid,” it is a serious problem that leads to many negative effects for victims, including suicide (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people, resulting in about 4,400 deaths per year, according to the CDC. For every suicide among young people, there are at least 100 suicide attempts. Over 14 percent of high school students have considered suicide, and almost 7 percent have attempted it. According to the CDC (2016), bully victims are between 2 to 9 times more likely to consider suicide than non-victims, according to studies by Yale University as cited in CDC, 2016. A study in Britain found that at least half of suicides among young people are related to bullying 10 to 14-year-old girls may be at even higher risk for suicide, according to the study above. Bully-related suicide can be connected to any type
of bullying, including physical bullying, emotional bullying, cyberbullying, and sexting, or circulating suggestive or nude photos or messages about a person. Some schools or regions have more serious problems with bullying and suicide related to bullying. This may be due to an excessive problem with bullying at the school. It could also be related to the tendency of students who are exposed to suicide to consider suicide themselves (CDC, 2016).

Inspired by the 2011 U. S. White House Conference on Bullying, hosted by President and First Lady Obama and the Department of Education, a special issue in American Psychologist (Hymel & Swearer, 2015) was undertaken to invite recognized scholars to critically review current research and theory on school bullying, in an effort to inform future research and practice (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). The President and First Lady Michelle Obama discussed how we can all work together to end bullying as an accepted practice and create a safer environment for our kids to grow up in. “If there’s one goal of this conference, it’s to dispel the myth that bullying is just a harmless rite of passage or an inevitable part of growing up. It’s not.” That’s how the President explained the first-ever White House Conference on Bullying Prevention during the opening session of the daylong summit. Partly because he grew up being teased about his big ears, and partly because he has two young daughters, for President Obama, the nation’s bullying problem is one he takes personally. He and First Lady Michelle Obama opened the conference on bullying prevention on a Thursday morning in March 2011 by calling on all adults to consider the role they can play in creating a safer climate for children (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). The conference encouraged schools, communities, and the private sector to join together to combat bullying.
The White House also highlighted private, non-profit, and federal commitments to bullying prevention. Examples of these include Formspring, a social network with over 22 million members working with The MIT Media Lab to develop new approaches to detect online bullying, and designing interfaces, which help prevent it or mitigate it when it does occur. Facebook unveiled two new safety features in the coming weeks: a revamped multimedia Safety Center to incorporate multimedia, external resources from renowned experts, and downloadable information for teens.

Educational organizations are getting on board with the movement, as well. The National Education Association (NEA) launched a nationwide anti-bullying campaign entitled *Bully-Free: It Starts with Me*. Through this new online campaign, the NEA will identify and support caring adults in each school who will listen and act on behalf of bullied students in schools across America. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) launched a national bullying campaign, *See a Bully, Stop a Bully. Make a Difference*, focused on raising bullying awareness and providing resources, training, and technical assistance for leaders and members. The National Association of Student Councils (NASC) declares its commitment to foster a national student-led conversation and call to action utilizing its *Raising Student Voice & Participation* (RSVP) process. In order to change bully behaviors, one must target the entire system, not just the individual behavior by introducing the social-ecological framework in which the aggressive behavior occurs.

Early in the Obama Administration, six federal agencies (Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Justice, Defense, Agriculture, and Interior) joined together to establish the Federal Partners in Bullying Prevention Steering
Committee to explore ways to provide guidance for individuals and organizations in combating bullying. In addition to the Steering Committee’s work, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) also created the Stop Bullying Now! Campaign to raise awareness about bullying; prevent and reduce bullying behaviors; identify interventions and strategies; and encourage and strengthen partnerships.

**Cyberbullying and Social Media**

Amanda Todd, 15 years old, killed herself after being cyberbullied by her classmates (Mungin, 2012). Amanda’s case made national headlines because of her YouTube video posted just days before her death in which she recounts the torment she faced on a daily basis. She had made two previous suicide attempts before finally succeeding on October 10, 2012. Amanda Todd had even transferred to several different schools in order to avoid being harassed (Mungin, 2012). Because she was cyberbullied, it was easy to find videos taunting her with a quick Internet search. In an age of increased technology use, this is a frightening example of how dangerous the Internet may be for students and how difficult it can be to escape harassment by peers. Unfortunately, the sort of relationally aggressive behaviors she endured including taunting, teasing, and cyber bullying can be difficult for teachers and administrators to observe or respond (Mishna, 2004).

Parents, trying to protect their daughters, are often unfamiliar with the social networking sites that their daughters visit. O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) report on a national poll conducted by Common Sense Media, that many parents lack a basic understanding about online forms of social media in which their daughters are engaged. Some parents do not only lack the technical skills, they may not understand the extent to
which their children’s online lives are simply another avenue to their worldly lives or an extension of their child’s life. Parents previously reported that leaving the school building would mean that a child who is being victimized would have a reprieve from their aggressor; in other words, home is a safe zone. This is not the case in the age of advanced technology in which electronic devices can be used as a vehicle to harass someone.

Patchin and Hinduja (2012) reviewed over thirty research studies in which the prevalence of victimization by cyber bullying ranged from 5.5% to 72% of teens. The wide range in the rate of victimization was due to the different types of studies conducted – there were different demographics studied, different methodologies used such as surveys, interviews and focus groups, as well as different time frames examined such as the incidence of online harassment in a week, month, or year. Patchin and Hinduja (2012) reported that the average rate of victimization in the studies they reviewed was 25%.

While the average rate of victimization is 25% of all students surveyed, there are demographic differences that show higher rates of victimization that the authors note – gender. Gender is a demographic that significantly changes victimization rates as most of the studies reviewed by Patchin and Hinduja (2012; CDC, 2016) report that girls are victimized at a higher rate than boys. The two online victimization behaviors reported most frequently by girls were being ignored (45.8%) and being disrespected (42.9%), both of which are relatively mild behaviors. Still, it is important to note that some girls did report serious behaviors like being threatened (11.2%) that likely are more indicative of cyberbullying than online harassment. Finally, online victimization of any kind occurred most commonly in chat rooms (26.4%), via computer text message (21.7%), and via email (13.5%). According to Burgess-Proctor, Hinduja, and Patchin (2009), most
female victims appear to know the bully and report that the bully was most often a friend from school (31.3%) or someone else from school (36.4%).

As technology has evolved, bullying has proliferated. Cyberbullying is bullying through email, instant messaging, chat rooms, web site posts, or digital messages or images sent to a cellular phone or personal computer or Ipad (Kowalski et al, 2008 a cited in www.violencepreventionworks.org). Youths who engage in cyber bullying behaviors do not have to be strong enough to physically dominate their peers, as they can remain anonymous in cyberspace, which provides them with a safety net (Norman & Connolly, 2011). The cyberspace world provides a medium by which anyone can be aggressive toward their peers at any time of day, which means that youths can be victimized in the privacy of their own homes. The ability to be aggressive against a peer at any time of the day, in addition to the anonymity cyberbullying provides, presents a unique challenge for all students, parents, teachers, and administrators who are charged with implementing anti-bullying policies in their classrooms.

With the advent of the Internet, chat rooms followed and online forums provided a communal ground for youth to assault one another. Next came AOL Instant Messenger (AIM), an online communication program that allowed teens to spend hours talking to one another in private, one-to-one conversations or in public chat rooms. The program allowed teens to create group-specific chat rooms. This exclusive forum allowed for youth to get together with select groups and talk about the latest gossip (Donegan, 2012; Hendricks, 2013).

Progress on the Internet brought about more websites, and with that came the dawn of social media. The first recognizable social media site, Six Degrees, was created
in 1997. It enabled users to upload a profile and make friends with other users. In 1999, the first blogging sites became popular, creating a social media sensation that is still popular today. Sites like MySpace and LinkedIn gained prominence in the early 2000s, and sites like Photobucket and Flickr facilitated online photo sharing. YouTube came out in 2005, creating an entirely new way for people to communicate and share with each other across great distances. By 2006, Facebook and Twitter both became available to users throughout the world. These sites remain some of the most popular social networks on the Internet (Hendricks, 2013).

However, social media sites such as Facebook and Google+ are prone to abuses like cyberbullying (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2009; Donegan, 2012; CDC, 2016). The site MySpace is often considered the pioneer of social media. MySpace (and Facebook which followed) allow individual users to create their own unique profiles and interact in cyberspace with friends and foes. Online publication of personal information is dangerous because it allows many people to see a side of a person more often kept private in a face-to-face interaction. This vulnerability puts many teens in a position as either the victim or active offender partaking in cyberbullying actions (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2009; Donegan, 2012; CDC, 2016). According to Stopbullying.gov, cyber bullying can happen 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and reach a child even when he or she is alone. It can happen any time day or night cyberbullying messages and images can be posted anonymously and distributed quickly to a very wide audience. It can be difficult and sometimes impossible to trace the source. Another aspect of social media that can be misleading and hazardous is the ability to create alias profiles. The ability for teens to
mask their identities provides them with an opportunity to say anything to another individual without the worry of any repercussions.

In the 1990s, with the appearance of the second generation of digital network phones, cell phones made their way into the majority of youths’ hands. According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center (2015), 73% of 12-17 year-olds own Smart phones, not just standard cell phones, which increased ownership from 45% in 2004, and one-in-three teens sends 3,000 text messages per month (Lenhart, 2010; Donegan, 2012, CDC, 2016). Though many parents believe they are buying a cell phone for their child’s protection, the opposite may be true as many youths admit to utilizing phones as an instrument for cyber bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Lenhart, 2010; Donegan, 2012). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2016) notes the explosion in communication tools and avenues does not come without possible risks. With the proliferation of devices that allow access to social media comes an increase in the convenience for youth to use these devices to embarrass, harass or threaten their peers. Accordingly, increasing numbers of teens and pre-teens are becoming victims of this new form of violence.

Although many different terms, such as cyberbullying, internet harassment, and internet bullying, have been used to describe this type of violence, electronic aggression is the term that most accurately captures all types of violence that occur electronically. Like traditional forms of youth violence, electronic aggression is associated with emotional distress and conduct problems at school. In fact, recent research suggests that youth who are victimized electronically are also very likely to also be victimized off-line (CDC, 2016).
Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin of the Cyberbullying Research Center, sampled 4,441 teens, ranging in age from 11 to 18 from a large school district in the southern United States. They defined cyberbullying as when someone repeatedly makes fun of another person online or repeatedly picks on another person through email or text message or when someone posts something online about another person who they do not like (2010). According to their results, cyberbullying victimization rates varied in the past few years, ranging between 18.8 percent in May 2007 and 28.7 percent in November 2009 with a mean of 27.32 percent based on seven different studies from May 2007-February 2010. Cyberbullying offending rates varied in a broader spectrum than victimization rates, ranging between 20.1 percent in June 2004 and 11.5 percent in November 2009 with a mean of 16.76 percent based on seven different studies from June 2004 to February 2010 (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Specific types of victimization and cyber bullying were also discovered through the survey taken in 2010. The survey discovered that the highest concentration of victimization and cyber bullying offenses occurred in the following areas respectively: mean or hurtful comments posted online (14.3 %, 8.8%), rumors online (13.3%, 6.8%), and threats through a cell phone text message (8.4%, 5.4%) (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

Another factor Hinduja and Patchin shared was what type of technology teens primarily use. According to a 2010 study, which asked teens what role technology played in their daily lives, cell phones were used the most (83%), followed by the Internet for school work (50.8%), ad then Facebook (50.1%) (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). This points to cell phones and the internet as the two primary mediums used for cyberbullying.
Anonymity of user is another significant factor in the increase of cyberbullying. Electronic technology allows adolescents to hide their identity, either by sending or posting messages anonymously or under a false name. So, unlike the aggression or bullying that occurs in the school yard, victims and perpetrators of electronic aggression may not know with whom they are interacting. Between 13% and 46% of young people who were victims of electronic aggression reported not knowing their harasser’s identity. Likewise, 22% of perpetrators of electronic aggression reported not knowing the identity of their victim (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2009).

Cyberbullying proved to vary by gender, as well. Based on the 2010 study involving a random sample of 2,212 teen males and 2,162 females, the male to female ratio varied most in the following areas: victimization within a person’s lifetime (16.6% for males vs. 25.1% for females), admitted to a cyber bullying offense within a person’s lifetime (17.5% for males vs. 21.3% for females), and had a hurtful comment posted about oneself online (10.5% for males vs. 18.2% for females) (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). This information may be biased due to the restraint among males about admitting a past bullying experience. Nevertheless, it is interesting that females reported a higher percentage in all categories.

One may believe that the effects of bullying are limited to initial responses that tend to fade within a few days or a week. However, research indicates that the harm inflicted by bullying, whether physical or psychological, has many implications and can result in a snowball effect of lasting painful emotions and negative impacts (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2009; Donegan, 2012; CDC, 2016). Many students tend to deny the emotional harm caused by bullying tactics such as name-calling, rumor spreading, and
teasing; however, research suggests the opposite. In a study including a sample of over 3,000 students, researchers found that 38 percent of bully victims felt vengeful, 37 percent were angry, and 24 percent felt helpless (Donegan, 2012).

Froese-Germain (2008) cautioned against thinking that just because cyberbullying takes place most often outside of school, it does not significantly affect a student in school. Students who are being cyberbullied have difficulty focusing on their schoolwork, which can, in turn, affect their grades. A high level of such bullying was consistently associated with lower grades across the three years of middle school (Juvonen & Graham, 2014). The students who were rated the most-bullied performed substantially worse academically than their peers. Projecting the findings on grade-point average across all three years of middle school, a one-point increase on the four-point bullying scale was associated with a 1.5-point decrease in GPA for one academic subject (e.g., math) — a very large drop. According to Juvonen, lead author of the study, "We cannot address low achievement in school while ignoring bullying, because the two are frequently linked." Students who are repeatedly bullied receive poorer grades and participate less in class discussions. Some students may get mislabeled as low achievers because they do not want to speak up in class for fear of getting bullied (Kowalski and Limber, 2007; Juvonen & Graham, 2014). Students who get bullied run the risk of not coming to school, not liking school, perceiving school more negatively and now — based on this study — doing less well academically (Juvonen & Graham, 2014). Cyberbullying may lead to students isolating themselves at school, which can cause the issue to worsen (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Juvonen & Graham, 2014).
Public attention about the potential dangers of electronic media has primarily centered on social networking websites. Is attention is not without merit, as young people have reported experiencing electronic aggression in chat rooms (25%) and on websites (23%). However, instant messaging appears to be the most common way young people perpetrate electronic aggression. Fifty-six percent of perpetrators and 67% of victims said the aggression they experienced or perpetrated was through instant messaging. Victims of electronic aggression also reported aggression occurring through e-mail (24%) and text messages (15%) (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2009).

A study conducted by the Cyberbullying Research Center involving a sample size of 468 students revealed that females are typically more emotionally affected by cyberbullying than males, which further illustrates the impact of the relational aggression phenomenon. The females in the study reported being frustrated (39.6%), angry (36%), and sad (25.2%) more often than males who reported lower percentages in each category (27.5%, 24.3%, 17.9% respectively) (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Kowalski and Limber (2007) examined electronic bullying among middle school students and found that girls had a higher incidence of being both the bully and the victim. Since girls are reportedly more likely to engage in relationally aggressive behaviors – indirect, covert type of bullying – it stands to reason that they would be more likely to engage in a behavior in which they can harass someone anonymously (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Research bears out this assumption. According to Cantanzaro (2011), the onset of social networking sites has allowed girls to harass each other with ease through cell phone and other electronics. Previously, girls would engage in relationally aggressive behaviors in person – calling a girl a nasty name face to face. With the introduction of cyberbullying,
that face-to-face confrontation is no longer necessary (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Juvonen & Graham, 2014). No longer is switching schools the plausible solution to the aggressive harassment; due to the Internet, the gossip and harassment (name-calling) follows the girl (Cantanzaro, 2011).

In a similar study conducted by the Cyberbullying Research Center, the emotional repercussions of cyber bullying across age groups were observed. The study discovered that anger and frustration remain the dominant responses among senior and junior high students, but students at the elementary level are more likely to feel sad as a result of being bullied (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). This is likely because children at a younger age are not dealing with the same kind of competitive social hierarchy typically found within upper level schools (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005). Rather than feeling the need to prove themselves among their peers, students at the elementary level tend to well up within the initial emotional responses to bullying (Gladden et al, 2014; Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Younger children may keep their initial emotional responses to themselves rather than acting out. Unfortunately, regardless of the initial emotional reaction to bullying, these emotions have the ability to continue to develop, with serious clinical implications (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Evidence illustrates the effects of cyber bullying on today’s youth; however, lawmakers at both the state and federal levels continue to wrestle with the issue. The infringement of students’ First Amendment rights is what originally sparked heated controversies concerning schools limiting what students could do or say on or off school grounds (Donegan, 2012; CDC, 2016). Lawmakers must wrestle with the difficult task of
defining cyber bullying, as well as determining proper sanctions for committing the act. In truth, cyberbullying is simply a variant of relational aggression, though it is conducted through online and electronic means such as social networking sites and text messaging.

Patchin and Hinduja (2012) reviewed over thirty research studies in which the prevalence of victimization by cyber bullying ranged from 5.5% to 72% of teens. The wide range in the rate of victimization was due to the different types of studies conducted – there were different demographics studied, different methodologies used such as surveys, interviews and focus groups, as well as different time frames examined such as the incidence of online harassment in a week, month, or year. Patchin and Hinduja (2012) reported that the average rate of victimization in the studies they reviewed was 25%.

While the average rate of victimization is 25% of all students surveyed, there are demographic differences that show higher rates of victimization that the authors note – gender. Gender is a demographic that significantly changes victimization rates as most of the studies reviewed by Patchin and Hinduja (2012; David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2009) report that girls are victimized at a higher rate than boys.

Kowalski and Limber (2007) studied 3,767 middle school students from six schools across the United States and found that 22% of them were involved in some type of online harassment. Of the students surveyed, 11% (407) of the students identified themselves as victims on online harassment, 7% (248) identified themselves as both bullies and victims, and 4% (151) identified themselves as bullying someone. As noted, according to Kowalski and Limber (2007), 665 of the 3,767 students surveyed in their study had been victimized online. Of the 665 students, 48% did not know the identity of their aggressor. The anonymity of the aggressor poses a challenge for individuals who are
trying to respond appropriately to these incidents. The anonymity creates a problem for girls in that they do not know if an individual, or a group is harassing them and they are unaware if the perpetrator is sitting across the room from them in class (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Hymel & Swearer, 2015). When taunting and harassment takes place on social media, it has the potential to be seen by all of the victims’ online connections and those people’s connections (Perrin et al., 2010). Not only is the victim being taunted, she is taunted in a very public format and once something is on the Internet, it is difficult to remove. Perrin et al. (2010) found that this type of harassment has practical implications in that the characteristic of being victimized via social media can cause the victim’s humiliation to grow exponentially and found depressive symptoms in 1,694 students in their study.

Relational Aggression

Aggression has been defined as behavior that is harmful to another person, which on the surface would seem to be broad enough to include the phenomenon of relational aggression. However, historically, most research methods for measuring aggression have focused on physical displays of aggression such as hitting or pushing, or acts of violent crime (Coie & Dodge, 1998 as cited in Bowie, 2007). These overt acts can be measured through observation, teacher or peer reports, or juvenile crime reports. Gender differences in overall aggression are reported to be much higher for boys than girls when measurements such a delinquent acts or violent offenses are used. For example, gender differences in aggressive acts are typically reported to be fourfold for boys versus girls by the age of 13 years and six fold at 18 years of age (Coie & Dodge, 1998 as cited in Bowie, 2007). When a student claims to be bullied, the overt types of bullying are often
what first come to people’s minds (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995 as cited in Bowie, 2007; Olweus, 2001; Catanzaro, 2011). However, there is a more covert type of bullying first identified by Crick and Grotpeter (1995 as cited in Bowie, 2007) to which girls in particular are prone.

Girls are more concerned with relationships and will therefore use methods to manipulate or damage relationships as a means of aggression (Underwood, Galen, & Paquette, 2001). The Peer Assessment of Relational Aggression and Other Aspects of Social Adjustment (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995 as cited in Bowie, 2007) includes such items as, “When mad, gets even by keeping the person from being in their group of friends” and “Tells friends they will stop liking them unless friends do what they say” (p. 713). It was not until researchers redefined measurements for aggression that we learned that girls demonstrate and equivalent prevalence of aggression when compared to boys (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995 as cited in Bowie, 2007). This covert bullying, dissimilarly referred to by various authors as *bullying*, *covert bullying*, *peer aggression*, *female aggression*, and the phenomenon of *relational aggression* is comprised of behaviors such as social exclusion, rumor spreading, and manipulating relationships, among others, has been reported as being common among females than in males (Skrzypiec, Slee, Murray-Harvey, & Pereira, 2011). Of concern is that these types of behaviors may be difficult to observe for people outside of the peer group (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995 as cited in Bowie, 2007), which can be viewed as the microsystem in the situation (Sawyer et al, 2011). In other words, parents and teachers, because they are not part of the peer group or microsystem, may not be able to recognize and identify these behaviors. As a result, girls who are
victimized may be dealing with their victimization alone, without support (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006; Skrzypiec, Slee, Murray-Harvey, & Pereira, 2011).

When reviewing literature on relational aggression studies, it is interesting to note that the phenomenon was first identified and studied in Finland (Fleshbach, 1969; Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988) and later further defined and conceptualized in the United States (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995 as cited in Bowie, 2007). Indirect aggression, a form of relational aggression, was defined as social manipulation, attacking the target in circuitous ways (Osterman, et al., 1998). When Fleshbach (1969 as cited in Bowie, 2007) initially observed first grade girls’ responses to new peers and labeled it as indirect aggression, she was defining a new phenomenon that needed further study. Fleshbach (1969) first described the phenomenon of relational aggression in an observational study, finding that first-grade girls were significantly more likely than boys to respond to an unfamiliar peer with social exclusion from the peer group.

Nearly 20 years later, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, and Peltonen (1988) continued to explore whether relational, or indirect aggression as these researchers called this behavior, was typical of middle-school-aged girls. Lagerspetz et al. (1988) used a peer rating scale to identify types of aggressive behavior children were likely to employ when angry with a classmate. The researchers found that there were significant differences between boys and girls in the use of direct (overt) and indirect (covert) aggression, also known as relational aggression. While boys became angry more often than girls, girls were significantly more likely to use indirect aggression when angry, such as persuading the peer group not to be friends with a child, or telling lies about another child.
Even though Lagerspetz et al. (1988) differentiated between indirect aggression and nonverbal aggression in their study description, their measurement instrument confounded the two concepts. Nonverbal aggression is quite often indirect or relational in nature, such as shunning a peer; however, this behavior can also include physical aggression, such as destroying a classmate’s personal property, which would involve another microsystem (Sawyer et al, 2011). Crick and Grotpeter developed and tested an instrument in the 1990s, which reliably tested and separated relational aggression from overt aggression (1995). They demonstrated that although relational and overt aggressions are related, they are also distinct concepts. As a result of their research, they emphasized that because relational aggression as a phenomenon is not always visible, such as a physically aggressive act of pushing another child, assessing the presence of relational aggression is a more complex task (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). They assert that obtaining information solely from a teacher or other outside observer may not provide reliable information. Only the peers themselves may know whether they or a classmate are excluded from an activity.

In their 1995 research, Crick and Grotpeter developed measurements for relational aggression based not only on prior research, but also on the concept that girls are more concerned with relationships and will therefore use methods to manipulate or damage relationships as a means of aggression. The scale also included items for measuring overt aggression, prosocial behavior (intended to help others), and isolation. It was not until researchers redefined measurements for aggression that they learned that girls demonstrate an equivalent prevalence of aggression, although more covert, when compared to boys.
Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Ferguson, and Gariepy (1998 as cited in Bowie, 2007) further developed the concept of indirect aggression by asking fourth through ninth graders to describe peer conflicts. The researchers found themes identified from same-gender conflicts among girls revolved around manipulation of relationships and social alienation. The researchers used open-ended questions asking 11- and 12-year-old boys and girls to describe what their peers do when angry with another peer, as well as close-ended answers. The close-ended answers included both overt acts of aggression, such as striking or pushing, and indirect aggression, such as spreading untrue rumors about a peer. The researchers used a peer measurement strategy as they felt that an individual who used indirect aggression would “probably deny being aggressive” if asked (p. 404).

The idea that relational aggression can be observed across cultural boundaries was tested then presented in 1998 by Osterman, Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, Kaukiainen, Landau, and Fraczek. The researchers conducted a large international study, which included samples from Finland, Israel, and Poland. Consistent with previous studies, female subjects, ages 8, 11, and 15 years were found to use indirect aggression significantly more than male subjects of the same age across all three age groups. Indirect aggression was defined as social manipulation, attacking the target in circuitous ways (Osterman et al, 1998). Most studies on aggression in children and adolescents focused on overt or physical aggression, primarily in males. Because researchers have historically focused on measuring overt aggression, it was mistakenly thought that girls did not exhibit the same levels of aggression as boys with peer relationships (Bowie, 2007; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Although the concept of relational aggression was identified and studied in Finland as early as 1969 (Fleshbach as cited in Bowie, 2007), it was not until fairly
recently that relevant research was conducted on measuring, defining, and distinguishing relational aggression from other types of aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995 as cited in Bowie, 2007).

**Female Relational Aggression**

Researchers have historically focused on measuring overt aggression and, therefore, mistakenly thought that girls did not exhibit the same levels of aggression as boys with peer relationships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Yet, when the relational aggression phenomenon is measured in addition to overt aggression, levels of aggression are more or less equal between genders (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Maniago, 2010).

Relational aggression is found in children as young as two years of age (Anthony & Lindert, 2010; Maniago, 2010). Relational aggression, or the purposeful intent to inflict harm on another person through a social relationship, has been identified as a form of aggression that is most often exhibited by females, yet researchers lack decisive evidence as to why (Werner & Nixon, 2005; Bowie, 2007). Historically, aggression and violence were thought of specifically as a male problem. Early views held that as a group, girls were typically not aggressive (Werner & Nixon, 2005; Bowie, 2007; Simmons, 2011).

Researchers who include more covert forms of aggression in their definition of bullying or peer aggression such as making faces or dirty gestures and intentional exclusion from a group in addition to rumor spreading, social exclusion, isolation, and speaking to someone in a hostile tone have found that, indeed, girls may be just as aggressive as boys (Olweus, 1995; Remillard & Lamb, 2005; Simmons, 2011).

As a result, research on aggression in girls has increased in recent years, and it has since been discovered that girls may be equally aggressive, though in different ways than
are boys. Crick and Grotpeter (1995 as cited in Bowie, 2007) found that girls were more apt to employ relationally aggressive behaviors such as dirty looks, social exclusion, gossip, and rumors than were boys. Researchers began to acknowledge that there are two types of aggression: physical forms of bullying that are overt in nature and the phenomenon entitled relational aggression, which is covert in nature (Gomes, 2007; Simmons, 2011). Themes identified from same-gender conflicts among girls revolved around manipulation of relationships and social alienation.

Remillard and Lamb (2005) examined relational and physical aggression and found that girls in their study reported greater levels of relational than physical aggression. However, Yoon, Barton, and Taiariol (2004) reported that while relationally aggressive behavior was originally thought to be employed by girls, a more consistent finding is that both girls and boys engage in this type of behavior, yet girls are more likely to be affected on a social emotional level than are boys. Girls use relational aggression more often than physical aggression and report being hurt more by the effects of relational aggression (Underwood, Gallen, & Paquette, 2001; Maniago, 2010).

The early research on aggression turned the myth of the good, nonaggressive girl into fact (Simmons, 2011; Yoon et al, 2004). Cultural rules against overt aggression led girls to engage in other, nonphysical forms of aggression. In a conclusion uncharacteristic for the strength of its tone, researchers challenged the image of sweetness among female youth calling their social lives ruthless, aggressive, and cruel (Simmons, 2011; Maniago, 2010). When relational aggression victimization takes place, girls are not focusing on academics, but on the problems they face with their friends (Ostrov, Ries, Stauffacher, Godleski, & Mullins, 2008) in each microsystem of involvement (Sawyer et al, 2011).
Because relational aggression is covert in nature, it often goes unnoticed as a serious problem (Ophelia Project, 2006).

Regardless of any inconsistencies in the research, researchers agree that the relational aggression phenomenon is cause for concern among adolescent girls (Yoon et al., 2004; Maniago, 2010; Simmons, 2011). Because girls are expected to be “nice,” they have been socialized to express their anger and frustration in more covert ways. Building on this hypothesis, Gomes (2007), suggests that the ways in which girls are socialized may lead then to act in covert ways. This can leave then unable to deal with anger and frustration in an effective way, which leads them to express their feelings in a way that has been seen as non-threatening such as rolling their eyes and giving dirty looks. Accordingly, the use of relationally aggressive behaviors can become a coping mechanism for girls.

Examples of relational aggression include withholding friendship, exclusion from social activities, and telling tales or gossiping about a peer; each of these behaviors executed with the purpose of inflicting punishment or retaliation (Odgers & Moretti, 2002; Ledbeater, 2010). Relational aggression includes acts such as harm to others through damage (or threat of damage) to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion (Ophelia Project 2006; Simmons, 2011). The relationally aggressive behavior is ignoring someone to punish them or get one’s own way, excluding someone socially for revenge, using negative body language or facial expressions, sabotaging someone else’s relationships, or threatening to end a relationship unless the friend agrees to a request. In such actions, the female aggressor uses relationships with a target person as a weapon (Simmons, 2011; Pipher, 1994).
Other terms connected to the relational aggression phenomenon are *indirect* aggression, which allows the aggressor to avoid confronting her target by using others as vehicles for inflicting pain, such as spreading rumors; and *social aggression*, which is intended to damage self-esteem or social status with a group of these actions centers around social interactions and interpersonal relationships mostly in school, a microsystem (Ledbeater, 2010; Simmons, 2011; Olweus, 2001; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995 as cited in Bowie, 2007). The Ophelia Project (2006) reported that 160,000 children miss school each day because of the fear of emotional torment by classmates.

In 2002, Odgers and Moretti reported that there was a growing acknowledgement among researchers that girls are increasingly engaging in aggressive behavior. The fact that girls are not only capable of using aggression to purposefully harm another, but do so on a regular basis, may startle those who believe that, in general, girls are not aggressive. There are two conceivable reasons for why this misnomer has persisted: lack of accurate measurements of relational aggression, and the failure to account for gender socialization (Murray-Close et al., 2014; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008). It is unclear whether girls are actually increasingly aggressive or awareness of the existence of girls’ aggression is simply increasing as suggested by Odgers and Moretti, or even that girls are being increasingly policed, as suggested by Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2008). In fact, Murray-Close et al. (2014) reported that studies examining youth aggression tend to fail to fully evaluate aggression in girls. This is cause for concern when trying to combat relational aggression.

**Gender, Schools, and Relational Aggression**
One cannot approach the study of the phenomenon referred to as relational aggression among today’s adolescent girls without examining how schools influence the ways girls view themselves, their bodies, and the world around them (their microsystem or social ecology) (Ledbeater, 2010; Simmons, 2011). High school is a place where girls learn about the importance of physical appearance and the social realities among friends. Studies on relational aggression focus primarily on how culture, specifically parents and the media, help to construct gender identity for girls; that means to be nice, passive, and quiet. However, schools, especially teachers, play an enormous role in gender construction and the development of a girl’s identity (Simmons, 2011; Pipher 1994). In the past, defining a bully especially in school, really meant identifying the characteristics of a boy bully whose anger is visible and physical. Brown notes that girls learn to hide their anger and aggression from view and they also take in the broader cultural message that full-fledged bullying is a boy thin; it doesn’t include acts like rumor spreading, note passing, gossip, or exclusion (2003; Pipher 1994).

We need to determine just how our culture, specifically our schools, contribute to the problem by teaching traditional gender stereotypes, dismissing girls’ feelings of anger, and by not allowing a safe place in which girls are taught to accept and appropriately handle their own anger in constructive ways (Brown, 2003; Simmons, 2011). As Brown explains, in spite of petty bickering and minor conflicts, society views female relationships as “devoid of really serious problems” (p. 13). However, the reality that relational aggression is used as an alternative to healthy, open behavior and discussion is cause for real concern. Brown examines how our culture, by creating an
environment filled with anxiety, competition, and expectations, and gender stereotypes teaches and encourages girls to turn on one another (2003; Simmons, 2011).

One reason girls experience a drop in self-esteem as they go through school is girls lose faith in their academic skills. Girls learn at a young age that the culture allows few top spots for females and in order for them to achieve such a position, either within the classroom or social group, girls learn to compete with or turn on other girls (Young et al, 2010; The Ophelia Project, 2006). As a result, girls begin to patrol other girls and punish those who strive too high or stoop below this cultural ideal for feminine beauty and behavior. Girls constantly struggle with their desire for individual achievement and success and with their loyalties toward the group (Brown, 2003, Young et al, 2010; Simmons, 2011). Unfortunately, a girl’s fear to separate her need for group inclusion and female relationship may prevent her from seeking individual paths of accomplishment. In today’s society, many girls think being bright is in conflict with being popular. The change of focus from academics to appearance and affiliation with social groups comes around middle school (Brown, 2003; Simmons, 2011). There, girls learn that good grades can interfere with popularity. By high school, cultural expectations regarding appropriate female beauty, behavior, power, and invisibility are fully internalized in a girl’s sense of self, and she begins to check and double check that other girls fit the cultural ideal of what it means to be a girl (Brown, 2003; Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006; Simmons, 2011). By high school, many girls have become practiced in voicing these misogynistic cultural stereotypes of girls and women and ascribing them to other girls (Brown, 2003). They become card-carrying members of a sexist ideology that stereotypes and judges girls and women and denigrates qualities associated with femininity. According to
Brown, these girls sell out their girlfriends, privilege their relationships with boys over girls, choose male friends over female, blame girls when boyfriends betray them, distance themselves from back-stabbing, wussy, untrustworthy ‘airheads’ or ‘clueless ones’ (p. 173).

In high school, female students are more likely to be invisible member of the classroom. Teachers interact with male students more frequently, ask them better questions, and give them more feedback (Simmons, 2011; Shandler, 1999; The Ophelia Project, 2006). The message to boys from teachers is that they are smart and will succeed as long as they behave properly, but girls tend to hear that regardless of their behavior, they may never be smart. Girls learn that being ignored has something to do with being a girl. Many girls think they, not the teachers, are to blame for their being overlooked. As Brown notes, “sometimes it’s because I think she doesn’t her us because we’re not very loud … they always say raise your hand, but when you raise your hand they never call on you” (p. 163, 166).

Girls learn at a young age that to be silent and well behaved is the accepted role for appropriate female classroom behavior. Simmons reveals that girls were told to be quiet, speak softly, or use a nicer voice about three times more often than boys, even though the boys were louder (2011 p.11). A girl’s good behavior in the classroom is praised more than her intelligence, while boys are praised for their intelligence as opposed to their behavior. When a girl’s voice is silenced, when she is treated as an invisible member of the classroom, she misses important opportunities to learn. When a girl speaks up and attempts to reveal what is unjust or wrong, she is quickly put back into her place (Simmons, 2011; Shandler, 1999; The Ophelia Project, 2006).
A girl’s perception of her possibilities, capabilities, and future goals is affected if she is consistently conditioned by a teacher to speak less and behave properly. Our schools and teachers contribute to the very problem of relational aggression by encouraging division among girls, competition for few top spots among girls, and stereotyping. As Brown explains, schools are more than a backdrop to girl fighting. They can contribute to the very real, though often unsubtle, ways to girls’ growing sense of invisibility and to the fighting and betrayals girls experience in their relationships with other girls (Brown, 2003; The Ophelia Project, 2006; Bell, 2016). Simmons argues that when a teacher sees a perpetuating girl, a teacher has no incentive to stop class (2011). Taking time to address relational aggression discord is not always as easy as yelling at a boy to remove his peer from a locker.

Because teachers do not know how to confront nonphysical acts of bullying – relational aggression – or sometimes do not see such acts, school staff members tend to turn a blind eye when it comes to disciplining the perpetrator or counseling the victim (2010; Young et al., 2006). Teachers and staff members often see girl bullying as a social skills problem or normal aspects of growing up. These acts go largely unnoticed, dismissed as a phase or simply ignored (Young et al., 2006; 2010; Marshall, 2007). Schools do little or nothing to combat the problem of the relational aggression phenomenon because they lack consistent effective and realistic strategies for dealing with such alternative aggressions. Most school personnel believe that the abuse girls subject on other girls is not abuse at all (Young et al, 2010; Young et al, 2006; Simmons, 2011).
A general attitude among teachers and school administrators has been that interpersonal aggression, or meanness, is a normative development feature of female students (Yoon et al, 2004: Young et al., 2006). This sentiment may explain teachers’ indifferent perceptions and attitudes toward the phenomenon of relational aggression. Specifically, school personnel perceive relationally aggressive behaviors as less serious than verbal or physical aggression and are less likely to intervene (Yoon et al., 2004; Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006; Young et al., 2010). When asked to respond to hypothetical situations that involve relational aggression, teachers are more likely to ignore or get less involved and are less sympathetic to the victims compared to overt aggression (Yoon et al., 2004; Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006).

Teachers’ passive approaches to dealing with relational aggression are disconcerting. Concern that stems from the absence of a consistent effort to address relational aggression is its impact on the victims and perpetrators. These students are less likely to feel safe in their school environment thus affecting their school performance (Yoon et al., 2004; Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006; Young et al., 2010). Simmons argues that this perception prevents anti-bullying strategies within a school and has limited the use of anti-relational aggression approaches, as well (2011). Simmons further argues that misdiagnosing the phenomenon of relational aggression as a social skills problem makes perfect sense in a culture that demands perfect relationships of its girls at any cost. The trouble with such a social skills argument is that it fails to questions the existence of meanness; it explains and justifies it (Underwood, Galen, & Paquette, 2001; Young et al., 2010; Simmons, 2011). As girls are told that openly voicing their anger is considered a social problem, they turn to relational forms of aggression to hide their
anger. Girls want teachers who will not only listen to them, but who will also encourage them to explore the source of their problem and discover from where their pain and anger is stemming (Underwood, Galen, & Paquette, 2001; Bell, 2016). If school personnel continue to believe that a girl’s relationally aggressive behavior is simply a form of peer pressure, of growing pains, or even a developmentally healthy experience, girls will continue to turn their anger inward and perform relationally aggressive acts against each other (Simmons, 2011; Young et al, 2010).

With the use of professional development, however, teachers and administrators can learn to recognize and deal with relational aggressive behaviors in school. Teachers and other school personnel can identify how pervasive the problem is and what the dynamics are. The use of an anonymous survey could be used to find out where and when relational aggression takes place, and what tactics are used (name calling, rumor spreading, cyber bullying, exclusion, etc. Results could be reviewed to develop policies and procedures to specifically address relational aggression, increase adult supervision is problem areas, and develop consequences for relational aggressive behavior (Bell, 2016; Young et al, 2010). Teachers and administrators must recognize the power they have by responding to a girl’s call for help by allowing her to express her feelings, especially her anger, in a way in which she can understand and grow from the experience.

**Laws and School Policies**

Not only do schools share a moral obligation to combat aggressive behavior in schools, they also have a legal obligation to protect all students from physical, emotional, and verbal abuse by others. The United States Department of Education sends our a yearly bulletin on the civil rights of students. A 2011 *Analysis of State Bullying Laws and...*
Policies outlines the public school obligations to create anti-bullying policies to protect students. School personnel who understand their legal obligations to address all harassment including the phenomenon of relational aggression under these laws are in the best position to prevent aggressions from occurring and to respond appropriately when aggressions occur (Aud et al., 2011).

Schools have a responsibility to create safe learning environments for all students. When harassment is based on a protected class and creates a hostile environment, schools have an obligation under federal civil rights laws to take action (Stopbullying.gov, 2014). Victimization by peers has only recently been an area of interest due to the school shootings and violence that has received much media attention (Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2003; Pinto, 2011; Goldman, 2010). Bullying in schools has become widely viewed as an urgent social, health, and education concern that has moved to the forefront of public debate on school legislation and policy. Increasingly, elected officials and members of the school community have come to view bullying as an extremely serious and often neglected issue facing youths and local school systems (Swearer, Limber, & Alley, 2009; Aud et al., 2011). The focus on youth bullying has intensified over the past 12 years as a catalyzed reaction to school violence that is often linked explicitly or by inference to bullying. The Columbine High School shooting in 1999 was the first of many high-profile incidents of violent behavior that was presumably tied to bullying as an underlying cause (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006; Davidson, & Demaray, 2007). It ignited a wave of new legislative action within state legislatures that aimed to curtail bullying behavior on school campuses (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006; Aud et al.,
Public concern over the physical and emotional health of bullying victims and the climate of public schools created demand for a government response.

In 1998, The United States Department of Education set forth an initiative to take action on school violence. Legislation was passed to provide funding through the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative. Legislators have passed laws in 45 states since 1998 to combat bullying (High, 2010). Only some of those laws address areas or relational aggression. In the aftermath of the 1999 Columbine shootings and in response to a bullying-related suicide, the state of Georgia became the first state to pass bullying legislation, which required schools to implement character education programs that explicitly addressed bullying prevention (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006; Davidson, & Demaray, 2007). Originally developed in 1999, Georgia updated the law in 2010.

At that time, the Bully Police website gave the new and improved law a grade of A++, increased from the original grade of B (High, 2010). In order to make the perfect grade, states need specific points outlined in the bullying law. States must use the word “bullying” in the explanation of the law; it must clearly be a bullying law with definitions of the word bullying outlined in the law, as well as a clause for cyberbullying. A good law should mandate anti-bullying programs with a specific date in which the program should be implemented (High, 2010). Protection against lawsuits for the school staff dealing with each bullying situation should be included. The law must mandate counseling for victims who suffer due to episodes of bullying. There also must be consequences for schools that do not comply. Georgia is compliant on all points with the
2010 update, according to High (2010); most recently Georgia was compliant in 2015 (Stuart-Cassel, Bell, & Springer, 2011).

All but a few states have passed multiple laws, amendments, or revisions that address bullying in schools (Stuart-Cassel, Bell, & Springer, 2011). Profiling the current status of legislation in states requires identifying multiple provisions currently in each state’s education code, or, in a few instances, in the criminal code. To profile the content and scope of bullying laws across states, a report developed by the U.S. Department of Education adapted a framework and identified in its December 2010 “Dear Colleague Letter” a format that organizes legislative and policy provisions in bullying laws into 11 categories or key components (Stuart-Cassel, Bell, & Springer, 2011). This study, however does not evaluate the impact of such components.

Most bullying laws do conform to research-based definitions by emphasizing the intentional nature of bullying behavior and the harms inflicted on targeted victims State laws most frequently define bullying as acts imposing “general harms,” “threats of fear of harm,” “physical harm” or “property damage.” Less frequently laws described acts that “disrupt the school setting,” “interfere with learning,” or “cause psychological harm” (DESE, 2010; Aud et al., 2011; Donegan, 2012). However, the lack of including these factors impacts the social fabric of our culture, specifically our schools, helping to create a society of girls who are unable to adequately cope with conflict, anger, and aggression (Simmons, 2011; Young et al, 2010).

Similar to speech and harassment laws at the federal level, individual states continue to wrestle with defining the problem and what legal sanctions to take when a
violation occurs adapted a framework (Donegan, 2012; Aud et al., 2011). Unfortunately, it took a number of high-profile cases, and even some suicides, to bring the issue to the attention of many states’ courts and legislatures. The review of state bullying legislation reveals clear differences in the terms used to define bullying and harassment and in how bullying laws are framed. In the majority of states, bullying laws are drafted as comprehensive sections of new legislation or as a series of consecutive statutes. These laws often share a core structure that includes: a) a preamble or statement of purpose; b) definitions; c) requirements for school districts to develop local bullying policies; d) prescribed components of local district policies; e) other school district requirements; and f) requirements for state education agencies (Aud et al., 2011). The potential violation of a student’s civil rights in harassment cases may prompt schools to establish separate policies and procedures for addressing bullying and harassment, or may encourage districts to apply the more rigorous standards for investigating harassment claims to any bullying incident to protect schools from liability. The conflation between bullying and harassment also may create challenges for schools around interpreting how they must legally respond to different types of bullying and harassment claims (Aud et al., 2011).

In the October 26, 2010, “Dear Colleague Letter,” from Arne Duncan, the Department’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) reminded school districts that student misconduct that falls under the school’s bullying policy also may trigger legal responsibilities under one or more of the federal civil rights laws. The letter stated that harassment “creates a hostile environment when the conduct is sufficiently severe, pervasive, or persistent so as to interfere with or limit a student’s ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by a school (Aud et al.,
State legislative approaches also set different expectations for how bullying policies are formulated. These expectations reflect different perspectives on where local control over policy should be permitted, and the degree to which mandatory and more prescribed policy requirements are desirable.

As a result of this, while definitions of bullying adopted in the early legislation often focused on overt physical or verbal acts, currently, thirty-six states include specific statutes addressing cyberbullying or the use of electronic communications to inflict harm on victims. Twenty-nine states define bullying in a way that encompasses relational aggression, while eight states clearly limit bullying behavior to physical or verbal acts. The phenomenon referred to as relational aggression is defined as behavior that is intended to disrupt or harm a person’s self-esteem or social status. It is typically used to undermine another child’s relationships with friends or their feelings of inclusion in a social group (Swearer, 2008; Lee, 2009; Aud et al, 2011).

Recent state legislation and policy addressing school bullying has emphasized an expanded role for law enforcement and the criminal justice system in managing bullying on school campuses. Though historically, authority over youth bullying has fallen almost exclusively under the purview of school systems, legislation governing the consequences for bullying behavior reflects a recent trend toward treating the most serious forms of bullying as criminal conduct that should be handled through the criminal justice system (Aud et al., 2011). This shift is evident in the growing number of state bullying laws that now require mandatory reporting by school personnel of offenses that may violate criminal statutes. Seven state bullying laws now include provisions for criminal sanctions
for bullying behavior, either by mandating school personnel to report bullying acts that potentially violate criminal law or by requiring policies to contain clear procedures for determining when and how violations should be reported to law enforcement (Aud et al., 2011; Donegan, 2012).

An increasing number of states also have introduced bullying provisions into their criminal and juvenile justice codes. For example, North Carolina recently passed a new law to criminalize cyberbullying, making it an offense punishable as a misdemeanor for youths under 18. Responding to off-campus behavior can create challenges for schools in identifying students responsible for cyberbullying offenses and investigating complaints (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). Schools that impose disciplinary consequences for off-campus conduct have often faced legal challenges for allegedly violating students’ rights to free speech (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Aud et al., 2011). The uncertainty surrounding the legal authority of schools to enforce rules governing off-campus behavior and the increasing number of court cases brought against districts may have led some elected officials and educators to rethink the scope of their legislation. As the body of legislation is continually amended, many states’ definitions have expanded to encompass a broader range of direct and indirect actions to include gestures, rumor-spreading, or other forms of social exclusion that meet criteria for relational aggression. Also, the growth in cyberbullying behavior and the challenges it poses to schools has resulted in more states amending legislation to address cyberbullying among students (Aud et al., 2011; Donegan, 2012).

The history of legislative activity around school bullying in states that have not
yet enacted bullying laws suggests that enumeration of protected groups or characteristics
has been the subject of controversy in crafting legislation, revealing divergent
perspectives on the importance and benefit of naming classes that are specifically
protected under bullying laws and policies (Aud et al., 2011, Stopbullying.gov. 2014;
CDC, 2016). Proponents in favor of inclusion argue that naming groups provides a clear
directive to schools about the need to safeguard populations that are most vulnerable to
bullying, without affecting protections for other students (Aud et al., 2011; Donegan,
2012). Presently, ten states either mandate or encourage districts to establish bullying
prevention task forces, safe schools committees, or other local advisory groups to address
school-wide prevention; twenty-five states mandate that districts develop and implement
training for school personnel; twenty-nine state laws require local bullying policies to
contain a definition of bullying and 23 states require that local definitions conform to
those contained within the law; thirty-six state laws require that district policies establish
reporting procedures; and twenty-two laws require district policies to either mandate or
encourage reporting of bullying incidents by school personnel. The states of Hawaii,
Michigan, Montana, and South Dakota are the only remaining states without state
bullying statutes, though each have pending bills in their state legislatures. Forty-six
states nationwide, including the four without legislation, introduced bills within their
2011 legislative sessions through April of 2011 to combat bullying in their local school
systems (Aud et al., 2011, Stopbullying.gov. 2014; CDC, 2016). Every state has passed
some sort of law or policy regarding bullying. Montana is the only state that has passed a
statewide policy discussing bullying without having enacted a statute specifically
prohibiting it. All other states have at least passed a law defining bullying and authorizing
school officials or other authorities to take appropriate action to stop it. There is currently no federal law specifically addressing bullying, but other federal laws, such as civil rights and nondiscrimination laws, may require schools to intervene with certain types of bullying (Stopbullying.gov. 2014; CDC, 2016).

Although anti-bullying laws vary from state to state, they generally focus on listing the specific behaviors that constitute bullying. These behaviors can include teasing, threats, intimidation, stalking, harassment, physical violence, theft, and public humiliation. States may also identify certain characteristics or traits of students who are often targeted for bullying, as well as provide guidance to school staff regarding how to address bullying issues (Stopbullying.gov. 2014; CDC, 2016).

These policies may not benefit schools or students unless they can be successfully implemented. For example, legislation that defines prohibited bullying behaviors, and specifies graduated and substantial sanctions, will often require extensive implementation procedures, such as reporting requirements, investigation, and procedures for implementing the sanction (e.g., expulsion). Whether these necessary actions are feasible within resource constraints cannot be determined through a policy review alone.

The Safe Schools Improvement Act of 2015 amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to require states to direct their local educational agencies (LEAs) to establish policies that prevent and prohibit conduct, including bullying and harassment, that is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive to: (1) limit students' ability to participate in, or benefit from, school programs; or (2) create a hostile or abusive educational environment that adversely affects their education. The Act also requires LEAs to also provide: (1) students, parents, and educational professionals with
annual notice of the conduct prohibited in their discipline policies; (2) students and parents with grievance procedures that target such conduct; and (3) the public with annual data on the incidence and frequency of that conduct at the school and LEA level. Other requirements include: (1) the Secretary of Education to conduct, and report on, an independent biennial evaluation of programs and policies to combat bullying and harassment in elementary and secondary schools; and (2) the Commissioner for Education Statistics to collect state data, that are subject to independent review, to determine the incidence and frequency of the conduct prohibited by LEA discipline policies. Once again, there is no mention of the phenomenon of relational aggression (CDC, 2016).

The Ohio Department of Education is the administrative department of the Ohio state government responsible for primary and secondary public education in the state. Fair and effective school-wide disciplinary policies and procedures are key for safe and supportive learning environments consistent with Ohio School statutes. In schools with safe, supportive learning environments where youth become connected to school, students are less likely to engage in disruptive and destructive behavior and more likely to graduate from high school (Ohio.gov, 2016). The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) offers a variety of bullying prevention resources for families, schools and communities. These resources include a model anti-bullying policy and related presentation materials, a webinar series and links to helpful websites. Districts can take advantage of these tools for help in meeting their legal requirement to establish a policy prohibiting harassment, intimidation and bullying (Ohio.gov, 2016). This State Board of Education-approved model policy contains procedures for reporting, documenting and
investigating incidents of harassment, intimidation, and bullying (including cyber bullying) as explained in the model policy and Ohio Revised Code. Once again, relational aggression is not listed as an incident to be reported. The document delineates responsibilities for school personnel and presents student intervention strategies. The policy also states the requirements for districts to:

• Consult with students, parents, school employees, volunteers and community members in developing policies and programs;
• Publish policies in student handbooks and employee training materials;
• Locally report on a semiannual basis a summary of reported incidents;
• Provide training on local policies to the extent that state or federal funds are appropriated for these purposes (Ohio.gov, 2016).

**School Interventions and Programs**

Programmatic intervention and programming for the phenomenon of relational aggression is limited at best. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) (2015) does not include relational aggression in its terminology, but does address cyberbullying. Two programs, The Empower Program and the Ophelia Project (2006) have been developed to address relational aggression in schools and create awareness of relational aggression in communities (Young et al., 2006). Both Rachel Simmons and Rosalind Wiseman are staff members of the Empower Program, a national, nonprofit educational organization founded in 1992 and based in Washington, DC. They seek to empower young people and adults to create safe schools and communities by providing effective prevention strategies to address bullying and other forms of peer aggression. Services include long and short-term curriculum-based workshops and classes,
programming for parents and community groups, youth leadership development as well as public outreach and advocacy (Simmons, 2011; Young et al., 2006).

The Ophelia Project was founded in 1997 by what started as a local book review on Pipher’s book Reviving Ophelia (1994) and quickly evolved into a grassroots movement of hundreds of volunteers dedicated to increasing social and emotional support for children, teachers. In 1998, while listening to the stories of adolescent girls in advisory councils, The Ophelia Project discovered an issue they had not begun to address—how girls hurt each other (Pipher, 1994; Shandler, 1999). With the support of groundbreaking researchers, they learned about relational aggression and the harm to both girls and boys. Before the books on relational aggression were written, and well before the term relational aggression was embedded in our national lexicon the Ophelia Project was on top of this issue. There were no intervention programs specifically addressing the phenomenon of relational aggression so using adolescent volunteers, The Ophelia Project developed the first program in the country by training high school students to work directly with middle and elementary students in learning about relational aggression and parents (Pipher, 1994; Shandler, 1999). These volunteers blended their experience, insight, energy, and love to create a safer social climate for youth. The project worked toward creating a healthier environment for girls while supporting Common Core standards. The project focused on creating a positive school climate and invites parents to be a part of the change process with the hope that educating parents about what the phenomenon relational aggression is and how it may be used will put them in a more effective position to discourage the behaviors and to work with other parents to encourage prosocial alternatives. In the last years of Ophelia, a number of
influences caused the organization to decline until it reached a point where it could no longer sustain operation. A growing market in aggression prevention programs and systemic change coupled with a declining ability for schools to financially and feasibly implement programming was one of many key factors (Nixon & Werner, 2010). There is still a Sister Project in Rancho Mirage, CA, called The Ophelia Project of Coachella Valley that has a vibrant organization providing volunteer mentors for at risk adolescent girls to help them graduate from high school and go on to higher education. They have a 100% success rate.

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) (2015) has been implemented in schools and actually supports Common Core standards. The program, however, does not include relational aggression in its terminology, but does address cyber-bullying. With over thirty-five years of research and successful implementation all over the world, OBPP is a whole-school program that has been proven to prevent or reduce bullying throughout a school setting. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is designed for students in elementary, middle, and junior high schools (students ages five to fifteen years old) to improve peer relations and make schools safer, more positive places for students to learn and develop. Research has shown that OBPP is also effective in high schools, with some program adaptation. All students participate in most aspects of the program, while students identified as bullying others, or as targets of bullying, receive additional individualized interventions. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is designed to improve peer relations and make schools safer, more positive places for students to learn and develop. Goals of the program include: reducing existing bullying problems among students; preventing the development of new bullying problems; and
achieving better peer relations at school (2015). Because the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* is not a curriculum, its core principles, rules, and supportive materials can be adapted for use by any program that children and youth attend on a regular basis, such as after-school programs, camps, or community youth programs.

School-wide preventions/intervention strategies must be developed and implemented to address both parties in the relational aggressive interaction, not just overt bullying behavior. Too often, prevention and intervention strategies focus only on changing the behavior of the bully, yet it is the bully – victim and occasional witness relationships that must also change (Yoon et al., 2004; Young et al., 2006). Because relational aggression is just emerging as an educational concern, school-based responses, programs, and interventions need to be based in sound intervention principles, supported by program evaluation and further rigorous research. Programs and interventions need to address both targets and aggressors. Understanding how the behavior is shaped and reinforced in specific environments is vital to the intervention process (Young et al., 2006). Creating a culture of mutual caring, support, and advocacy among students seems to be critical to effective intervention efforts (Young et al., 2010).

**The Systems-Ecological Framework**

The ecological systems theory was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner who believed that a person's development was affected by everything in their surrounding environment. Ecological systems theory, also called development in context or human ecology theory, identifies five environmental systems with which an individual interacts. This theory provides the framework from which community psychologists study the relationships with individuals' contexts within communities and the wider society. A
child's development is affected by their social relationships and the world around them. Bronfenbrenner divided the person's environment into five different levels: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. The mesosystem consists of the interactions between the different parts of a person's microsystem. The mesosystem is where a person's individual microsystems do not function independently, but are interconnected and assert influence upon one another. These interactions have an indirect impact on the individual. The exosystem refers to a setting that does not involve the person as an active participant, but still affects them. This includes decisions that have bearing on the person, but in which they have no participation in the decision-making process. The macrosystem encompasses the cultural environment in which the person lives and all other systems that affect them. Microsystem refers to the institutions and groups that most immediately and directly impact the child's development including: family, school, religious institutions, neighborhood, and peers. Chronosystem is the patterning of environmental events and transitions over the life course, as well as sociohistorical circumstances. For example, divorces are one transition. Since its publication in 1979, Bronfenbrenner's major statement of this theory, *The Ecology of Human Development* has had widespread influence on the way psychologists and others approach the study of human beings and their environments. As a result of his groundbreaking work in "human ecology", these environments - from the family to economic and political structures - have come to be viewed as part of the life course from childhood through adulthood (1979). This study's focus is based on the systems-ecological framework (social-ecological framework) involved with peer aggression, which rears its ugly face in many
situations in students’ lives (Barboza et al, 2009). A student’s microsystem can change throughout the day depending on where he or she is – with a peer group or the school environment or even at home (Duncan, 2006). According to Sawyer et al (2011), the dynamics of the aggression extend beyond the aggressor and victim and include the school, and community, as well as the individuals involved, and the research indicates the likelihood that aggressive behaviors and the stress related to them follow students throughout this system in which they function. In his “General Strain Theory,” sociologist Robert Agnew (2006) hypothesized that the strain and stress exerted on an individual as a result of bullying and aggressive behaviors can manifest itself in problematic emotions that lead to deviant behavior. In a fact sheet produced by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, loneliness, humiliation, and insecurity were each reported as further manifestations of the initial emotional responses to the bullying process. These feelings have the potential to cause students to fear going to school. These responses can lead to more serious clinical implications such as depression, which can continue to develop into even worse problems (Ericson, 2001; CDC, 2016).

The cyclical repercussions of this process are alarming if they lead a victim to antisocial behaviors when they try to find an outlet for their emotions. Offenders are likely to utilize bullying tactics as an outlet for other insecurities or problems in their lives (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2009). The extreme consequences of bullying are suicidal thoughts or thoughts of violent revenge (Anderson & Smith, 2003). Statistically both victims of cyber bullying as well as offenders proved much more likely to have attempted “bullycide,” the act of committing suicide due to the effects of bullying, than youth who had not been affected (High, 2007; CDC, 2016).
Summary

Creating a school environment that guarantees physical safety and psychological security of students is an important task to promote academic, social, and emotional competencies. Bullying, cyber bullying, and the main focus - relational aggression – are complex phenomena that undermine many important aspects of student adjustment. The covert nature of relational aggression should not be ignored in the examination of school violence and in how administrators address student needs. The research findings support that relational aggression is maintained and further perpetuated in many contexts including schools. Timing and preparation of interventions is critical in establishing new, positive social structures, and any systematic intervention effort may be more needed and cost-effective for the purpose of prevention.
Chapter Three
Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate and understand the experiences school administrators have had with the phenomenon of relational aggression and how student needs are being met. In addition, this study strived to provide an emic view of student relational aggression and the resulting impact this aggression has on adolescence. Congruent with the purpose of this study, the systems-ecological framework was used. The method helped this researcher illuminate and understand the experiences of relational aggression described by school administrators who participated in the study, and, in turn, helped to answer the research questions.

This section focused on the background for conducting this study and the qualitative research methodology for this study and the process for data collection.

Previous Studies

With a gap in research pertaining to relational aggression and intervention and/or prevention programs, there is a necessity to investigate the phenomenon further. Scholarly searches utilizing the phrasing, “how many qualitative and/or studies have been done on relational aggression?” databases revealed hundreds of sites, but upon further scrutiny, more than half failed to incorporate the phenomenon of relational aggression in their text. One of the most extensive works to date on the subject of relational aggression was completed by Underwood (2003). Much of the research conducted on the phenomenon of relational aggression and girls has involved quantitative methods (Crick
Research Design

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study to examine and investigate the experiences of school administrators who have encountered or dealt with relational aggression in the school community. Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2013). To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes (Creswell, 2013). The final presentation includes the “voices” of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem and its contribution to the literature or call for change (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Qualitative researchers seek to understand meanings people have constructed and determine how people make sense of their experiences in the world (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research is a broad approach to a study of social phenomena used to develop solid proposals for ethical research practice as a plan of inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Qualitative researchers believe that there are multiple realities and multiple constructions and interpretations of those realities. Researchers conducting qualitative inquiry strive to make sense of those interpretations of a particular phenomenon (Merriam, 2009).
Survey research was conducted using research grounded in system-ecological framework explained extensively in the framework section. In survey research, the researcher selects a sample of respondents from a population and administers a standardized questionnaire to them. The questionnaire, or survey, can be a written document that is completed by the person being surveyed, an online questionnaire, a face-to-face interview, or a telephone interview. For the purpose of this research, a questionnaire was utilized to gather information from Ohio school administrators.

**Institutional Review Board Approval**

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program) was completed with a report date of February 8, 2015, as was the required human subjects research training for investigators, staff, and students. Approval for an expedited research study was sought, and an exempt status (Protocol # 210311 SBE IRB) was confirmed February 24, 2016, from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Toledo prior to data collection. Exempt status was confirmed as this study presented no more than minimal risk to human subjects. The risks were no greater than those normally encountered in everyday life.

**Participants**

Careful participant selection is an essential step in the phenomenological research process. It is imperative to choose participants who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2013). For this study, the phenomenon under investigation is relational aggression and administrator experiences.

Due to the fact that school administrators are the agents for enforcing board policy, the study subjects selected for the research were superintendents in the state of
Ohio. After some research, a practical and efficient method for collecting data from this diverse population was developed. An initial contact was made to NWOCA (Northwest Ohio Computer Association) inquiring about the policies regarding using electronic mail as an instrument for collecting data for research. Once provided with an explanation for use of the system, the determination to approve the project and authorize the release of the survey through the computer network was granted. The permission provided enabled the data collection process to extend to the targeted population. The survey and consent form was sent as a Google Form to all 613 superintendents in the state of Ohio.

**Research Questions and Instrumentation**

The research questions guiding this study are:

- Have Ohio school boards and administrators developed policies and procedures designed to protect the rights and meet the needs of students affected by relational aggression and, if so, how are they being implemented?
- What is the status of relational aggression education efforts or curricular programs in Ohio schools?

To address these questions, a survey questionnaire was developed and sent to the school districts via electronic mail (Appendix A). The questions on the survey were developed after extensive and careful consideration of a review of current literature (pertaining to relational aggression. Survey questions are listed parenthetically below in accordance with their appropriate category of information to be gathered. The questionnaire was designed to ascertain:

1. The extent of knowledge school administrators had regarding the legal aspects of relational aggression issues impacting schools. (There is a Board of
Education adopted policy in place in my district that specifically addresses relational aggressions and procedures. I have substantial background regarding the laws that apply to relational aggression.)

2. If school boards across the state of Ohio have adopted policies that specifically address the rights and needs of students affected by relational aggression. (If there is an adopted policy in place, what year was it adopted? If a policy exists or is in development, the policy contains specific procedures for the prevention of relational aggression. The school system is committed to eliminating relational aggression from the schools and facilities.)

3. Whether the curriculum does, or should, contain some relational aggression components as a comprehensive approach to educating high school students about relational aggression. (The district has a definition for relational aggression, which includes activities engaged via computer and phone use. Relational aggression education and awareness are addressed in the schools’ course of study.)

External review of my questions was requested during face-to-face conversations to determine the validity and accuracy of the questionnaire. In order to insure the validity of the questionnaire, an expert in the field of relational aggression and bullying was consulted in construction of the questions. The evaluation and input from the expert (Appendix B) was valuable as his expertise in the area of bullying established validity through a logical analysis and ensured that the aspects of the questions related to phenomenon of relational aggression were accurate. After explaining the goal of the
research and analyzing the questions on the instrument, he considered the questionnaire valid.

**Data Collection Method**

The questionnaire was distributed to the subjects through Google Forms via the use of electronic mail. As previously indicated, the electronic mail made the distribution of the survey instrument effective. The final consideration was the assurance of anonymity of the respondents. By establishing this procedure, anonymity was assured while, at the same time, providing a means to monitor the number of responses. Of the 613 public school districts listed on the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) website, 47 superintendents’ email addresses were not listed, which left a total of 566 superintendents to whom the Google survey was sent. The first survey was emailed on May 6, 2016, with a follow-up email survey on May 24, 2016. The superintendent of the local district in which I teach offered to send follow-up emails with a personal note on June 7 and July 1. The last survey was emailed on September 19, 2016, which made the total number of responses 77.
Chapter 4

Findings

This study deals with the knowledge of what administrators know about relational aggression and how student needs are addressed. A secondary aspect of the study seeks to ascertain the status of relational aggression education efforts or curricular programs in Ohio schools. School administrators throughout the State of Ohio contributed to the pool of data used to develop the narrative regarding the degree to which school boards have recognized and reacted to the presence of relational aggressive behaviors at schools.

The survey was designed to assess and determine important areas of interest being studied:

1. The extent to which school administrators are aware of the phenomenon relational aggression.
2. The degree to which school policies have included the term relational aggression and not just the term bullying.
3. The amount of knowledge that school personnel have regarding the law on the issue of House Bill 276 Anti-Harassment, Anti-Intimidation or Anti-Bullying.

Demographic information about the survey respondents was collected, as well.

Subjects

Ohio school districts of various sizes were included in the survey process. Specifically, school districts ranging in size from 0-599 through 2500+ were the classifications assigned to the school districts. The results of the survey will be used to provide observations about school districts regardless of individual size. In this study, school districts of 100 to 599 students are referred to as small; 600 to 999 medium; 1000
to 1999 large; 2000 to 2500+ very large. To clarify the numbers used, the original survey included district area classifications of rural, small town, urban, and large city, but this portion of the electronic survey was inadvertently omitted during the email process due to a possible glitch in technology.

Of the 566 superintendents to whom the survey was emailed, 77 responses were received yielding a response rate of 13.6% after sending the survey via email on five separate dates. Visser, Krosnick, Marquette, & Curtin (1996) reported that surveys with lower response rates (near 20%) yielded more accurate measurements than did surveys with higher response rates (near 60 or 70%). Manfreda, Bosnjak, Berzelak, Haas, & Vehovar’s (2008) work, of 45 studies examining differences in the response rate between web surveys and other survey modes, estimated that the response rate in the web survey on average is approximately 11% lower than that of other survey modes (as cited in Fan & Yan, 2010).

Part of the low response rate might be linguistic, not philosophical in nature. School districts simply do not use the term relational aggression. For example, a superintendent from a school district with a student population of 2,360 stated, “Relational aggression is not a term we use in the school district. Our policies cover intimidation, bullying, harassment, hazing, violence and dating. I can reference these policies when answering your survey if you wish. Please know that school districts do not use the term ‘relational aggression’ in policy.” Two other respondents from school districts with a student population of 2500+ commented, “Do you mean ‘bullying’ when you use the words ‘relational aggression’?” These statements actually offer valuable information and evidence that supports the thesis of this study. A Google search of
relational aggression used in Ohio school law yielded returns of “no information found.” Even House Bill 276 only lists “Anti-Harassment, Anti-Intimidation or Anti-Bullying” in its amendment adopted by the State Board of Education July 10, 2007, and despite recent media attention, research regarding the prevention and treatment of relational aggression is sparse. The report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education Analysis of State Bullying Laws and Policies, Washington, D.C. 2011 (www2.ed.gov) also does not list relational aggression in any of the fifty states’ bullying legislative language.

Component #1 of the Survey

The first subsection of the survey was aimed at determining whether Ohio school districts had official board-adopted policies in place. There were four items included in the particular subsection. The items will be presented in order. The first item was

1. There is a Board of Education adopted policy in place in my district that specifically addresses relational aggression issues and procedures.

   | Yes | No | Do Not Know |
--- | --- | --- | ------------|

In response to this first item, seventy-four (74) percent of the respondents indicated that their school district did, in fact, have an officially adopted board policy. Twenty-three point four (23.4) percent of the districts were definitive in their response that the local school board had not yet adopted a policy. Districts that were unsure whether a policy existed totaled six point five (6.5) percent.

The second survey item read:
2. **If there is an adopted policy in place, what year was it adopted? 20___**

The earliest year of adoption listed was 1996, and the most recent was 2016. The mode (the year that the majority of the schools listed as the year of adoption) was 2013. Some respondents indicated not applicable (N/A), several indicated “none,” and some respondents offered explanations such as: “We have a bullying policy. It is not called relational aggression policy; therefore, I checked ‘no.” “The closest thing we have is the anti-harassment policy first in: 96.” “Policies are in place that address behaviors exhibited by relational aggression but the policies do not speak directly to the term relational aggression.” “No policy specifically uses the term “relational aggression.” “(1-29-13 and 4-18-16) 2 policies that touch upon it.”

The third survey item requested the revision date(s) for adopted policies:

3. **Has the policy been revised and if so, what year(s)? 20___**

The school districts that have an adopted policy in place as of the years 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2015 and have not revised their school policies totals twenty-three districts. The most recent revisions took place in 2016 for five districts followed by 2015 with eight districts making revisions. In 2014, six school districts revised school policies, and thirteen districts reported revisions to policy in 2013, followed by four districts making reported revisions in 2012. The oldest date indicated was 2001, reported by one district. Thirteen district administrators commented, “N/A or unknown.” One respondent reported, “Yes, on a regular schedule.” Another responded, “NEOLA review twice per year.” One of the administrators who responded with N/A also included, “I see many of your questions use
the “relational aggression” nomenclature. I am unsure if it is your intent to substitute bullying. As it not explicitly stated to substitute, I am going to take your questions literally. If your questions refer to bullying, then you will need to disregard my data in your analysis.”

The fourth item applied to those respondents who did not have a policy in place:

4. Although there is not a policy currently in place, one is being developed.

Of the seventy-seven administrators responding, fourteen (18.2%) indicated “yes,” thirty-seven (48.1%) responded “no,” and twenty-six (33.8%) responded “do not know.”

Component #2 of the Survey

The remainder of the survey, with the exception of the demographics section, was presented in a Likert Scale format. The responses were designated in the following manner:

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Not sure/Do not know
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

This section (questions 5-16) aimed at determining the use of district policies and procedures, administrator and faculty knowledge level (of relational aggression and House Bill 276), district handbook use, relational education and awareness, reporting of
relational aggressive behaviors, handling of victimization, and to whom students report relational aggressive acts.

5. **If a policy exists or is in development, the policy contains specific procedures for the prevention of relational aggression.**

Of the forty-eight respondents who affirmed the existence of a policy, thirty-one (40.3%) administrators agreed that such procedures exist while seventeen administrators (22.1%) strongly agreed that specific procedures for the prevention of relational aggression. Seventeen administrators (15.6%) were not sure/did not know, twelve administrators (15.6%) disagreed, and three administrators (3.9%) strongly disagreed that policy for specific procedures for the prevention of relational aggression exists.

6. **The school system is committed to eliminating relational aggression from the school and facilities.**

A majority of the administrators responded in the affirmative with forty (51.9%) responding “strongly agree,” and twenty-eight (36/4%) responding with “agree.” However, five administrators (6.5%) responded “Not sure/Do not know,” two administrators (2.6%) responded “disagree” and “strongly disagree” respectively.

7. **Administrators, teachers, and other district employees are alert to possible circumstances or events that might include relational aggression.**

Affirmative responses of “strongly agree” were reported by twenty-five (32.5%) administrators and “agree” was reported by thirty-three (42.9%) administrators. Thirteen
(16.9%) administrators indicated they were “not sure/do not know,” with five (6.5%) and one (1.3%) who “disagree” and “strongly disagree” respectively.

8. Students should be required to notify school officials if they have been the victims of relational aggression.

Once again, a majority of the administrators responded in the affirmative with thirty-three (42.9%) indicating they “strongly agreed” and twenty-seven (35.1%) who “agree.” Of the other respondents, nine (11.7%) responded “not sure/do not know,” four (5.2%) “disagree,” and four (5.2%) “strongly disagree.”

9. I have substantial background regarding the laws (i.e. House Bill 276) that apply to relational aggression.

A majority of the administrators responded in the affirmative with eleven (14.3%) responding “strongly agree” and twenty-two (28.6%) responding “agree.” Of the other responses, twenty (26%) indicated “not sure/do not know,” twenty-one (27.3%) “disagree,” and five (6.5%) “strongly disagree.”

10. The district has a definition of relational aggression, which includes activities engaged in via computer and phone use.

Affirmative responses of “strongly agree” and “agree” were reported by twenty-three (29%) and twenty-nine (37.7%) respectively by administrators. Ten (13%) reported “not sure/do not know,” twelve (15.6%) indicated they “disagree,” and three (3.9%) responded “strongly disagree.”
11. The teaching staff has been adequately in-serviced regarding the district’s policies and procedures for the treatment of aggressive behaviors.

Of the forty-seven administrators who affirmed this statement, twelve (15.6%) “strongly agree” while thirty-five (45.5%) “agree”. Of the remaining thirty respondents, fifteen (19.5%) reported “not sure/do not know,” twelve (15.6%) responded “disagree,” and three (3.9%) responded “strongly disagree.”

12. Information on the district’s policies and procedures addressing the issue of relational aggression is included in the student handbook.

A majority of the administrators responded in the affirmative with twenty-three (29.9%) “strongly agree” and thirty-two (41.6%) responding “agree.” Twelve (15.6%) administrators responded “not sure/do not know” while five (6.5 %) responded “disagree” and “strongly disagree” respectively.

13. Information on the district’s policies and procedures addressing the issue of relational aggression is included in the staff handbook.

The majority of the administrators, twenty-six (33.8%) responded “agree,” and fifteen (19.5%) responded “strongly agree.” A larger number, eighteen (23.4%), responded “not sure/do not know,” twelve (15.6%) responded “agree,” and seven (9.1%) “strongly disagree.”

14. Relational aggression education and awareness are addressed in schools’ course of study.
Only seven (9.1%) administrators “strongly agree” with this statement while twenty-four (31.2%) “agree,” and twenty-five (32.5%) responded “not sure/do not know.” On the negative side, fifteen (19.5%) administrators “disagree” and six (7.8%) “strongly disagree.”

15. Students and teachers report incidents of relational aggression to administrators in the district.

Of the sixty administrators who affirmed this statement, twenty-two (28.6%) “strongly agree,” and thirty-eight (49.4%) “agree.” Fifteen administrators (19.5%) responded “not sure/do not know,” three (3.9%) “disagree,” and one “strongly disagree.”

16. There have been reports of relational aggression from students in the district.

The majority of the administrators, thirty-two (41.6%), responded “agree,” and fifteen (19.5%) “strongly agree.” Eighteen (23.4%) responded “not sure/do not know,” ten (13%) “disagree,” and two (2.6%) “strongly disagree.” (Table A).

Summary

The data collected would indicate that boards of education in the state of Ohio have recognized the need to implement policy and procedures to address relational aggression if they not already. There seems to be some inconsistency in translating policy into practice. This may be due to a lack of specificity in the board policy and subsequently developed procedures. The lack of specific legal knowledge could also be a contributing factor. The term relational aggression does not seem to be clearly understood
or written into school policy. These observations will be further developed and supported in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5
Discussion

Findings and Interpretations

With implementation of the survey method of procuring data, this qualitative study sought to discover new knowledge about relational aggression to better explain and understand the potential lived experience of school administrators who have experienced student relational aggression and what is being done to address students’ needs. The lived experience resonates in the social-ecological perspective as it examines close relationships that may increase the risk of experiencing aggression as a victim or perpetrator. A person’s closest social circle-peers, influences their behavior and contributes to their range of experience. The community, or ecology, explores the settings, such as schools, in which social relationships occur and seeks to identify the characteristics of these settings that are associated with becoming victims or perpetrators of relational aggression (CDC, 2016).

Ohio public school administrators, as well as the literature reviewed, provided rich information of experiences in regard to relational aggression (or lack thereof) about what administrators know and how student needs are being addressed. Based on the data provided by Ohio public school administrators who responded to the survey, Boards of Education have policies in place that specifically address relational aggression issues and procedures. Such data contradicts the statement sent as an email by one superintendent from a large Ohio school who stated, “school districts do not use the term ‘relational aggression’ in policy. Policies cover intimidation, bullying, harassment, hazing, violence and dating.” When asked if school policy contains specific procedures for the prevention
of relational aggression, the responses in the affirmative and those in the negative range were fairly comparable, perhaps due to a linguistic misnomer with the term relational aggression on the part of the respondents. Outcomes were strongly affirmative in response to students being required to notify school officials if they have been the victims of relational aggression.

In regard to knowledge of House Bill 276, each school district in Ohio is required to establish a policy prohibiting “harassment, intimidation, or bullying.” The Ohio Board of Education adopted policy 4114.123, *Behavior and Rights: Prohibit Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying*, on December 18, 2007. to include violence in the dating relationship. In addition, HB 276 requires districts to post a summary of all reported incidents of “harassment, intimidation, or bullying” on its web site. However, in response to knowledge of House Bill 276, a higher percentage of administrators were not familiar with the bill. The information helped fulfill the purpose of this study by offering a glimpse of the knowledge base of relational aggression as it relates to Ohio public schools and how student needs are being met. Due to the newness of some state laws, the impact relational aggression has had on public education is considerable. Logical actions should explore whether educational efforts are adequate in the addressing the issues of relational aggression. With the data gathered through the survey method, an inquiry could be furthered made into whether adequate efforts are being made to educate students about the effects of relational aggression and legal aspects surrounding any form of bullying, which includes relational aggression.
As research indicates, girls have a tendency in their social relationships to form what are known as cliques. These cliques have a hierarchical structure and dominated by leaders and are considered exclusive so that not all girls who want to be members are accepted (Simmons, 2011). As suggested by Crick (1998), relational aggression includes making up stories to get someone in trouble, talking badly about a person behind her back, starting rumors, and spitefully excluding someone. These findings have implications for administrators and educators who are responsible for adolescent girls in their school system. The findings also have implications for school administrators, teachers, and school counselors who supervise the spaces of a school and who assist adolescent girls in developing their well-being while learning to cope socially. A key factor for school personnel is assisting adolescents in developing healthy relationships, which is ultimately how adolescents relate and build relationships with each other that is vital to their successful development.

Girls are aware of the practice of relational aggression and have learned the precise methods of using it or, if the victim, avoiding it. Simmons explains how girls view their gender in relation to other females:

Girls describe themselves to me as disloyal, untrustworthy, and sneaky. They claim girls use intimacy to manipulate and overpower others. They said girls are fake, using each other to move up the social hierarchy. They describe girls as unforgiving and crafty, lying in wait for a moment of revenge that will catch the unwitting victim off guard and, with an almost savage eye-to-eye mentality, “make her feel the way I felt” (16).

The social fabric of our culture, specifically our schools, helps to create a society of girls who are unable to adequately cope with conflict, anger, and aggression. But schools need to take relational aggression seriously. Not only do schools have a moral obligation to combat overt bullying in the schools, they have a legal obligation to protect all students...
from emotional, verbal, and covert abuse (relational aggression) by others. Based on administrator responses to the survey, a low percentage of respondents are knowledgeable and/or aware of the legal ramifications of House Bill 276, which could lead to legal issues for districts. Administrators must integrate programs for educators to learn about nuances of relational aggression as a form of bullying that takes on a different method than what has been previously understood or experienced by educators, administrator, and students before such state rulings.

The United States Department of Education sends out a yearly bulletin on civil rights for students. An October 26, 2010 letter outlines the public school obligations to create anti-bullying policies to protect all students. The Department Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin. Furthermore, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits schools to discriminate on the basis of sex (http://www2.ed.gov). According to the law, school districts may violate these civil rights statutes and the Departments implementing regulations when peer harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, or disability is sufficiently serious that it creates a hostile environment and such harassment is encouraged, tolerated, not adequately addressed, or ignored by school employees. School personnel who understand their legal obligations to address harassment under these laws are in the best position to prevent such acts from occurring and to respond appropriately when it does (http://www2.ed.gov). Therefore, schools that have not created or enforced anti-bullying policies may in in violation of Federal Law but, even without such laws, schools need to make every effort to address all forms of bullying including relational aggression to ensure the safety of all students. In
response to the survey question about relational aggression education and awareness in schools’ course of study, the majority of the administrators responded as not having such a program in the course of study or being unaware of such a program.

One problem with the language, though, is the constant use of the word ‘bullying.’ The word has long been associated with playground antics, boys shoving each other into lockers, or a punch in the hallway. The term relational aggression must be added to school law verbiage. According to most survey responses, Ohio school districts presently do not include relational aggression in school policy, handbooks, or curriculum. This information relates back to the information from a superintendent in a large Ohio public school district in regard to the use of the term relational aggression. Many policy changes in our schools need to take place in order for students to recognize, accept, and learn to handle their angry feelings. First, school educators and administrators need to stop believing that bullying only involves visible physical aggression and to recognize that aggression comes in a multitude of forms through a variety of behaviors. In fact, students are aware of the variety of ways in which students aggressively treat others. Girls are taught to believe that relational aggression is an appropriate and acceptable way to behave. School administrators must also not assume that a girl’s anger is unique and personal, that it is simply a social skills problem and a phase from which a girl usually and successfully moves. As Brown notes (2003), school administrators and personnel must help girls locate and understand from where their aggression comes.

There is little training for teachers and school administrators to spot and understand the near invisible cycles of popularity and isolation among girls. Encourage your school to provide teacher education on alternative forms of aggression and to understand how and why girls and boys are encouraged to express their anger and aggression differently (Brown, 2003, p. 213).
School districts need to stop insisting on the ideal notions of femininity, which too often silence girls and their anger. By expecting this nice girl image, an image that silences a girl’s voice, her anger, and is obviously detrimental to a girl’s well-being, schools teach our girls that they are different than boys and, thus, create an unfair and unsafe teaching environment. Brown (2003) notes, “should we pay close attention to their anger, as well as the discomfort it arouses in us, we may find ourselves participating in a different kind of conversation, open to other meanings and new pathways (p.197).

Teachers and administrators should be trained to identify female relational aggression and adopt policies that respond to hidden forms of aggression in beneficial ways for both the aggressor and victim. The OCR report states, “the school may need to provide training or other interventions not only for the perpetrators, but also for the larger school community, to ensure that all students, their families, and the school staff can recognize harassment if it occurs and how to respond” (http://www2.ed.gov). Brown discusses the importance for our school districts to train teachers to recognize relational aggressive acts, not as a social skill problem, but as a serious form of bullying.

Teacher training should not stop at understanding how relational aggression plays out among students. There should be efforts to train staff to respond to relational aggression in productive ways. If a school intends to adopt an anti-harassment or bullying prevention program, with the inclusion of relational aggression, it is essential that the program not only address power imbalances as they play out in peer groups, but encourage critical thinking about ways in which some such imbalances are normalized and subtly encouraged by schools and other institutions (Brown, 2003). As survey
responses indicated, a larger number of administrators implied little to no relational aggression education and awareness is being addressed in schools’ course of study.

Teaching girls to accept and confront their anger must begin at an early age and it must be consistent every year through every grade level. Very little training would be required to train teachers to identify and discipline alternative (relational) aggressions. Through enforceable public rules, we will begin to scratch the surface of the problem.

Simmons contends, if we do not make alternative (relational) aggressions a clear responsibility of school officials, children will continue to be vulnerable to abuse (2002). Administrators and teachers want to believe they create a safe and supportive school environment for students, but if they are not educated about certain forms of hidden behavior, like relational aggression, they will lack the tools to help their students to learn about themselves, aggress in healthy ways, and become better citizens. Through training, teachers will learn to recognize the feeling of their female students and perhaps make changes within their regular teaching and management practices to recognize girls as equal members of the classroom. If female students are able to connect with their teachers, especially their female teachers, they will have an equal opportunity to succeed in the class.

Schools also need to teach females to use anger wisely and not to simply hide it from others and hurt the girls they may care about in a circle of peers. Schools must teach girls to walk away when it is important, negotiate verbally when they can, to realize that anger and aggressive feelings can be the impetus for creative and productive actions. These visible forms of aggression allow girls to understand and express their anger in
healthy, acceptable ways, which allows girls to confront their anger and, thus, the confidence to express themselves freely (Simmons, 2002).

Teachers, administrators, and school staff can be educated in staff meetings and professional development workshops on what constitutes relational aggression and its effects. Administrators must declare and enforce a no tolerance policy for relational aggression in their school or school system. Administrators, teachers, and community members should be offered a list of books related to the covert bullying of girls. Such books include: *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* (Simmons, 2002) and *Queen Bees and Wannabees: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and Other Realities of Adolescence* (Wiseman, 2002). This reading could lead to a school study on the topic of girls and relational aggression and could include current articles published on the topic.

Schools must create and adopt anti-bullying policies that specifically include relational aggression. Legally, it is the school’s “responsibility for addressing harassment incidents about which it knows or reasonably should have known … and separate the accused harasser and the target, providing counseling for the target and/or harasser, or take disciplinary actions against the harasser” (http://www2.ed.gov). There is desperate need for consistent guidelines for teacher and administrative intervention. By helping girls and boys understand the school culture and their place within it, both can become more aware of the social injustices regarding cultural stereotypes of feminine behavior. Girls are then given information and the tools to act upon any anger and deal with that rationally (Brown, 1998). Schools should be safe places for girls; a place where creative actions can take place to initiate change.
Relational aggression is a problem in many school settings and must be addressed in order to provide a safe and positive learning environment for all students. Research shows this phenomenon is as psychologically harmful as other more well-known overt types of aggression, such as physical bullying and fighting. Given that relational aggressive behaviors are quite complex, programming to reduce relational aggression must take into account important developmental, cultural, gender, and contextual considerations (Leff et al, 2010). Schools can play an important role in ensuring that the experience of girls in terms of relational aggression is heard, acknowledged, and considered important.

Perhaps a more important implication for schools is that although females are thought to have lower prevalence rates of aggression and antisocial behavior than males, current research suggests they are actually at greater risk of psychological maladjustment (Espelage, Mebane and Swearer, 2004). While Crick and Grotpeter’s earlier research clearly showed relational aggression to be more characteristic of girls, ‘in which the goal is to hurt others by damaging their reputation or their relationships’ (as cited in Espelage, Mebane and Swearer, 2004, p. 16), the findings support Espelage et al.’s more recent view that relational aggression plays a unique role in youth psychological and social adjustment. Finally, in a profession where so many teachers are women, there is the need for us to reflect on our own relationships with each other in light of our middle and secondary school experiences. Most importantly, we must discard the belief that practices of relational aggression are natural and unavoidable, and take action to support our female students to learn new ways of relating to each other through learning how to be
open and honest, so they can express their emotions and formulate solutions to their conflicts (Brown, 2003; Espelage, Mebane and Swearer, 2004).

**Implications for Future Research**

There are many possibilities for further research in this domain, which would hopefully increase understanding of the development of relational aggression and eventually suggest possible prevention or intervention strategies, such as parenting education, for better child social development outcomes. Other possible studies include, but are not limited to, school districts that address relational aggression and the number of incidents of bullying reported to see if there is a correlation; a study of size and/or location of schools and their reported incidents of relational aggression compared to different sized/located schools in Ohio; a study describing the types of interventions/programs being implemented to see if relational aggression is addressed in practice, not just by name.

Although prevention and intervention programs for relational aggression are still in the early stages of development and evaluation, a number of these programs show quite a bit of promise and help direct the field in terms of future research and practice implications (Leff et al, 2010). One such program addresses the complex social-ecological contexts. Relational aggressors often exhibit peer relationship challenges and psychosocial adjustment difficulties (social), while at the same time being viewed as quite popular and influential within their peer group (ecology). Research suggests that involvement in relational aggression is associated with serious adjustment problems, including concurrent and future social maladjustment (e.g., problematic friendships; rejection), internalizing problems (e.g., depressive symptoms), and school avoidance.
Despite the burgeoning literature focusing on the harmful and damaging nature of relationally aggressive behavior, this research has only recently begun to be used to inform school-based prevention and intervention programming (Leff et al., 2010).

Programming should address the complex social-ecological contexts. Relational aggressors often exhibit peer relationship challenges and psychosocial adjustment difficulties, while at the same time being viewed as quite popular and influential with their peer group. (Card et al., 2008; Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick 2010). Given this, intervention programs should integrate more opportunities for youth to demonstrate their social influence and potential leadership in a prosocial manner. Drawing from research documenting the relatively high correlations between relational and physical aggression and some of the similar maladjustment profiles experienced by these youth, it is recommended that future interventions for relational aggression build on empirically supported programs for physical aggression (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick 2010). Drawing from research documenting the relatively high correlations between relational and physical aggression and some of the similar maladjustment profiles experienced by youths, it is recommended that future interventions for relational aggression build empirically supported for physical aggression.

Second Step (Grossman et al., 1997), a program for students through middle school and I Can Problem Solve (ICPS) (Shure, 2001), a program for students through grade six are examples of nationally known and well-respected programs that have added curriculum and/or evaluations related to relational aggression. Given the extremely complex nature of relational aggression, it is also important that key individuals within the school and community are integrated into the intervention team. This approach is
most clearly evident in the WITS (Walk away, Ignore, Talk it out, Seek help) program in which teachers, counselors, administrators, and school police officers serve as key implementation leaders. How well a program is integrated within a school and wider community may also be a crucial factor for the program’s sustainability and long term success (Grossman et al, 1997; Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick 2010). More research is needed on the cost-effectiveness and efficacy of these approaches and for programs developed and implemented for students in high school.

An area of research that has not been explored is emotional regulation, or the processes a person uses to monitor his or her emotional responses, as well as the subsequent behavioral reaction, to a given situation (Bowie, 2007). Children who are unable to regulate their physiologic emotional reactions to stimuli in their environment are at risk for misinterpreting social cues as threatening and may react in an aggressive manner. Past research has found that emotional dysregulation typically results in extrinsic behaviors for boys such as overt aggression and oppositional disorder but results in intrinsic behaviors for girls such as depression and anxiety (Bowie, 2007). By only using traditional measures of overt aggression, researchers may not have identified episodes of direct relational aggression as aggressive behaviors.

Before we can develop interventions to prevent relational aggression, we need to more fully understand the concept of relational aggression and its psychopathology. Taken together, the research focusing on relational aggression underscores the importance of targeting this form of aggression when designing programs for aggressive youth (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010). The scientific literature has been relatively slow to inform relational aggression interventions; however, several researchers have begun to
use this burgeoning literature base to update ongoing interventions that did not include relational aggression in prior trials, as well as to develop new programs with a concentrated focus on relational aggression (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010). This information is helpful for school administrators as they examine existing programs and/or interventions that will be suitable to their student population and locale.

Another important issue for future work in this area will be to obtain longitudinal data that would further clarify the direction of effect between social-psychological adjustment and relational aggression and victimization and, in particular, to examine possible reciprocal associations (Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001). In contrast to research on aggressive children, relatively few studies have examined the victims of aggression, particularly victims of relational aggression, especially in the upper grade levels. However, extant work on peer victimization indicates that, like peer aggressors, victims of peer aggression also experience significant levels of psychological distress (Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001). Based on responses from the survey, the survey data highlights the point that the covert form of bullying, relational aggression, is not on school administrators’ agenda as it is not part of school policy in the state of Ohio. Therefore, it is suggested that school practitioners (teachers, administrators, and counselors) consider their school’s needs and resources in conjunction with the mode of operation, target population, and preliminary findings for each of the promising existing programs in order to determine which program would best serve their school. Notably, although many general bullying programs may target relationally aggressive behaviors, this study did not reveal any programs that have fully examined their effectiveness on relational aggression. Until more programs target and measure outcomes specifically
related to relational bullying and victimization, it is important to recognize that general bullying programs require systemic evaluations related to relational aggression and victimization before large-scale implementation to address relational aggression (Leff, Wassdorp, & Crick. 2010).

Future work would benefit from increased attention to theoretical models that will begin to explicate the manner in which relational forms of aggression and victimization develop, the process by which they lead to subsequent adjustment difficulties, and the associated psychosocial factors that also contribute to similar outcomes. This would provide an important extension and elaboration to research over the past decade that, along with this study, has supported the importance of relational aggression and victimization for children and adolescents. This work would also benefit from investigating children and adolescents from both normative and clinically referred samples to better examine aggression, victimization, and adjustment across a broader range of severity than has been included in prior studies on relational aggression and victimization. By doing so, students whose school personnel are aware of relational aggressive behaviors feel their needs are being met and their administrators understand the phenomenon and are taking the problem seriously.

There exist many lines of research beyond the role of educational administration that exist in this area. Prospective research in this area seems to have many avenues to pursue. More research that carefully considers the subtle and not-so-subtle contexts of relational aggression would be helpful. We know that relational aggression happens, but we do not yet fully understand the contexts that create and maintain its use in schools.
We need to understand relational aggression from both an individual and a system perspective.

Longitudinal research that considers the long-term consequences for targets and aggressors is needed. This line of research could include consideration of how families and communities create and maintain the use of relational aggression. Considering the perspectives and experiences of both targets and aggressors continues to be an important line of investigation. Similarly, investigation comparing children who are perceived to be popular yet are not well liked by children who are identified as sociometrically popular is needed (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). As basic research accumulates, intervention research should be carefully designed and evaluated. It is likely that effective interventions will vary with the developmental demands. As programs are developed and implemented, careful program evaluation is essential (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006).

**Conclusion**

Relational aggression is real. Teenagers are dying, administrators are in the dark, and school districts are not implementing programming and/or interventions at an adequate rate. There is a student need, and this need for safety and security must be addressed by school administrators. There is literature to substantiate findings in regard to relational aggression. Turning a blind eye to a harmful phenomenon can turn deadly and/or lead to legal issues.

This study suggests that relational forms of aggression and victimization are distinct constructs among adolescents and may be particularly relevant for this developmental stage compared with overt behaviors. When examining adolescents’ psychological adjustment, researchers should consider overt forms of aggression and
victimization in conjunction with relational aggression and victimization as well as social support within school communities. Identification of adolescents who are relationally aggressive or relationally victimized will be important for understanding varied social-psychological adjustment outcomes in school settings.

Educators must not stand by idly and allow relational aggression to run rampant in schools. When students are not taught coping strategies, they will develop their own, which may result in unhealthy choices that could lead to future problems. Interventions have to be in place in early childhood in order to improve coping skills of students and prevent the negative effects of relational aggression (Ostrov et al, 2008). The key is that relational aggression should not be ignored; by middle school the problem is often too far out of control and serious emotional effects have occurred. Educators and parents must all remember Phoebe Price, a fifteen-year-old who endured such incessant aggression at school that she could no longer endure the pain. Nine of her tormentors were charged in her death (Goldman, 2010). Educators cannot overlook the problem of relational aggression any longer.

The answer to relational aggression is not an easy one. Our schools must recognize and understand relationally aggressive behaviors among female students so they stop perpetuating the behavior. Schools have the responsibility to “eliminate the hostile environment created by harassment, address the effects, and take steps to ensure that harassment does not occur” (http://www2.ed.gov). The emotional damage that results from relational aggression should not be taken lightly. Many women remember being the victim, and perhaps they remember because the source of the aggression was never discussed or resolved. With the help of teachers, administrators, and the school
community, girls can find their voice, discover their true identities, be taught to handle their own aggression, and develop ways in which their anger can be used constructively in resolving problems and disagreements.
References


Beebout-Bladholm, T. M. (2010). *Teachers’ responses to bullying situations: The


Bullying and dropping out: Is there a connection? (2012). Retrieved from Not in Our Town Website: https://www.niot.org/blog/bullying-and-dropping-out-there-connection-0


victims and victims who become bullies (bully-victims) at rural schools. *Victims and Offenders*. 1, 15-31.

Duncan, A. (2012). U. S. Secretary of Education


Journal of Catholic Education, 10 (2). Retrieved from website:

http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol10/iss2/12


http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/fs2001


American Psychologist. 70(4), 293-299.


Putallaz, M., Kupersmidt, J. B., Coie, J. D., McKnight, K., & Grimes, C. L. (2007). A


# Table 1

## Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Superintendent</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Level</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior High School</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District/Central Office</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(There is some overlap as three respondents replied, “middle school and junior high school,” and one administrator responded, “junior high school and high school.”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Enrollment</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-599</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600-749</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>750-999</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000-1999</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2499</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2500+</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item Number</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A

Administrative Survey
Female Relational Aggression and Education Issues

A dissertation is required as partial fulfillment to qualify for an Educational Doctorate (EdD) degree. The following questions address both procedural and attitudinal aspects of the school administration in regard to female relational aggression - harm within relationships that is caused by covert bullying or manipulative behavior. Examples include social exclusion, “the silent treatment,” or spreading gossip and rumor via email. This tends to be manipulative or subtle and may not appear as typically aggressive behavior.

The primary purpose is to determine the degree of knowledge that school administrators have in regard to the effects of relational aggression on educational institutions. The secondary focus is to measure the amount of information regarding relational aggression that is being made available through curricula and courses of study.

There is a Board of Education adopted policy in place in my district that specifically addresses relational aggression issues and procedures.

☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ DO NOT KNOW

If there is an adopted policy in place, what year was it adopted?  20_______

Has the policy been revised and if so, what year(s)?  20_______

Although there is not a policy currently in place, one is being developed.

☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ DO NOT KNOW

The following questions are answered on a scale of 1 (one) to 5 (five). The scale is as follows:

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Not Sure/Do Not Know
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree
If a policy exists or is in development, the policy contains specific procedures for the prevention of relational aggression.

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

The school system is committed to eliminating relational aggression from the schools and facilities.

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Administrators, teachers, and other district employees are alert to possible circumstances or events that might include relational aggression.

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Students should be required to notify school officials if they have been the victims of relational aggression.

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

I have substantial background regarding the laws (i.e. House Bill 276) that apply to relational aggression.

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

The district has a definition for relational aggression, which includes activities engaged in via computer and phone use.

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

The teaching staff has been adequately in-serviced regarding the district’s policies and procedures for the treatment of aggressive behaviors.

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Information on the district’s policies and procedures addressing the issue of relational aggression is included in the student handbook.

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5
Information on the district’s policies and procedures addressing the issue of relational aggression is included in the staff handbook.

☐ 1  ☐ 2  ☐ 3  ☐ 4  ☐ 5

Relational aggression education and awareness are addressed in the schools’ course of study.

☐ 1  ☐ 2  ☐ 3  ☐ 4  ☐ 5

Students and teachers report incidents of relational aggression to administrators in the district.

☐ 1  ☐ 2  ☐ 3  ☐ 4  ☐ 5

There have been reports of relational aggression from students in the district.

☐ 1  ☐ 2  ☐ 3  ☐ 4  ☐ 5

DEMOGRAPHICS

Position ☐ Superintendent  ☐ Asst. Principal  ☐ Principal
☐ Assistant Superintendent  ☐ Dean

If currently a building level administrator, type of building:

☐ Middle School  ☐ Junior High  ☐ High School

The total enrollment in your district:

☐ 0-599  ☐ 600-749  ☐ 750-999
☐ 1000-1999  ☐ 2000-2499  ☐ 2500+
Appendix B

Bill Geha - Intervention & Prevention Specialist

Sylvania Schools

August 2000 – Present (16 years 3 months)

Bill has been in education for 47 years. He began his teaching career at St. Clements and St. Francis High School. He then spent 28 years at Washington Local Schools as a teacher, prevention specialist and counselor; 14 years with Sylvania Schools as the District’s intervention/prevention specialist; and as a drug counselor with Springfield Local Schools for the past 3 years.

Bill is an internationally certified prevention specialist, certified drug counselor, co-director of America’s Pride Drug Prevention Team of Toledo, and founder of the P.E.A.C.E Project, a nationally recognized anti-bullying program.

As a specialist in student assistance, Bill has worked as a consultant for the Ohio Resource Network, as well as working with the Cree Indians of Canada and the Navajo Indians in the Southwest on developing prevention programs and strategies.

Bill has designed and implemented over 14 programs that focus on respect, relationship and the well-being of children.