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ABSTRACT

GIRL DRAMA: BEHIND THE SCENES

by Rashida Savage-Gentry

The purpose of this study was to explore how adolescent girls navigate conflict. This research study was designed to understand the various forms of mediation or conflict resolution between adolescent girls, explore the performance of conflict, as well as investigate the possibility of consistency in mediation forms implemented. From an interactionist approach this exploration attempted to understand the ways in which adolescent girls make sense of their life situations and the ways in which they go about the process of conflict mediation on a day to day basis, through their accounts of meaning, interpretation, activities and interactions throughout their experiences. The roles of the peer group or social community in this process were further explored. The results of this overall study suggested that the experience of girl drama is a normal process for some adolescent females. The results further provided an understanding of how the experience of conflict navigation may have an impact on identity construction.

Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes

A Dissertation

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Two young ladies, Kayla and Alicia were brought to the counseling office because the two were arguing in the lunchroom.

"What seems to be the problem?" The counselor asked.

Both young ladies sat emotionless and refused to acknowledge the issue at hand. Kayla shrugged her shoulders, while Alicia remained unexpressive with a blank stare.

Kayla began. "Well, she don't like me and she keep tellin people that she wanna fight me. So I walked up to her in the lunchroom, asked her why she keep talkin bout me, and I told her if she wanna fight, then it's whatever…"

"Is that true Alicia?" the counselor asked.

Finally Alicia responded. "Yea it's true that she came up to me in the lunchroom wit her friends askin do I wanna fight- but I ain't never say I wanna fight her. People been telling me she wanna fight me. I don't know what her problem is wit me, but whatever, I ain't trippin. She can say what she want, but I ain't much for talkin…"

The counselor interjected, "Is that a threat Alicia?"

"Naw it ain't no threat. I ain't got time to argue back and forth wit her bout nothin…and if she don't like me she don't like me. But she ain't gone be comin up to me with her friends like I'm scared, like I won't do nothin bout it. That's what she won't do." Alicia responded.

Meanwhile Kayla remained silent, contemplating her next move. Kayla knew that her friends had told her that Alicia wanted to fight her, but after she thought about it, she never really heard Alicia say it to her directly. In fact the only time the two had ever had an exchange of words was in Science class. The two were assigned to work on a project together, and Alicia asked if she could work alone and Regina, one of Kayla's friends said that the reason Alicia didn't want to work with Kayla was because Alicia didn't like Kayla. But looking back on the situation, Alicia never said anything directly to Kayla, she simply asked to work alone.

Throughout my experience interacting with adolescent females as an educational administrator, scenarios like the one previously described, are encountered frequently. In some

cases it is a simple misunderstanding or breakdown in communication that leads to the conflict. In other cases the foundation has more legitimacy when relational aggression is displayed, and one party feels as if she has been wronged by the other party, ostracized, gossiped about or made fun of. Ultimately, in many cases the drama surrounding the conflict entails some culminating event -- whether there is a verbal confrontation, similar to the one described above, or a physical altercation. Regardless of the foundation of the conflict, it has become evident that adolescent girls mediate conflict in a variety of ways. From a research perspective, this research study will introduce an understanding of the various forms of mediation or conflict resolution between adolescent girls, explore the performance of conflict, as well as investigate the possibility of consistency in mediation forms implemented. This knowledge will help inform professional practices of educational practitioners and further provide an understanding of the rationale behind these variations.

Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes was a case study which consisted of an inquiry process of understanding conflict with adolescent girls, based on how girls understand conflict in a school setting. The resulting information from this study will positively impact the existing knowledge base because it places emphasis on a deeper understanding of girl – to –girl conflict by looking closely at participants' words, actions and records. The topic of conflict mediation for adolescent girls is one in which variables cannot be easily identified, and while some theories are available surrounding this topic, limited theories exist that explore the ethnic or socioeconomic implications of this topic, which suggests that future theories need to be developed. This study will add to the literature and inform the field by beginning to fill the void with respect to this topic.

The goal of this study was to discover emergent themes and patterns relative to conflict navigation which became apparent after close observations, careful documentation, and thorough analysis of this topic. This research study further provides a detailed view of the topic. Contextual findings will also contribute to the existing knowledge base.

Why Study Adolescent Females?

Adolescence is a critical, transitional time for females which is why this age was the focus for this study. According to Erikson (1950), the development of a self-observing ego, can be a tremendous achievement for girls. This age and the subsequent achievement may also mark a genuine crisis for girls because it creates both a moment of opportunity and danger. During development girls may be subjected to different perspectives which may allow them to develop a

heightened sense of how they appear to others, and to see themselves as others see them. The phenomenon of girl conflict among early adolescent girls illustrates the complex interrelationship between personal and social identity. Exploration into the world of "girl drama," not only revealed the ways in which girls enact and perform their identities, but provide us with a useful window into the ways in which the social informs the personal and the personal transforms the social in the construction of identity.

The importance of friendships and social conformity pressure may increase during adolescence at a time when adolescents have an interest and a greater capacity to participate in interpersonal relationships (Petersen, Leffert & Graham, 1995). Girls of this age report more peer issues and conflicts than boys, and in some cases they perceive those events as more stressful than boys (Compas et al., 1993). The stress associated may be because girl's identity is associated more with interpersonal relationships than compared with boys in the same age range. In *Understanding Girls' Friendships, Fights and Feuds: A Practical Approach to Girls' Bullying*, Valerie Besag (2006) suggested that although we know little about the dynamics of girls' friendship bonds; the reasons for the instability of their social relationships, the role individuals play in the disputes, and the precipitating factors relating to the conflicts, we must learn how to explore and understand the social forces that influence girls' behaviors. This understanding can be further developed through an exploration of identity construction, and how gender, race or socioeconomic status informs this construction.

Identity Construction: Some Factors to Consider

Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes investigated the techniques that girls use to navigate conflict within their reality – specifically at school with their peers. This exploration made human action the focal point, and used this foundation as the basis for a further understanding of what in the identity construction may be an ongoing, dynamic process -- a characteristic of oneself that is modified as one undergoes experiences in each facet of their lives. Erikson (1968) supported this assertion through his definition of identity, which is constructed through the choices people make in response to sociocultural, historical and institutional realities (Waterman, 1988).

Erikson (1968) further argued that identity is not to be considered solely in personal terms, but must be integrated in terms of culture. In this context, culture will be referred to the way of life adolescent girls learn from their interactions with others. It includes the way they talk

about or see the world, and it is further dynamic, which means that it constantly experiences change, depending upon the forces within it. *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes* explored the impact culture has on identity formation and the strategies that girls use to navigate conflict. Through exploration of the impact of culture on identity formation, commonalities between ethnicity and socioeconomics were identified. The role of communication – its multidimensional means of interpretation through language and the use of symbols were also further explored.

Hertzler (1965) defined language as a "culturally constructed and socially established system of standardized and conventionalized symbols, which have a specific and arbitrarily determined meaning and common usage for purpose of socially meaningful expression and for communication in a given society" (p. 85). Language can be produced at will and can represent a reality that other symbols cannot. It is a set of words used for communication and representation. These words serve as symbols, spoken or written and are the basis for all other symbols. To determine meaning, a shared understanding of what these symbols represent must be developed. This study attempted to explore the significance of the use of language and symbols and the role each plays in the acts of conflict mediation or relational aggression.

Mead (1934) suggested that symbols are significant because they are meaningful not only for the actor, but also for the user. The user of symbols uses them to intentionally give meaning she believes will make sense to the other. Further citing Mead (1934), Charon (1992) suggested that symbols are one class of social objects used to represent whatever people agree they shall represent. They are social objects used by the actor for representation and communication. We tell others something about what we think, who we are, and what our intentions may be. We are able to communicate through the use of symbols. The multi-dimensional use of symbols was explored in this research study to gather a further understanding of the implications these interpretations have on how girls mediate conflict.

The role of symbols and developing an understanding of what various things represent is essential to the understanding of how girls navigate conflict, in order to get a real understanding of what actually causes the conflict and why it continues to perpetuate in some cases. There may be various cultural competencies at play here. For example, actions interpreted as symbols may further contribute to the conflict that exists between parties. Using the previous example, the fact that Kayla confronted Alicia about fighting may not have been as significant if Kayla had not

confronted Alicia with a group of friends. In this case, the group representation may have symbolized a need for Alicia to prove that she wasn't afraid.

More than Words- A Look at the Performance of Conflict

As girls navigate conflict, this experience may be considered a performance because each person plays a role during this experience. The roles that are played are often dictated by a causal relationship that is experienced during this process. Citing Mead, (1934), Charon (1992) supported this assertion. Pragmatists concentrate on action, on what people do, rather than who they are as individuals or as parts of groups (Charon, 1992, p. 119). People play the role of actors, and their action is continuous, a constant never-ending process referred to as a stream of action (Charon, 1992). Simply stated, a stream of action is the sequence of events that takes place in our lives. For adolescent females the stream of action could be what happens during the course of a school day. The significance is that the actor does not stop acting along the stream. Many decisions are made along a stream of action that lead us one way rather than another way. The stream of action is again, the sequence of events that we experience. We become whatever we do because of a series of decisions that reaffirm, slightly alter or, change decisions.

Acts are social objects the actor pulls out of the stream of action to decide something is present. Each act is named, its name is social and it changes as our use of it changes. Each act begins with defined goals, and each end's with goals achieved, altered or, forgotten (Charon, 1992, p. 125). Citing Mead (1934), Charon (1992) describes four stages of the individual act: impulse, perception, manipulation, and consummation. *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes* explored each of these stages using conflict as a metaphor.

Through this research study elements of social interaction were revealed that may be seldom noticed. These social interactions may help in the understanding of the lived experiences of adolescent females. These social interactions may further be explored in detail for the purposes of understanding the conflict that exists between girls, but there are several interpersonal rituals or common courtesies that we all demonstrate in our day to day interactions with others. As adults, violations of these rituals or courtesies may not necessarily result in verbal disputes or physical altercations, but this modification can be attributed to a difference in the social environments that we experience everything from society to interaction to self ultimately depends on performances and the roles we play as actors and audience within the construct of society.

This research study does not really try to rationalize the true reason why girls engage in conflict but provide a perspective on what it means to be normalized in our society. This study further provided opportunities for discussion and deconstruction of relationship patterns between adolescent females. Examining the relationship between gender role identity and relational aggression also shed light on the methods that enable these unhealthy communication and relationship patterns to exist. The reality is that adolescent girls mediate conflict in various forms. *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes*, explored the various forms of mediation or conflict resolution between adolescent girls, the performance of conflict, as well as investigated the possibility of consistency in mediation forms implemented. The next chapter will provide a review of the literature that significantly impacts this topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes, was a case study that explored strategies used by adolescent females in navigating conflict. It further explored the process of conflict mediation as a performance and the potential existence of commonalities between socioeconomic status and race. This literature review will provide a foundation of youth culture in its current form, and the role of language. The concept of "girl drama," will further be explored by describing what it looks like in context and clearly defining terms that are pertinent to this study. This review will further investigate the normalcy of conflict experience within adolescent females, and identify the key players within this performance. The role of identity construction for adolescent females will be surveyed through this review, as well as the impact of gender, race and socioeconomic status on the performance of conflict.

Girl Drama-- What does it really look like?

While the phenomenon of girl drama has evolved over the years, some of the characteristics of this drama have changed, while many have remained the same. Regardless of how the characteristics surrounding girl drama are shaped, there is one unifying characteristic that they contain—aggression. Some aggressive behaviors don't cause physical harm; others are more indirect, manipulative and can lead to emotional turmoil or psychological harm.

The definition of social aggression is pretty consistent across literary spectrum. Cairns & Cairns (1994), Cairns (1988), and Xie (1998) all consistently defined social aggression as a non-confrontational means of using the social community as a vehicle for attack. In this case the social community would be considered groups of friends or cliques of girls, and the behavior may include the use of gossip, social exclusion or social alienation of a selected female. Relational aggression on the other hand has consistently been defined as behavior that damages another child's friendship or feelings of inclusion by the peer group, but still may include some of the same behaviors—social isolation, exclusion, ignoring, gossiping, and/or withdrawing or threatening to end a friendship (Xie, et. al, 2002). The key distinction between forms of aggression is whether or not the behaviors are considered non-confrontational or confrontational – which can be determined based upon whether or not there is an event which leads to a confrontation between both parties.

Confrontational behavior can be described as approaching another student with the intent of engaging in a physical fight or intimidating the other student through the use of verbal assault or threat, in the presence of other peers. Xie, et. al., (2002) supported this definition of confrontational behavior but further suggesting that use of this strategy has several risks for the perpetrator. Revenge, or retaliation by the victim—meaning that the victim doesn't necessarily respond in the manner in which the perpetrator may have anticipated, or that the situation escalated outside of the perpetrators control, may be a risk, as well as punishment by school authorities.

On the other hand non-confrontational behavior provides the perpetrator with the opportunity to remain anonymous in her attack—which means that neither school officials or the victim have a clear idea of where the source of the attack is coming from, which makes it difficult to address. In order for this strategy to be implemented effectively however, cooperation must exist between the perpetrator and the social network of friends or peers. In order to rally the support of this social network, Xie, et. al., (2002) suggested that the perpetrator needs accurate knowledge of the interpersonal relationships that exist within the peer group as well as savvy manipulation skills. The perpetrator must be able to identify alliances within the social group, but also be able to persuade individuals within the group to attack the victim; otherwise this strategy may not be effective.

Social Networks and the Media: A Powerful Influence

The advancement of technology and the increased use of social networks, as well as the role of the media may have a significant impact on the strategies girls use to navigate conflict. Coyne, et. al., (2004) supported this assertion. Forms of social and relational aggression are often portrayed in movies and television programs, and these portrayals may have an impact on the strategies girls use to mediate conflict. In movies, relational aggression is usually resolved when the victim decides to stand up for herself-- which sends the message that the victim has the power to stop acts of relational aggression (Cecil, 2008). This may be considered a false reality for some victims because often the intervention from an adult may be useful to help end the aggression. The influence doesn't just stop with the role of the media.

Cyberbullying is a concern that is steadily growing across the nation. Cyberbullying can be defined as the use of electronic mediums like social networking sites (e.g Facebook, Twitter), emailing or texting to engage in relational aggression (Radcliff and Joseph, 2011).

Cyberbullying is powerful because minimum effort is required by the aggressor in order to engage in relational aggression outside of the parameters of school, and there is little escape for potential victims. Typically victims may have received a break from social or relational aggression outside of school but the use of technology provides limited opportunity for escape. Escape is limited through the use of smart phones. Students now have the capability to text or send messages with may contain socially aggressive content. Logging on to social media sites may further subject victims to socially aggressive behavior. Burgess et. al., (2008) further suggested that cyberbullying is increasingly difficult to address because usually female cyberbullies often perform the acts of aggression as a group.

Is Girl Drama a NORMAL part of development?

Most women would agree that at some point in their lives they have experienced relational aggression within their relationships with other women. Relational aggression can include a range of behaviors that cause hurt or is damaging to relationships, which have been previously established. In some cases relational aggression stems from some conflict, or disagreement over a difference in opinion, or the conflict may be more complex in nature. So the question is whether or not the experience of relational aggression is a normal part of development for adolescent girls.

Crick (1997) suggested that participation in acts of relational aggression are rare and only impact a small proportion of society, which argues against aggression as a normal part of development for adolescent females. Paquette & Underwood (1999) suggested that this experience is a part of normative development for young girls. In fact they argue that participation in issues relating to relational aggression have a positive impact on the critical development of young ladies because it teaches them how to sort out issues relating to their identities, by educating them about social norms and teaching them how to protect the integrity of their social groups in school environments.

Girl Drama: Who Are the Players?

The conflict that exists between two girls usually displays a binary relationship between the "in crowd"— which would consist of a group of girls that are perceived to be popular—even amongst peers or within their own self-constructed popularity, a "victim,"—someone that is not a part of the perceived "in crowd," or has been alienated from the social group for a particular

reason. The remaining question is what factors are considered in the creation of these constructs— "perceived popularity" versus "victim."

It's important to recognize the difference between social preferences versus perceived popularity. Students who fall into the category of social preference popularity are typically students who are well liked by their peers (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). They have a tendency to get along well with others, and they may not necessarily be associated with the "in crowd," but they are charismatic, typically do well academically, and they are not excessively involved in drama or conflict. Students who are *perceived popular* by their friends are students who have a social reputation of being tough or aggressive, and /or typically demonstrate antisocial behaviors, as they try to perpetuate the mask of popularity. In order to maintain their status, they don't associate themselves with everyone— they are more isolated into groups or cliques in an effort to establish status or elitism (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). Therefore the key distinction between perceived popularity and social preference stems from the use of relational forms of aggression within perceived popularity.

Recently researchers have begun to explore the correlation between perceived popularity and relational aggression. There has been some evidence to suggest that both male and female adolescents rely on aggressive behavior once they reach a certain level of status within their peer groups, in order to protect that status or as a way to combat hostility or resentment towards them from peers who are not considered as popular (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). One study has shown that increases in aggression lead to higher perceived popularity suggesting a self-perpetuating cycle over time (Rose, et. al., 2004). This means that adolescents can contribute to an increase in their status or perceived popularity, by demonstrating socially aggressive behaviors. The question remains that if students have some control over the development of their perceived popularity, then, who really are the victims?

Reynolds and Juvonen (2010) conducted a study in which they explored whether or not early maturation is associated with perceived popularity and whether or not these factors may contribute to the development of a girl's reputation, which may help account for them falling victim to relational aggression. The authors contend that while having a reputation of being popular can afford early maturing girls some social benefits, this does not protect them from negative peer experiences. In fact, it often increases the risk of peer harassment because girls who mature early are more at risk for having malicious rumors spread about them because

inferences are often made regarding their romantic involvement and engagement in sexual activity which are frequent topics of gossip among adolescents (Reynolds and Golden, 2010). An assumption is often made that the more mature a girl looks, the more promiscuous she must be because maturity for girls is often equated with sexual involvement.

Although girls who are perceived popular usually demonstrate more relational aggressive behaviors, these girls may further become victims of relational aggression because they often are the targets of jealousy, and others who wish to gain dominance or increase their perceived popularity amongst their peers may attack them to earn credibility and increase their position in the social hierarchy (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). While perceived popularity can yield both positive and negative results for adolescent females, not all victims fall into this category.

It can often be challenging to be a new student in an unfamiliar environment with established social networks. Merrell et. al., (2006) suggested that the period of transition into a new environment can potentially open a student up to being a target especially if the student may be considered a perceived threat to the social hierarchy that has already been established. Students who may be considered threats are students who are naturally liked by their peers, or who may be considered attractive or pretty. Each of these characteristics, are further socially constructed by the school culture, which is largely impacted by the media.

Students who are "loners," or perceived to be "rejected" or different in some way, or are socially awkward, avoid social situations, or lack social skills, (Putallaz, et. al., 2007) may be victims as well. In most social networks, constructed within schools, difference may not be widely encouraged or accepted, and there is often pressure for adolescents to conform their identities to be consistent with social norms and the established school culture. It is important to recognize that individuals who possess these characteristics are not necessarily guaranteed victims of relational aggression, but any one of these factors or a combination of them may be associated with victims of relational aggression (Radliff & Joseph, 2011). Because there are so many factors that may contribute to adolescent development, it is important to take a closer look at identity construction.

A Closer Look at the Role of Identity Construction

"The young person, in order to experience wholeness, must feel a progressive continuity between that which he has come to be during the long years of childhood and that which he conceives himself to be and that which he perceives others to see in him and expect of him…Identity is a unique product which now meets a crisis to be solved only in new identifications with age mates and with leader figures outside the family." *Erikson, 1968, p. 87*

Adolescence is a time of identity formation. During this time adolescents often struggle with constructing who they are and their value commitments. This time can also be confusing, because there is no formula on how to construct their identities, therefore many rely on their friends and peer relationships to help them through this process—which could be positive or negative depending on their friends. Erik Erikson (1968) supported this assertion. Erikson was one of the founders of psychosocial development and his work helps us to develop an understanding of personality development throughout the human lifespan. This review will explore adolescent development in this context. Erikson contended that adolescence is characterized as the time in the human life cycle where an individual must establish a personal identity and avoid the dangers of role and identity confusion. Erikson further suggested that identity can be found only through interaction with other people, and therefore adolescents experience a strong need for peer group recognition and involvement. Conforming to the expectations of peers helps provide adolescents with some idea about how they fit into certain roles. The peer group serves a dual purpose because it not only provides adolescents with role models regarding behavior; it further provides personal social feedback. If an individual manages not to become a target of relational aggression then it may be safe to assume that he or she has successfully conformed to the expectations of the group.

Gilligan (2003) further supported this assertion through the proposal that women's integrity and sense of self are based on their connections and interdependence with others and that affiliation with and acceptance by other girls or women often becomes an essential element of identity. Pipher (2002) suggested that as girls become adolescents the process of establishing and maintaining friendships with women is a crucial aspect of psychological development, and as girls become adolescents, these relationships become increasingly important and potentially assist with adjustment and a sense of well-being. This research helps to validate the significance of peer groups and friendships in the identity formation process for adolescent females.

Erikson (1968) further suggested that identity formation must be viewed as shaped by and shaping forms of action and the purposes embedded in the action:

> Taking human action as the focus of analysis provides a more coherent account of identity not as a static, inflexible structure of the self, but as a dynamic dimension or moment in action that may in fundamental ways change from activity to activity,

depending on the way in each activity, the purpose, form, cultural tools, and contexts are coordinated (Erikson, 1968, p. 18).

Identity construction may be impacted by the experiences adolescent females have within their peer groups, specifically as it relates to conflict and other forms of relational aggression. Their identity may be shaped based on how they choose to navigate these experiences. Their approach may differ based on their experience and the context under which the experience occurs; however the decisions that are made through this process will have a significant impact on how their identity is constructed.

One of the most important contributions of Erikson's (1968) theory of identity formation is the significance he gave to the cultural and historical impact on this process. For Erikson, life history "intersects" with the historical moment in which all youth find themselves (1968, p. 257). He suggests that the artifacts, images, and myths that are part of the environment of children growing up are traces of culture's history that, over time, become internalized to a greater or lesser degree by youth who grow up in that culture. In each of these acts, history and historical processes find their way to the core of individual identity, which further leads to the significance of the role of culture.

A challenge for adolescent females during identity construction may be constructing their identities based on their interactions with their peers within groups or friendships, while also maintaining loyalty to cultural expectations outside of this environment. Erikson (1968) supported this assertion, through his argument that identity is not to be considered solely in personal terms, but must be integrated in terms of culture; there is for him, "a unity of personal and cultural identity (Erikson, 1968, p.20). He further suggested that one of the most important conflicts for individuals in identity formation is the degree to which their own cultural identity is nurtured by members of their own culture and how it is validated by others in the community. This can be a tremendous amount of pressure for adolescent females because it is up to the individual, to create and maintain a dynamic conception of oneself while balancing expectations from both the community culture and the peer group.

Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz (2007) suggested that youth cultures are semiautonomous spheres of cultural production—basically they govern themselves by generating culture through their everyday interactions. Their cultural production is mediated by dominant meanings and value systems. Value may be attributed to popularity or status within the cultural group, which

further may be defined by style—the type of clothes that are worn, hair or make up or other attributes that the group chooses to define as popular. Within this cultural construction of popularity, members negotiate the affiliation process. Currie et. al., (2007) suggested that affiliation results in identification by claiming membership. Girls position themselves by claiming affiliation within a given category of membership—some examples include affiliations with extracurricular organizations like athletics or music or with different types of peers depending upon commonalities. The category that they may attempt to affiliate with varies based upon how they choose to construct their identities and what they identify as priorities.

Erikson's (1968) research validates the connection that exists between culture and history in identity construction. It's not surprising therefore that girls with traditional feminine gender identities may match their preferences, attitudes, behaviors and personal attributes with traditional feminine gender roles (Bem, 1981). These traditional feminine gender roles expectations may include restricting the emotional expression of anger—which may be extremely limiting for adolescent girls. Other traditional gender role expectations may include the expectation that girls are expected to maintain harmonious relationships with others, and if they are concerned about the potential negative impact of the expression of anger on others, they may be more likely to temper their reactions in conflict mediation situations (Hatch & Forgays, 2001). Because directness and confrontation approaches may not be consistent with traditional feminine gender identity, girls adhering to these standards may be forced to implement more manipulative and covert means of expressing anger, resolving conflict and establishing dominance (Bem, 1981).

The existence of diversity makes it close to impossible to fit all women into the construct of gender identity. Crothers et. al., (2005) suggested that there is a strong likelihood that different socialization processes exist for adolescent girls based on socioeconomic status or ethnicity. Racial identity development may be a significant variable in determining an African American adolescent girl's likelihood for wanting to fit in with White peers or dominant cultural practices (Crothers, et. al., 2005). As African American adolescent girls attempt to balance cultural expectations with expectations within their peer groups, they may be faced with the challenge of which normalizing process to adopt. With time and maturity, African American adolescent females may learn how to operate within hegemonic structures and may choose not to conform to dominant cultural practice, however there may be some consequences for that decision.

Crothers et. al., (2005) supported this assertion through the idea that African American adolescent girls who fail to fit into hegemonic cultural norm expectations run the risk of being targeted or becoming victims of relational aggression because of their refusal to conform, because research has established that difference may lead to victimization.

Identity formation during adolescence may be one of the most challenging times for adolescent females because there are a number of factors that significantly impact this process -- peer group relationships, culture, ethnicity and historical influences all may have an impact on this development. The challenge for adolescent females is to create a balanced identity through the impact of these factors, and further remain loyal to who they are while constructing a socially acceptable self—because it's natural for adolescents during this time period to want to be accepted by the social groups of their peers.

Erving Goffman (1967) suggested that societies everywhere must mobilize their members as self-regulating participants in social encounters. Through the respect or lack of, others show communicate about what we must and must not do to gain their cooperation in constructing a socially acceptable self. We attach feelings to how people perceive us, and when we fail to meet social expectations we may become embarrassed, or feel ostracized from the peer group. This claim validates the significance of identity formation during this time, but further introduces the responsibility adult members within a social context, share during this process. As adults we have a responsibility to help adolescents through the construction of their individual identities, which means that we further have a responsibility to understand which factors may significantly impact this process.

The Impact of Language, Gender, Race & Socioeconomic Status on the Performance of Conflict

A Closer Look at the Role of Language

Investigating the role of communication is important throughout this process. Paris (2011) defined language as an act of identity that foregrounds particular identifications with and against others (p.15). Paris further suggested that understanding youth communication and identities helps leverage educators and their push for cultural youth competence. As diversity continues to grow, there is an increase existence in multiethnic youth space—which is a social and cultural space centered on youth communication within and across ethnicities—it is a space

of contact where youth challenge and reinforce notions of difference and division through language choices and attitudes (pg. 16).

Morgan (2004) suggested that young girls reconcile disputes about power, gossip, loss of privacy and insults through he said, she said episodes. In resolving these disputes girls focus on the content of previous and future interactions and what someone actually said, could say or would say if given the opportunity. Here Morgan (2004) supported Erikson's (1968) assertion of the performance of conflict, through the recognition that both an actor and observer exists, and one's social standing and the positions and roles one assumes in interactions are the foundation of talk. In some cases adolescent girls are less interested in who said something and more interested in investigating and evaluating instances of instigation. As adolescent girls attempt to develop friendship and loyalty, they learn how to investigate "true" friendship by determining whether someone who reports that someone said something behind her back is a true friend (Morgan, 2004). In this case oral communication is significant in the formation of relationships between adolescent girls, but physical acts of aggression can be another form of communication as well.

Fighting as a Gendered Performance

Some theorists argue that physical fighting is considered a gendered performance, which is a performance of identity that expresses at least in part, an answer to the question, 'Who am I?" that both perpetuate and challenge the usual notions of masculinity and femininity and the differential power associated with discourses. It further illustrates the degree to which personal identity is always mediated by social identity (Brown and Tappan, 2008). Girls who take themselves seriously as fighters in social media (e.g. the movies) and in real life distance themselves from such "girlie" or "sissy" tactics preferring to "fight like guys" – punching or taking other girls out, justifying their aggression using rationales and ideologies such as "protecting my territory," "demanding respect," or maintaining a "king of the hill" social hierarchy once reserved for boys and men (Brown, 2003).

Identities are forms of self-understanding: "people tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998, p. 3). These self-understandings are not simply individual, internal, subjective conceptions of one's "essential self" rooted in the "core of one's being," that emerge from self-reflection, or as a result of the resolution of deeply seated

intrapsychic conflicts or struggles. Identities are as much social as they are personal. They link the personal and the social, they entail action and interaction in a sociocultural context, they are social products lived in and through activity and practice (Holland et, al., 1998).

A Closer Look at the Impact of Race & Socioeconomic Status

There are several studies that explore the correlations that may exist between socioeconomic status and race and participant involvement in acts of physical aggression based on these criteria. Xie, Farmer and Cairns (2003), conducted a study in which they investigated the development and social functions of aggressive behavior with a sample of African American children and adolescents from inner city schools. The study concluded that children's aggressive behaviors become diversified from childhood to adolescence with a decreased use of physical aggression and an increased use of verbal aggression as children make the transition into adolescence overall. This change may be attributed to the fact that as students become older, the consequences for engaging in physical aggression become more severe in middle school and high school settings. The change may also be attributed to maturity in growth in how to mediate conflict and find alternatives that are more effective than engaging in physical altercations.

When reviewing the findings specifically to African American adolescent females, the study found examples of lower levels of social aggression—gossiping, alienation, and isolation; among African American females and higher levels of physical aggression – in female to female conflicts (Xie, et. al., 2003). This finding is an implication that African American adolescent females have an increased tendency to use physical aggression as a primary means of communication when navigating conflict.

Family characteristics may also contribute to the differentiation in demonstrations of aggression across ethnicities. In a study conducted by McLoyd (1998) it was reported that children's physical aggression and /or disruptive behaviors are associated with lower socioeconomic status, while social aggression may be related to higher levels of family socioeconomic status. Adler and Adler (1998) further suggested that girls from higher socioeconomic status with low levels of parental monitoring were more likely to manipulate peer social dynamics. The rationale for this distinction may be attributed to the lack of parent guidance or monitoring, which may put an adolescent female in a situation where she is fending for herself, and learns how to manipulate her parents in order to get what she wants. This may work because the parent may experience feelings of guilt for their lack of involvement.

Therefore it's understandable that the skills acquired in this situation are further utilized in other contexts to obtain the desires of the adolescent female.

Adams, et. al., (1994) further contended that the existence of emotional and behavioral problems is higher among poor and low socioeconomic children. Children in this case, as presented by Adams et. al., (1994) have little protection against the effects of poverty. The pressure of this economic status creates a cyclical effect and children are powerless to defend themselves in these situations.

Duncan et. al., (1994) speculated that parents in poor neighborhoods may be less likely to discourage their children to reduce aggression and acting out because the need for children to defend themselves is greater in poorer neighborhoods. Peer group influences and lower quality schools may also underlie this neighborhood effect.

McLoyd (1998) contended that because poor and lower socioeconomic children experience more negative or undesirable life events and adverse conditions, this overabundance of negative influences can place demands on them that exceed their coping resources, which is why there may issues in their cognitive development and their ability to navigate conflict.

The Performance of Conflict

Identity can be viewed as a form of mediated action. This concept has two elements: an agent, which is a person who is doing the acting, and the use of cultural tools which may be instruments appropriated from the culture and used by the agent to accomplish a given action (Tappan, 2000). This concept correlates to conflict because the agent may be the aggressor, who is doing the acting, and cultural tools may be the use of technology, either smart phones or social media networks, in an effort to accomplish their goals in alienating or ostracizing the victim for the social group. Adopting this understanding of identity formation means focusing less on what people say about their own sense of self-understanding and more on what they do in specific situations and circumstances. The focus is on how mediational means or cultural tools are used to construct identities in the course of specific activities and particular actions (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995), and there is a link to this conception of identity supported by feminist theorist Judith Butler's (1990, 1991) argument that identity is fundamentally performed or enacted. Butler suggests, in particular, that identity is fragile, that the roles one plays are unstable and hence actors must continually repeat their performances of identity in different contexts and for different audiences in order to provide some measure of stability and certainty.

Not only can identity formation be viewed as a theatrical production, but the experience of conflict and how adolescent females navigate this area can further be considered a performance -- where each participant, including the social group, serve as actors in the process. The actions are based on interdependence, and how one actor responds to another in the conflict mediation process. The action is further an ongoing process as each actor responds to the other during the interaction. George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) was a social theorist who was well known for his theory of action. Although this theory was published in 1934, its claim is still relevant and may be applied to the understanding of how girls navigate conflict. Mead's description of the four stages of the individual act: impulse, perception, manipulation, and consummation, further validates this claim. This review of literature will use Charon (1992) as an intermediary to further explain each of these stages.

The impulse stage can be connected to the performance of conflict because during this stage there is tension, between at least two parties, that leads to one taking action, which may ultimately result in discomfort for the other party. The action taken may be confrontational or non-confrontational. At this stage in the performance end goals may not be clearly identified, but a problem exists and one party has decided to act. This stage may be evident through the performance of conflict when an adolescent female who is perceived to be popular, feels as if her popularity is being threatened by another party, and she feels the need to take action in an effort to maintain her status within the peer group. Citing Mead (1934), Charon (1992) suggests that during this time an act begins with a problem to be solved, a goal to be reached, something to be overcome by the human being in the environment (p. 125).

During the perception stage citing Mead (1934), Charon (1992) suggests that people perceive or define their situation. This stage correlates to the performance of conflict between adolescent girls because at this stage adolescent girls may be trying to identify what the conflict is, and who it involves. They may begin to question whether or not an isolated issue exists with one individual or a group of individuals. In order to make these determinations they may attempt to read and analyze the signs of relational aggression and what they represent. Charon supports this assertion through his explanation of how individuals define goals and how they perceive and define objects in situations to reach their goals and overcome problems. At this stage of the act, both actors play a role (p. 126). One person may be responsible for establishing the foundation of

the conflict, while the other is reading and interpreting the signs in order to understand what strategies may be used to confront this issue.

The manipulation stage is where humans manipulate their environment by using objects according to goals they have defined for themselves (Mead, 1934). This stage has a direct correlation to the earlier presented findings by Xie, et. al., (2002) who suggests that accurate knowledge of the interpersonal relationships that exist within the peer group as well as savvy manipulation skills may help the perpetrator control a conflict mediation situation. If the perpetrator can persuade others to buy-in to participating in socially aggressive behaviors toward another person, the perpetrator may be viewed as having the upper hand in the performance of conflict. Both actors still have a role to play in this type of situation, because the victim has to find a legitimate response to these actions. After conducting a study of how adolescent females cope with relational aggression, Remillard & Lamb (2005) found that adolescent females coped either by using emotion focused strategies- which included avoidance, ignoring, withdrawing or problem focused strategies which included the use of outside support to help resolve the conflict, and organizing a plan of action.

The goal during the consummation stage is to meet the goals that were identified when the need for conflict or forms of relational aggression was established. Equilibrium is restored momentarily (Charon, 1992, p. 127). After consummation takes place another sequence of impulse, perception, manipulation, and consummation takes place, and the stream of action continues. This interaction demonstrated how humans actively perceive, define and manipulate their environment to achieve goals. As actors act toward each other they begin to share a view of the world.

Cameron and Taggert (2005) explore the concept of "adging up," and the bystander effect. The public challenge broadcast by embarrassing gossip is usually enhanced by the very active, vocal, and pressuring activities of third parties to the dispute. Aside from conveying messages, this involved "adging up," a term they define as hectoring both actors involved in the situation to come to blows. This typically happens between girls and third parties privately and they insist that the victim respond immediately and forcefully, and the crowd exhorts them to take action.

The role of the bystander is not always to impel one party to take action. In some cases, the bystander simply serves as a witness to the performance of conflict. Owens, Slee and Shute

(2000) suggested that bystanders often are inactive during the performance of conflict out of fear or paranoia that taking action may lead to personal victimization. In some cases this leads them to simply witness, and not defend or take a stance in the performance of conflict, so that minimum attention is drawn to them, and there is no backlash or repercussions for their involvement.

Through our appearance and manner or personal front we manage others impressions of us, influence the definitions of situations and affect their conduct (Goffman, 1959, p. 24). Goffman describes the activity that serves to influence others as the **performance.** Whenever we interact with others we are an audience for their performances. Each participant expresses a self and forms an impression of each of the other participants based on appearance and manner and the setting of the interaction (Charon, 1992, p. 187). We quickly arrive at working consensus about definitions of one another and the situation that then guides their interaction. Like stage actors, social actors enact roles, assume characters and, play through scenes.

We commonly divide social settings as evidence of the staged character of everyday social life. Most social settings consist of a front stage where performances are given and a backstage where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted. As it relates to the performance of conflict, a front stage may be at the school, in the lunchroom, or classroom setting, and the backstage may be outside of the school, through the use of technology—smart phones or social media sites in an effort to rally supporters.

Audiences are aware that performers are likely to present themselves in a favorable light, so they look for evidence of deception. Understanding that there are two sides of the story, and both parties will try to manipulate the story to her advantage is informative. As a result, a complete investigation is launched in an attempt to find information from other witnesses, which may include teachers, other students or, possibly, security personnel. These witnesses in many cases may be referred to as social actors, who attempt to manage others impressions of their group, establishments and, organizations that they represent. They are referred to by Goffman as performance teams (Goffman, 1959).

Team members often rehearse their lines in audience's absences; they provide one another with stage directions through subtle cues. The routine is further dependent upon the loyalty of its members.

This case study attempted to explore how girls navigate conflict, while attempting to identify patterns of mediation strategies throughout this process. The research of Erik Erikson (1968) and George Herbert Mead (1934) served as foundation for this study, because although the time frame under which their work was originally presented may have been in the past, the concepts that are presented by both theorists still reign true. In order to attempt to understand the process of conflict navigation, we must further develop an understanding of the factors that contribute to identity construction (Erikson, 1968), and the impact we have on that process as adults. The idea of conflict as a performance is further an intermediary in understanding the process of conflict navigation, and Mead's (1934) theory of action helps to transform that understanding.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Conflict can have various interpretations—from a literary perspective to day to day applications. Conflict may be an inevitable and unavoidable part of personal relationships (Cahn, 1994). It occurs when there is a struggle between at least two parties who may perceive that there is competition in meeting goals, or interference from others in an attempt to achieve goals (Wilmont and Hocker, 2001, p. 41). In some cases perceptions about conflict typically have negative connotations. Miriam Webster (2012) defines conflict as a fight, battle or war. The concept is further defined as a mental struggle which may result from opposing needs, wishes or demands. The culmination of definitions regarding conflict provides indications that conflict can be both physical and mental. It can exist within one person, or among a group. Exploration of conflict further involves a closer look at the role of social interaction.

Studying the Lived Experience of Adolescent Girls

An interactionist approach was used to describe the lived experiences of adolescent females and how they navigate conflict. From an interactionist approach this exploration attempted to understand the ways in which adolescent girls make sense of their life situations and the ways in which they go about the process of conflict mediation on a day to day basis, through their accounts of meaning, interpretation, activities and interactions throughout their experiences. The role of the peer group or social community in this process will further be explored.

A primary notion within the interactionist perspective that cannot be ignored, is the idea that people (and their behavior), cannot be understood apart from the community context in which they live. People derive their existence from the communities in which they live, and these communities are contingent on the development of shared symbols or languages (Prus, 1996, p. 10). Interactionists further suggest that people's awareness of the world, their abilities to learn, think or create are contingent on learning and understanding a community based language. In the process of acquiring a language and interacting with others, people begin to acquire knowledge or further develop mentally. This idea was applicable to this study because female adolescent identity may be constructed based upon their interactions within their social groups and communities. In this case the community may have multiple meanings—it can refer to their

cultural communities, where they live, and their households, or it can refer to their social communities—their peers, or friends that they socialize with outside of the family context.

Biesta and Burbules (2003) further suggested that communication is not the simple transfer of information from one mind to another, but the coordination and reconstruction of individual patterns of action which results in a shared, intersubjective world. This world is created through action. The actions that are taken by people serve as a means of communication of their intentions and motivations. For example adolescent females may use relational aggression in an effort to maintain their status within their peer groups. Use of this form of communication may send the message that they feel threatened, and they are willing to do whatever it takes to withhold their social positions. *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes* identified the multifaceted use of communication and the role that communication plays in conflict navigation between adolescent females. This communication may be considered multifaceted because it may be demonstrated in various forms—either verbally or through action.

Biesta and Burbules, (2003) suggested that transactional realism (as presented by Dewey), is a reality that only reveals itself as a result of the activities or doing of the organism-which in this case will be adolescent females. Within transactional realism knowledge is a social construction based on the material environment. Transactional knowledge manifests itself in the way in which organisms transact with and respond to changes in the environment (Biesta and Burbules, pg. 11). What we know reveals itself on the level of action and only later in symbolic forms like language. Through constant transactions with our environment, through attempts at a balance with our environment we develop patterns of possible action or habits. Both the knower and what is to be known are influenced by the experience between them. This study attempted to explore how adolescent girls make meaning of these experiences.

Through this research study elements of social interaction were revealed may be seldom noticed. These social interactions may include strategies of isolation or alienation of a peer from a peer group, or the role of gossip in the process of conflict mediation. These social interactions further helped in the understanding of the lived experiences of adolescent females. These social interactions may further be explored in detail for the purposes of understanding the conflict that exists between girls, but there are several interpersonal rituals or common courtesies that we all demonstrate in our day to day interactions with others such as greeting people or holding the door for others. As adults, violations of these rituals or courtesies may not necessarily result in

verbal disputes or physical altercations, but this modification can be attributed to a difference in the social environments that we experience.

Social interactionists like Goffman (1959) and Mead (1934) show us how fragile society, interaction and the self are. Everything from society to interaction to self ultimately depends on performances and the roles we play as actors and audience within the construct of society. The same is true for adolescent females in the process of conflict navigation. As each participant in the process chooses their roles in this process, and how they are going to respond to the actions or communication that take place, they are constructing their identity. Some will make decisions during this construction that will shape who they are for the remainder of their lives, while others will struggle with this process and may further therefore experience emotional turmoil as a consequence of their response or lack thereof.

A contemporary symbolic interactionist theory of conflict may argue that any conflict resolution plan that attempts to address the practice of girls fighting must acknowledge the subjective meaning assigned to the experience of girls' lives while recognizing competing ideologies that shape normative femininity in contemporary society. This research study does not really try to rationalize the true reason why girls engage in conflict but provide discontinuities that girls reveal about being normalized in our society and the implications of that normalization in the lives of real people.

The phenomenon of girl drama among adolescent girls helped to demonstrate the complex relationship between personal and social identity. Girl fighting is not the only way in which girls enact and perform their identities; however it does provide a useful perspective on the ways in which the social informs the personal and the personal transforms the social. According to Erikson (1950), the development of a self-observing ego, is one of the hallmarks of early adolescence is an enormous achievement for a young girl. But this age and this achievement may also mark a crisis for girls because it may provide a moment of both opportunity and danger. It opens them to different perspectives allowing them to develop a heightened sense of awareness to be attuned to how they appear to others, and to see themselves as others see them, which is further a benefit of this study.

A Closer Look at the Methods Involved in this Study

Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes, was a qualitative, case study which consisted of an inquiry process of understanding conflict with adolescent girls, through participant observations and interviews. Data acquired through this process helped to describe a complex, holistic perspective by reporting detailed views of participants by looking closely at participants' words and actions. This study was conducted in an urban middle school-- which for many adolescent females is a natural setting.

The goal of this study was not to prove how girls navigate conflict, but understand the various forms of mediation or conflict resolution between adolescent girls, through the exploration of the performance of conflict, as well as investigation of the possibility of consistency in the implementation of various forms of mediation. The goals of this study were the foundation for the rationale behind using the approach of a case study. Yin (2003) suggested that case study designs should be considered when the focus of the study is to answer *how* and *why* questions, the behavior of the participants cannot be manipulated, and the goal is to cover contextual conditions that are relevant to the phenomenon under study. *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes* met each of these criteria.

Knowledge acquired through this study will help inform professional practices of educational practitioners and further provide an understanding of the rationale behind these variations, by discovering patterns in conflict navigation that emerged after close observations, careful documentation, and thorough analysis.

Data Collection

Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes, was a case study designed to explore how adolescent girls mediate conflict. The use of the pragmatist methodology of purposeful sampling generated information rich cases that provided significant information in the understanding of how adolescent girls mediate conflict (Creswell, 2003). This study included the use of participant observations and interviews.

The recruitment and selection process of research participants was multi-faceted. Observations of students in social settings at an urban middle school were conducted, and participants were further recommended by guidance counselors. Participant observations provided the opportunity to witness how the actions of research participants corresponded to language, and identified patterns of behavior. These observations conducted with how many females in grade 6,

further helped to develop rapport (Glesne, 2006). The primary goal during these observations was to look across and investigate peer groups, and ultimately identify female adolescent participants who served as information rich sources.

Participants who were recommended by guidance counselors were recommended based upon their previous experience with conflict, which means that they either had been the aggressor in conflict situations involving other females, or they had been identified as victims, and they went to the counselor for support or direction in how to mediate these situations. Participant recommendations in this case were from grades 7 and 8. Each counselor provided a list of 20 potential participants whom they recommended based on their previous experiences with conflict mediation. From the total of 40 potential participants, 10 girls were randomly selected and invited to participate in the study. 6 of the 10 girls approached, returned their permission slips, and therefore invited and participated in the study.

Both research selection criterions fulfilled the requirements of purposeful sampling because the females, who were selected for the sampling, were selected with a particular purpose in mind. Interviews were conducted in a conference room at the middle school during student "encore" classes -- which were non-academic courses. At least 3 interviews were conducted with each participant over a six week period at an urban middle school.

In order to protect the identity of participants, pseudonyms were used. Each participant had the option of creating their own pseudonym, or selecting a pseudonym from a random list of provided names. Participants were further reminded of the voluntary nature of participation in the research study, and reminded of the opportunity to withdraw without penalty or consequence.

The urban middle school in which the study was conducted had a current enrollment of approximately 1100 students, of which 49.3% are African American, 2.4% Asian, 7.6% Hispanic, 5.1% Multiracial and 35.6% White. The student population further consisted of 57% of students who may be considered economically disadvantaged. The demographics at this school provided the opportunity to include a diverse sampling of female adolescent participants. Access to this school site was provided through my professional relationship with the principal, and the IRB process as required by Miami University to conduct this study was completed as well.

During the initial introductions consent / assent forms were provided to potential subjects. These forms (located in Appendix A) include:

- The name of the primary investigator and my affiliation as a graduate student at Miami University.
- Contact information for both the primary investigator and the university regarding any questions or concerns.
- A full description of the purpose for conducting the study, as well as all procedures that will be followed, including the duration of the study, frequency of contact with respondents, and the fact that interviews will be taped.
- A statement about the voluntary nature of participation in some or all aspects of the research study.
- A description of all known or anticipated benefits arising from participation in the study as well as known or reasonably anticipated harm.
- Confidentiality procedures
- The availability of research findings.
- Information of security of data.

Through the use of interviews each participants understanding of conflict was explored. Interviews provided the opportunity to learn about what could not be visibly seen and explore explanations of things that could not be witnessed during observations (Glesne, 2006). This research study, by design and by philosophy, required the development of a relationship based on trust and rapport. The list of interview questions has further been provided in Appendix B. Given that the relationship evolved across these interviews, the quality of information exchanged also evolved. Member checks occurred throughout the interview process but specifically at the conclusion of each interview. Information was restated and summarized and each participant was questioned in an effort to determine accuracy. Audio recordings were further used to collect data, and these audio recordings were transcribed within 7 days of the conclusion of the study.

Data transformation occurs when you organize information from the research into meaning (Glesne, 2006). Citing Wolcott (2004) Glesne presents description, analysis and interpretation as three means of data transformation. Each was essential in this process and was implemented in the interpretation of research from this study.

Description allows the data the opportunity to speak for itself and answer the question of what is going on here (Glesne, 2006). The use of this strategy allowed the field notes, and the

candor of the interviews to speak for themselves, and allowed the reader to connect with the experiences of the participant.

The analysis of the study helped to represent the details that resonated with the purpose of the study (Glesne, 2006). It provided the opportunity to bring key factors – both a priori and emergent themes into light and make connections with relationships among these key factors that may be identified. The analysis further had a strong relationship with the interpretation component, because it forced an extension of the analysis of what was presented and further used theory to help provide structure and validity to the information that was learned (Glesne, 2006).

The performance of conflict, specifically Mead's (1934) four stages of conflict—impulse, perception, manipulation, and consummation, were further used in the analysis of the data in an effort to make a correlation between the existence of this theory and evidence from *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes.*

The Existence of Rigour

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria to determine the rigour of research—credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes*, addressed each of these components in an effort to determine the trustworthiness of this study.

Credibility refers to the value and believability of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Triangulation was used in an effort to establish credibility in this study. Triangulation was demonstrated through the existence of several methods—interviews, participant observations, and data comparison. Additionally, peer debriefing and member checking were utilized. Peer debriefing was conducted with an academic advisor and was not used not for the purpose of arriving at the same conclusion, but to develop consistency with the strategies implemented through the coding process and identification of the themes- both a priori and emergent, and the paths taken to identify these themes.

In an effort to ensure dependability and confirmability, reflexivity was further implemented. Reflexivity was conducted through the use of a reflective diary. This diary provided the opportunity to reflect over the interview process—identify challenges, and find solutions, and provide a means of recording the rationale for decisions that were made throughout the study. The diary further provided me with the opportunity to reflect over participant observations, and helped to guide the interview process—beyond the initial proposed structure, which did evolve over time.

Rich descriptions were utilized, to establish transferability. These detailed descriptions, contained imagery, and direct quotes, in an effort to allow the reader to make informed decisions about the findings in specific contexts. The experiences of each participant in *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes* provided these descriptions to flourish in this context.

One of the primary goals through this research study was to assume the role of an active learner, who told the story from the participants' view. Using transparency and concreteness the goal of communication was not to tell readers what to think of this research experience but to show them the experience from beginning to end and draw them into the story that allows them to draw their own conclusions.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Liberty Middle School (LMS)

Liberty Middle School (LMS) is an urban middle school with a current enrollment of approximately 1100 students, of which 49.3% are African American, 2.4% Asian, 7.6% Hispanic, 5.1% Multiracial and 35.6% Caucasian. The student population further consists of 57% of students who may be considered poor or lower income, because they qualify for free or reduced lunch. The demographics at this school provide the opportunity to include a multicultural sampling of female adolescent participants, which is important to the study in an effort to explore a diverse representation of how adolescent girls mediate conflict across the continuum.

Currently LMS is in the middle of a huge renovation project, and they are constructing a new facility onsite, which means that while the inside of the building is pretty much intact, the outside was not, therefore gaining entrance into the building, was somewhat of a mystery. Although all of the lighting appeared to be functioning properly the building was dimly lit. Caught in the chaos of kids changing classes, directions on how to get to the main office were unclear. Some students were running in the hall, while others, mostly female—were talking to their friends. There was laughter and yelling, tugging and pulling in a hallway that was uproarious and overwhelming as some students went to their next class, while the 6th grade students were on their way to lunch. This was the first day of participant observations, which were scheduled to start in the lunchroom. After finally checking into the office, a male student, tall with a mocha complexion, black curly hair, and a red jacket escorted me to my destination.

Based on my experience in the hall, my expectations for the lunchroom were the same—clamorous, and chaotic, as students socialized with their friends while eating lunch. My findings were surprising. Although it was lunchtime I didn't smell anything —which was shocking considering it was the cafeteria, and the students who were not in line for lunch were all seated and talking relatively quietly. As an administrator who often dreads lunch duty, I marveled at the organization of it all. There were 5 school security personnel in the lunchroom—4 men ranging in size and age, and one female who appeared to be middle-aged, all dressed in red shirts with the LMS logo and black pants.

Circulating around the cafeteria, the challenges surrounded selecting participants using this strategy was realized. As tables were approached, students stopped talking and stared at me

because they recognized that I was a stranger in this context. Nevertheless rounds were continued while attempting to listen to conversations, trying to appear friendly, and identify peer leaders, when suddenly after the second or third round I was approached by "Janine."

Janine was significant during this observation process because all of the girls were listening to her intently as she talked. She clearly had their attention. While the entire conversation could not be heard, it seemed as if she was talking about her weekend. Janine had big, round, brown eyes, and skin like peaches and cream—smooth, pale and slightly pink. She wore no makeup, but she was dressed in vivid, bright colors. She had on a purple headband which accentuated her shoulder length brunette hair, with a pink and purple Aeropostle hoodie and her finger nails were painted bright pink. She and three of her friends all appeared to have packed their lunch, and when she called out to me, they all turned their heads in unison.

"Excuse me, are you our new counselor?" she asked.

"No. I'm a graduate student from Miami University here to conduct a study." I explained.

"A study on what?" she questioned.

"Girl drama…" I responded. This had her attention and the attention of her friends. Suddenly the table erupted with girls questioning me about the study.

"Girl drama?! We can tell you about girl drama!!! What do we gotta do?" Each of the four girls seemed eager to participate and listened intently as I began to explain.

As the purpose of the study and what it entailed was explained, commotion started to gain the attention of a number of students in the lunchroom. I realized that selecting participants for the study was going to be easier than expected. There were some challenges with identifying peer group leaders in this context, because no obvious exclusion criterion other than being male had previously been identified.

After Janine and her friends signed up for the study and were provided with consent and assent forms, circulating around the lunchroom continued, until the next cluster of girls got my attention. "Hannah" was among this group. Hannah stood out because she was pretty. She had long strawberry blond hair which was held back by a white headband and she wore make up. She had brown eyes and long beautiful eye lashes and she too appeared to have the attention of her peers. They were all sitting around her, listening intently to her story and some were asking questions as they ate lunch. When I walked past the desire to hear their conversation caused me to hesitate and just like with Janine, my presence was questioned.

"Hi…" Hannah called, attempting to get my attention. "Who are you?" she questioned. At this point I introduced myself and provided the rationale for the study. Just like before, the girls were really excited, and although Hannah never returned her permission slip to become an official participant of the study, I met "Candace," who later became a participant. During this first initial encounter, Candace didn't say much. In fact I suspected she signed up because all of her friends at the table signed up, but later she would reveal her experience with girl drama and how she fit into this intricate network of friends.

This strategy continued for several visits during lunch for 6th graders, and over 30 permission slips were distributed, ultimately yielding 9 participants from 6th grade who participated in the study—Candace, Catrina, Faith, Janine, Kendra, Laura, Lisa, Mariah and Sarah. The remaining 6 participants – Beth, Carrie, Cherise, Kaylanna, Mary and Natalie were in grades 7-8 and were recommended to the study by the guidance counselors at the school.

Social Aggression—It Happens to Everyone

Social aggression is a non-confrontational means of using the social community as a vehicle of attack (Cairns & Cairns, 1994, Carins, 1988, and Xie, 1999). In this case the social community would be considered groups of friends or cliques of girls, and the behavior may include gossip, social exclusion or social alienation of a selected female.

Of the 15 participants in the study one thing was consistent—the experience of social aggression. It had happened to everyone. While some were clearly victims, others were aggressors. "Janine," was one of the first participants in the study identified through participant observations. Janine was a 6th grade student at LMS. She liked to play soccer, had a younger sister and lived with both her parents. She shared a story about how she was hurt by one of her friends who was saving a seat for a friend.

> One time my friend made me mad because she was saving a seat for someone else and I refuse to move when the other person arrived… we kind of got into it about it because she pushed me out of the seat. I was upset but I didn't say anything to anybody at school… I handled it by crying when I got home, and then talking to my mom about it. My mom said that if I had a problem, then I can go up to her and say stuff when I went over her house the next weekend. That weekend when I went to her house I asked her why she did that to me, and she came up with a lame excuse, but ultimately said she was sorry.

While Janine was able to use her mother's advice to help her solve the conflict with her friend, adults were not always as helpful in helping to mediate conflict.

There are some occasions when girls try to do the right thing and parents intervene. "Catrina," a 6th grade student shared this story:

> I was saying to my cousin that this girl was being disrespectful to me and she was younger than me, and there are things she did to make me mad. Me and my cousin were in my friend's yard, and the girls yard was right across the street. Apparently she told her dad what happened, and her dad was out there and she was like, "I hate Catrina, and that's so mean of her…" Her dad told his daughter that she shouldn't be afraid to fight me, but I didn't want to fight her. The whole incident got out of control and he told the bus driver and the principal at the school. He made it seem like I was picking on her but nobody ever asked me what happened.

Catrina's account was evident that sometimes girls earn unwarranted reputations, and sometimes parents view their children's involvement in conflict through rose-colored glasses. While Catrina liked to play a few sports outside of school—volleyball and swimming, she wasn't involved in any organized activities outside of school. She complained that her mom worked a lot and spent a lot of time with her boyfriend. She lived with her mom, her mom's boyfriend and her mom's boyfriend's daughter—a freshman in college. Catrina shared that she was concerned that her mother was probably going to get married soon. Catrina was especially annoyed that her mother didn't come to her rescue regarding this particular incident. Her mother's advice was to go to school and focus on her work. From her mom's perspective, nothing else really mattered.

"Faith," was a 6th grade student at LMS. She clearly lit up the room with her outgoing personality and bright smile. Faith wore glasses, had long, curly honey blond hair which hung loosely just beyond her shoulders. She had a fair complexion that was virtually flawless. She wore no makeup, no nail polish or jewelry. She wore a white hoodie and a purple t-shirt that read, "Girls Rock."

Faith lived alone with her mom. She loved playing soccer, basketball and was involved in a recreational swim team. While she wasn't directly involved in a lot of conflict, her friends were, and her motivation for participating in the study was simply to talk and think about what caused conflict. We talked a lot about the role of rumors and jealousy in this process, and she shared this story:

> Well I was at a party and she (Maggie) went to someone's house afterwards and I was there. And she said the only reason why she said that (started a rumor) was because someone lied to her and told her I said something that I didn't say about her… I guess we made up because we figured out that neither of us said anything bad about each other. And we didn't talk about it much after that.

In this case the situation was resolved with a conversation and the realization that what was stated wasn't true, but in some cases the resolutions don't come as easily.

Kendra was a 6th grade student at LMS, who like Faith, lived alone with her mom. Kendra's round face and small smile were warm and inviting. She had long, black straight hair that was pulled back into a pony tail. She was shy but filled the room with nervous laughter while she wringed her hands. Her wheatish skin was smooth, and undiminished. She wore no makeup and no jewelry. She too had been the victim of social aggression, but had decided to confront her attacker.

> This girl was talking behind my back about how she doesn't like me and how I'm ugly and stuff…and this one time I was going to my encore class downstairs and I saw her and then I was like, why don't you come say stuff right in my face instead of telling other people…she went back to her class, and kept talking about me to some friends. She told them she was going to get me and they told me. Later on in the 4th encore class she was waiting for me downstairs and she started saying stuff to me and we started arguing in the hall. We were yelling in each other's faces, and just when I had had enough and I was about to punch her, our friends pulled us apart.

Although the girls were almost involved in a physical altercation they later became friends, "…now we're friends and she called me yesterday and told me that people keep telling her that I talked behind her back. But we agreed not to listen to them." While Kendra, had made a pact not to listen to instigators, her story is evidence that the cycle of conflict can continue depending upon the choices of each participant.

"Mary," was an 8th grade student at LMS who took a different approach in navigating conflict. Mary played select soccer and was a cheerleader at LMS. She was passionate about soccer but tried out for cheerleading at the urging of her mother. When Mary wasn't playing sports, she spent a lot of time hanging out with friends from her church. Mary's mother was a

background singer and her father was the president of a chicken company. Mary was the youngest of three.

Mary had natural beauty. She had a rosy complexion, and long, curly hair that had natural honey blond streaks. She wore no makeup, and nothing stood out much about her outfit. She wore Adidas sweat pants with a matching long sleeve shirt. She was clearly an athlete. Her athleticism did not protect her from the victimization of social aggression. Mary recounted a recent conflict with one of her friends.

> My friend and I both tried out for cheerleading. She has been cheering since she was 6 years old, and I play basketball mostly and I'm really not like a "girly, girl," but my mom really wanted me to try out. So I gave it a chance for my mom, just trying to see if I liked it, and once try outs came around, my friend started going around telling people that I was really bad and that I should just stop trying, because I wasn't going to make the team. We found out I made it and she didn't. And she got really, really mad at me, and sent me really hurtful texts saying how bad I am, how bad a friend I am, and that I should just quit...and that she was so much better than me, and I was like I didn't want to talk about it through texts, I wanted to talk face to face. Because with texts, you know, you can't really have a good conversation. So I talked about it with her face to face and I said you know if you would have it in stuff, especially since you are one of my best friends, I wouldn't say hurtful things to you, I would've been happy that you made it. And I was startled that you weren't that way with me. That's usually what happens. Whenever I'm in the middle of things, I try to talk it out because I think it's stupid, to lose a friendship over stupid drama.

Candace came from a large family. She had four older brothers and one younger sister. She lived with both her mom and dad. Candace had straight auburn hair that hung just above her shoulders. Her rosy colored skin was speckled with freckles. She was a 6th grade student, who played violin outside of school. Like many participants, Candace had never been involved in a physical altercation, but she had witnessed many altercations and had her own set of experiences with girl drama—specifically with social aggression. Candace was a part of a large circle of friends who had cliques within the group. In many of our conversations she referenced being singled out from her friends because her parents couldn't afford to buy her the most expensive clothes, and how her friends often assumed they were better than her for that reason. Nonetheless

Candace was adamant about maintaining those friendships, and often sacrificed her feelings just to get along. Candace was recently attacked by a peer in class, however instead of taking action she decided to get an adult involved.

> Yesterday we were in orchestra standing at a stand and this girl came up and pushed all of our stuff off me and my friends stand, and started kicking us and hitting us with her bow…she thinks she's all that and cool in stuff cuz there's no like assigned seats in the room we go in, because we're in an advanced class, and that was the only open stand that me and my friend saw yesterday and she was standing there for the past few days…so she thought it was hers and that she could push our stuff off… kicking her back wouldn't solve the problem, she would probably just kicked us back. So we told the teacher.

It was clear that Candace did not think a physical response would solve the problem. Other participants, like Laura shared this mindset—even though her parents had demonstrated otherwise.

"Laura," was a 6th grade student at LMS whose favorite color was purple. Purple rimmed glasses framed her almond shaped face. She had a ruddy, smooth complexion and wore no makeup, but purple nail polish. Laura had two sisters and her parents were in the middle of a messy divorce. In fact, both parents had recently been arrested for getting into a fight with each other. Laura decided that she wanted to live with her dad, because she and her mom didn't get along. "My mom and I don't have the greatest relationship…she's angry all the time and I don't want to deal with it. I can't believe how she's treating my dad."

This issue was a great source of pain for Laura. In addition, her grandfather had passed away recently; she was really depressed, and struggling with how to deal with the issues at home and school. Recently her friend Elizabeth was upset with her because there had been rumors that Laura was talking about her. Laura thought the rumors started because she started dating a boy that they both liked.

> Friday before 6th bell she (Elizabeth) was at the bottom of the steps holding her fists threatening to punch me, and I ran upstairs and told my teacher…I started to cry…Elizabeth and I have known each other since elementary school and we never had a fight or disagreement. On the internet this weekend everyone said that I need to watch my back because she is going to get me.

All Laura wanted was a solution, and for things to go back to the way that they were, but bystanders and instigators wouldn't let her forget the reality of this unresolved conflict.

"When the Going Gets Tough…"

Some participants in *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes* used physical aggression as a form of communication—especially after attempts at verbal communication were unsuccessful. The use of this strategy may be considered confrontational because they often approach another student with the intent of engaging in a physical fight or intimidation. The experiences of these participants demonstrate what happens when the going gets tough.

"Beth," was a 7th grade student. She was heavy set and wore clothes that were too small. She couldn't zip her red hoodie, and her striped black shirt was so small that a little bit of her stomach was exposed. Her dark skin was sprinkled with traces of acne. She wore no jewelry, or make up and her hair was pulled back in a ponytail at the top of her head.

Beth had three sisters and three brothers whom she stated didn't all live in the same household. She explained that her mom and two sisters lived in the same house and the others lived elsewhere—but she didn't specify. Beth really wasn't involved in any activities outside of school. She explained how she enjoyed playing board games, talking on the phone and spending time at the recreation center. At the recreation center she explained that she usually played basketball and sat on the couch. Beth had been involved in several physical altercations—most recently a fight on the bus. Beth explained that she never threw the first punch; she had learned this strategy from her mother. Beth was one of the first participants that revealed the underworld of LMS—the existence of gangs, jealousy, rumors and sex that consumed some students. She recounted,

> …this whole school is about nasty stuff. It'll be a stupid rumor because somebody a say that they did it to this person or that person cuz of somethin that went around the school. Sometimes it do be true though…it's a gang here at the school, Zone 15. It's mostly boys in the gang but I think girls be tryna sleep with mass people in the gang cuz everybody in that gang either did something wit a girl here at this school or younger than em, or older than em…anything. They just tryna to get some…

There were some girls whose reputations had been tarnished by this underworld, and "Carrie," was one of them. Carrie was a 7th grade student at LMS. She was beautiful. She had smooth, olive skin, big brown eyes and long curly jet black hair. She wore big silver hooped

earrings, mascara and a touch of lip gloss and she had a beautiful dimpled smile. She was shy, but proudly from the Dominican Republic. Carrie lived with her mom, stepdad, and three siblings. Carrie wasn't involved in any extracurricular activities outside of school. Her mom worked nights at a factory, and her step dad was home with her during the day, and she was responsible for babysitting her younger siblings and cooking dinner.

Carrie had been involved in her fair share of drama with girls relating to rumors about her experiences with boys. She felt like how girls there developed their reputations was unfair and recounted an experience with one of her friends.

> Those girls that are virgins and don't have a lot of contact with all of that, those are the girls that are get called "whores," and "bops," and the girls who have already had sex are considered like the good ones, and there's no name for them… that's how I feel… Well there was one day in 6th grade—the worse grade ever, and I was sitting in class, and one girl who I thought was my friend said she didn't like me anymore outta nowhere. I asked her why and she said it was because I was a hoe. And I was like no I'm not. And she was like yes you are and don't ever talk to me again, and she called me the b word. I was like, "Ok." I didn't cry until I got home, but I couldn't believe she said that to me, because that's a rumor and I couldn't understand why she would say that to me, and I was so hurt.

While Carrie had been the victim of social aggression, she was also guilty of being the aggressor as well. She recounted:

> One day I came from choir and I saw Savannah, and my friend was like you know Savannah suck dick. And I was like what? I was shocked I couldn't believe it and everybody in the hall started talking about it. I was really in to drama before, so I went to her and asked her if it was true. And she asked me who told me that. And I told her. She started laughing, so it looked like she was playing. The next morning, when I came from breakfast and she came up to me and asked me why I came up to her and called her a hoe. I told her that I didn't call her a hoe, I was just trying to see if she suck dick because everyone said that she did. So we started arguing, and that's when she called me a hoe and I called her a hoe and then we was just pushing each other around, and that's was when the security guard broke us up.

While girls like Carrie used physical aggression as a means of self-defense, others engaged in physical altercations in an effort to protect their reputations and construct their identities. Cherise was one of them.

"Cherise," was an 8th grade student at LMS who came from a large family. She had 4 siblings and lived with her mom. Her dad passed away when she was younger. Cherise had mocha complexioned skin, and big brown eyes. She wore a hair weave that was pretty thick in nature, and matted at the bottom. She was slender and wore a black long sleeve shirt and jeans. She wore no jewelry or makeup. Cherise wasn't involved in any extracurricular activities, in fact, she usually hung out with her friends after school—who were limited, because her circle was small. She felt like she couldn't trust anyone. Although her physical appearance was non-threatening, Cherise had been involved in her first physical altercation when she was in 1st grade, and ever since then, she stated she would fight to defend her reputation. "I don't like to fight people a lot, but if they disrespect me, I'm gonna fight em."

"Walk this way…Talk this way…"

Adolescence is a pivotal experience for girls. During this time identity formation may be one of the most challenging times for adolescent females because there are a number of factors that significantly impact this process—relationships with their parents and friends, culture and ethnicity may all have an impact on this development. Girls are often conflicted as they attempt to navigate this process and construct who they are. Adolescent girls at LMS are no exception.

"Sarah," was a 6th grade student at LMS. She was the middle of three children and she really liked school. She was very sweet and soft spoken. Her smooth, wheatish skin was flawless. Her deep set, almond shaped eyes were genuine and innocent, and her smile was welcoming and inviting. But Sarah wasn't exempt from social aggression—her experience with bullying because of her ethnicity had impacted her identity construction. Sarah recounted,

> I was being bullied by a bunch of girls because of my skin color and I really didn't know a lot of English because at the house I was talking to my mom in Spanish…and so this girl was acting like my friend for a while and then she started spreading rumors about me, like that I'm a "brownie" and stuff like that. I didn't do anything about it… I just walked away from it. I told my sister and she just told me to back away from them because they're really not friends.

Despite her experience, Sarah appreciated the diversity that LMS had to offer. "I like hanging with people from different backgrounds…If I hang with people who are just like me I don't really get to be interested in something, and it would just be the same thing over and over again." Diverse relationships provided Sarah with the opportunity to engage with people outside of her culture and expose her to new realities and experiences that she may not otherwise experience without the existence of these relationships.

Mariah was a 6th grade student at LMS, who had three siblings, and lived with both her mom and dad. She was light skinned, wore glasses and had medium length black hair. Mariah used proper English. She didn't use any slang terminology or colloquialisms. Mariah was interested in fine arts, and played the cello, guitar and took dance lessons. Recently she and three of her friends had just become friends again because of conflict. Two of the girls were really close and Mariah and another friend were close, and she expressed that they were isolating each other. Her typical strategy in handling this type of situation was to ask whoever was mad at her what happened so that she could fix it. It really bothered her when her friends were upset with her.

Mariah talked about the diversity that LMS offered, that she appreciated, but also may have contributed to the conflict that existed between adolescent females. She recounted:

> There are a lot of fights at this school. I think this happens mostly because Liberty is made up of different elementaries so like you have Sundale that is in Montgomery and then you have Jackson, and it's like we're way different from each other. I came from Sundale that's in Montgomery and sometimes people think were "goodies," or "snooty"… It's hard to let those people in that come from different schools. You don't trust them. I think before we came here we didn't really know what to expect, but they just knew Sundale was full of "goodie, goodies," and when they see us now they are like well maybe not, but still I don't want to be their friends because that's what everyone says. It's hard not to believe what you think you've known since elementary.

"Lisa," a 6th grade student at LMS, felt the diversity of the school contributed to the amount of conflict that existed between girls. She specifically spoke of the role of race in this process.

> I like the diversity but sometimes it seems like one type of race will act more undisciplined than the other and I don't like how there are some people who stereotype according to race. They judge people by how they act and how they dress and I don't

like that...Sometimes diversity contributes to communication issues because sometimes it seems like certain people don't really talk or socialize with other people. Like they would just stay in their kind of group and block everybody else. I just think it's normal.

Lisa's skin was the color of cappuccino. She wore her thick, black hair in a ponytail. She appeared very dignified and mature for a 6th grade student. She wore a lilac sweater and jeans, and sat with her legs crossed. She wore no makeup, and she wore small hooped earrings and a thin gold necklace. She expressed disdain for people whom she considered disingenuous. She recounted:

> Some people are really fake. They cuss and use profanity, but when they are around adults or their families, they change and try to act all nice and change their personality. There are some groups of people who they meet and they change just to fit in with that person or those people and they don't really talk to you anymore. Some people don't have strong will power or they are not prepared mentally so they fall into the trap of changing who they are to fit in with other people.

Based on Lisa's response, she appeared to be a good judge of character— she referenced power and authenticity in friendships—and this perspective seemed mature for a 6th grade student. Lisa's insight didn't seem rooted in experience like some participants however. "Kaylanna," was one of them. Experience for her had been the best teacher, and she was still dealing with the consequences of those experiences.

Kaylanna was an 8th grade student at LMS. She had caramel complected skin, was tall and slender, and wore mascara. She had a wide smile, and wore a black hair weave, which hung down to the middle of her back. The thickness of her own hair and the exposure of hair tracks was an indication she was her own hair stylist. Kaylanna paid attention to detail. She wore a double string of chipped, tarnished pearls and a matching bracelet, and her entire outfit coordinated with her accessories. A blue jean vest and cream colored lace blouse, with ripped jeans and brown scuffed boots -- Kaylanna made the best of what she had.

Kaylanna came from a large family. She had five sisters and was raised by a single mom. From the beginning she provided context about her family background, as justification for her recent actions and participation in conflict.

> I live with my mom… is just that her and her relationships are more important than me…like I should not have to ask my older sisters because my mom should be there. She

should question me and talk to me when I do something wrong, instead of yelling or getting mad, and calling her kids' names like B word or whatever. I don't know how to be a woman or a young lady in a relationship because she's not guiding me… I did something bad. I did something really, really bad. It was involving boys. People were talking about it. One minute people seemed cool and then one minute they were talking behind my back. There was people that was actually telling on the guys, and then all that... My mom knows about it, they had to tell her, and we was fend to go to court, and I learned from my lesson. We were going to court because they had a video. My mom was mad when she found out but she forgave me because she had incidents when she was younger and that's why she understands the peer pressure and all. She doesn't really sit down and talk to me about what I need to know about dealing with guys and friends and all so I'm kind of figuring it out on my own.

Natalie was an 8th grade student at LMS that knew it all. She had bleach, blond hair and piercing, deep set blue eyes. She had a full face of makeup—mascara, eye liner, blush and even foundation. There was nothing distinguishable about her outfit however—she wore jeans and a striped long sleeve green shirt. Natalie had had a lot of experience with girl drama.

I'm 13 years old and I've dealt with girl drama since pre-school because I was bullied up until 6th grade. Then I realized that it was only because of environmental influences, and because of the way they grew up, and sometimes it's just because of jealousy. I've learned just how to deal with it. And I've had a couple of drama's with he said she said type of stuff, and the thing is at the end of the day *we're all going to be friends no matter what*. The main issue is trust. It's hard for us girls to trust people especially give 2nd chances to them, and I've had so many witnesses with that.

Natalie, had seen it all. She had been involved in physical fights, social aggression where she was the victim and the aggressor and she was insightful about why girls were involved in so much drama. She even suggested she knew why girls started rumors about each other.

…Most of the time girls like starting stuff, they like that adrenaline rush. They like being able to show off. Most of the time they are attention whores. If the spot light is not on them and they are not the center of the show, then they want to figure out a way to get there. That's kind of like how it is here, people want to be the center of attention and t hey will do whatever they can to be the center of attention. If they don't like somebody

> they will start a rumor just to see someone be upset or like I remember one time that I had a rumor started about me that I was a bop and I sucked up some dude behind McDonalds, when it was somebody else, and it was the person who started it. And I was able to say, let's see. I'm still a virgin in every single place you could ever get rid of, and I'm definitely not going to loose something I can't get back until I am ready to do it. So, just stop. People usually don't mess with me, because I'm now the type of person that doesn't care anymore what people think about me, it matters what my friends think and my family, but I don't care what other people think. They think that it makes them look cool and better than everybody else but it doesn't. It makes them look stupid.

Natalie's candor was mesmerizing. She talked like she was a graduating senior and had experienced everything girl drama had to offer. She reflected on her growth as an individual and how each experience contributed to the construction of her identity.

> Last year I went to ISS mass times because I stayed in drama and I ended up running my mouth because I had a very bad attitude and then I would end up getting ISS for it. I would skip detention and stuff like that. I felt like it was the middle of my middle school career and I'm not even going to care this time. I felt like when I get to 8th grade I'm going to grow up, and that's what I did. I grew up this year.

As adolescent girls continue to have experiences with conflict, the strategies they implore with navigating this experience has a direct impact on how they construct their identities. For some, they become stronger, they can use the reflections of the experiences as life lessons of how to evade drama, but others, don't fully recover, and therefore live in fear of conflict and try to avoid it at all costs.

The experiences of the research participants in *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes* provided validity to the idea that participation in conflict may be a normative part of development. Despite the extent of these experiences, each adolescent girl had been exposed to social aggression in one form or another. The next chapter will explore the implications from these findings, by analyzing the existence of the performance of conflict and further connecting the patterns and themes identified through the lived experiences of adolescent females.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Social Aggression-- a Normative Process

Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes was a case study that explored the various strategies that girls used to mediate conflict. Before investigating the techniques implemented during conflict navigation, it was imperative to take a look at the foundation of drama for adolescent females, which began with the role of social aggression. Cairns & Cairns (1994), Cairns (1988) and Xie (1999) all consistently define social aggression as a non-confrontational means of using the social community as a vehicle for attack. In this case the social community for adolescent girls is groups of friends. The non-confrontational behavior that is entailed includes the use of gossip, social exclusion or social alienation.

Some researchers suggest that the experience of social aggression for adolescent females is rare and only impacts a small percentage of society (Crick, 1997). In contrast, Paquette & Underwood (1999) suggest that the experience of social aggression is a normal part of development and argue that this experience further positively impacts the development of adolescent females because it teaches them how to sort out issues relating to protecting their identity. The implications of *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes,* support the latter—each participant, regardless of race, socioeconomic status or background, experienced social aggression in some shape or form.

Sometimes an act of social aggression is a simple one that isn't complicated or intricate to understand, but the emotional ramifications are not as simple. Janine experienced social aggression in the form of isolation when one of her friends was attempting to save a seat for another friend and asked her to change seats. She handled it by hiding her emotions at the time of the incident, but later confronting the issue directly by asking her friend for the rationale behind asking her to change seats. The two were able to come up with a solution, in this case, and resolve their friendship. But for some the solutions weren't so simple.

Kendra's involvement with social aggression related to her experience with rumors. She had heard that this girl was talking behind her back by calling her names like "fat and ugly." She too decided to confront her alleged aggressor, but this confrontation resulted in a screaming match that almost became physical before the two girls were separated by friends. Even though the confrontation between both girls was volatile, the two were able to resolve their conflict with

the help of mediation provided by their guidance counselors. Later, they became friends, after making the agreement not to listen to instigators, or people who attempted to continue to spread rumors.

Mary was another example. Mary's experience with social aggression stemmed from the fact that a friend was upset because Mary had made the cheerleading squad, and the other girl did not. Mary experienced social alienation because of this accomplishment. An accomplishment she didn't really want but had pursued at the urging of her mother. Her strategy in dealing with social alienation in this case was to talk it out because she too didn't want to lose a friend over drama.

Each example demonstrates that social aggression may be a normative experience for adolescent females. Again, each participant in *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes*, experienced social aggression in some form. For Janine, it was social alienation; Kendra had an experience with rumors, while Mary experienced social exclusion. Each experience further provides validity to the claim that social aggression has many forms, and is experienced by many. Each experience further helped shape the identity of its victims. All decided to confront the issue directly—but for Kendra it taught her how it was important not to listen to gossip and rumors, while Mary learned the importance of finding resolutions because it wasn't worth losing friends.

Physical Aggression—A Form of Communication

Developing an understanding of the significance of the depth of communication is important in understanding how girls navigate conflict. Biesta and Burbules (2003) suggest that communication is not the simple transfer of information from one mind to another but the coordination and reconstruction of patterns of action, which result in a shared, intersubjective world that is created through action. The traditional view of physical aggression or fighting would be that this action occurs *after* a breakdown in communication. Biesta and Burbules (2003) suggest that symbolic communication is an action which includes verbal action and also may include physical action. Therefore physical gestures, which may include fighting, may be understood as a form of symbolic interaction that convey meaning. For many of the participants of *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes*, physical aggression was just that—another form of communication.

Beth had been involved in her fair share of physical altercations. She didn't remember how some altercations had gotten started, but some were over simple things—someone getting upset during a game of touch football during gym or an argument on the bus over a rumor. While

Beth was involved in several situations, she had also learned not to take the first punch. She didn't want to fight, but she wasn't going to allow someone to think she was afraid to fight. Beth was no exception. Many of the participants who were involved in acts of physical aggression shared similar experiences.

Brown and Tappan (2008) argued that physical fighting is considered a gendered performance, which is a performance of identity that demonstrates an answer to the question, "Who am I?" Adolescent girls in some cases throughout this study engaged in physical aggression to demand the respect of their peers. They were afraid to look "soft," or to give the appearance of being afraid of the other party. Engagement in acts of physical aggression may further illustrate the degree to which personal identity is often mediated by social identity. How you define yourself is often contingent upon your social identity—the way others perceive who you are. Cherise was one of the participants, who demonstrated an answer to this question through her involvement in acts of physical aggression.

Like Beth, Cherise had been involved in several acts of physical aggression, but she articulated her rationale for this involvement differently. While Cherise admitted she didn't like to fight a lot, she would resort to fighting if she felt as if she had been disrespected. For her physical fighting was a means of constructing her identity and protecting her reputation, which provided some validity to the claims of Holland, Lachiocotte, Skinner & Cain (1998), who suggested that identities are forms of self-understanding, and "people tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to *act* as though they are who they say they are (Holland, et.al., 1998, pg. 3)." This is evident in Cherise's own admission, "I want people to say she's nice and smart but if someone pushes her then she can defend herself. But if I skip out on a fight then they'll be like oh she's nice and smart but she just scared of everybody. I don't want that to be my reputation." Clearly Cherise's continued involvement in acts of physical aggression were her way of reinforcing her expectation of herself and further an attempt at reinforcing the reputation that was developed of her in the minds of others.

A Closer Look at Socioeconomic Status & Race

While the race and socioeconomic status of each participant in *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes*, was not clearly identified, there were 5 participants out of 15 that were involved in acts of physical aggression. 4 of the 5 participants were clearly not Caucasian based on their physical appearance. Beth, one of the participants involved in multiple acts of physical aggression,

recounted how she had learned not to take the first hit from her mother. Her mother didn't necessarily discourage her from fighting, but did not want Beth to be the aggressor if she was involved in a physical altercation. Cherise's mother had given similar advice. Cherise's mother stated, "If they get in your face or like touch you, then that's when you have to do something about it." Cherise believed her mother had given her consent to engage in physical altercations under these circumstances, and Cherise further admitted to being dishonest with her mother when she was involved in physical altercations and these circumstances were not met, in an effort to avoid getting into trouble at home.

Family characteristics may further contribute to the ethnicity differences of aggression. Adler and Adler (1998) suggested that girls from higher socioeconomic status with low levels of parental monitoring were more likely to manipulate peer social dynamics. The rationale for this distinction may be attributed to the fact that the lack of parent guidance or monitoring may put an adolescent female in a situation where she is fending for herself, and learns how to manipulate her parents in order to get what she wants. This may work because the parent may experience feelings of guilt for their lack of involvement. Therefore it's understandable that the skills acquired in this situation are further utilized in other contexts to obtain the desires of the adolescent female.

While it may be unclear which socioeconomic status that Carrie fall's in to, she was definitely a participant who wasn't monitored very closely by her family and this may have had an impact on her involvement in conflict, as well as her parents' response to this involvement. Carrie's mom worked nights, and was at work by the time that Carrie got home from school. Her step dad was home but she had very little interaction with him. In fact he never gave her permission to participate in any activities outside of school—he always told her to ask her mother. Carrie had been involved in several acts of physical aggression, but she said that her punishments at home were minimal. "My mom always worries that she punishes me too harshly…so she'll take my phone for a couple of days and then she'll give it back. She said she doesn't like to be too tough on me, but she wants me to learn my lesson."

The involvement of minority participants in physical acts of aggression may suggest that there is some validity to the claims that ethnicity, socioeconomic status and family background may have an impact in minority participation in physical acts of aggression. However it is important to reiterate that physical aggression may be a form of communication demonstrated by

some participants in an effort to construct their identities -- preserve and validate their reputations, and further represent who they are. For some it is a means of survival-- an expectation that has been passed down through generations, and like verbal communication, it may be considered a form of communication that has no end.

The Role of Social Media—An Alternate Form of Communication

While Carrie wasn't monitored closely at home, she admitted that she spent a lot of time on Facebook—which was how many conflicts had started. She was cognizant of the perils of social media but stated she couldn't stay away, like it was an addiction.

> Facebook has a lot to do with the drama between girls…that's where all the fights come from. That'show it starts—which is why my mom wants me to delete it. I want it so bad, and that's like the only thing I get to do when I'm at home. Play on my lap top and be on FB.

Carrie wasn't the only participant that was obsessed with social media—Cherise, Kaylanna, Natalie, and Janine had all used social media as a means of navigating conflict.

Janine recounted an experience in her involvement in conflict that was instigated with a post made on Facebook.

> I was having an argument with this girl…I don't really know why she was mad at me, but when I went home I got on Facebook and mass people started telling me to watch my back because the girl was going to get me. Someone even said I better shut up before they got her to beat me up.

Burgess et.al., (2008) suggest that typically victims may have received a break from social aggression outside of school, but the use of technology provides limited opportunities for escape. Social media sites are an additional means of communication – they provide an alternative means of engaging in acts of aggression, with minimum effort. An audience is already generated, through friend and group lists, therefore social media sites provide an alternative "stage" in the performance of conflict.

Identity Construction: The Experiences that Shape Our Lives

Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes, investigated the identity construction of adolescent females. The experiences of adolescent girls are shaped based on their connections with their friends. Gilligan (2003) further supports this assertion through the proposal that women's integrity and sense of self are based on their connections and interdependence with others and

that acceptance by other girls often becomes an imperative element of identity. The interconnectedness that this relationship requires is dependent upon a certain level of trust. Betrayal can negatively impact this relationship, and therefore introduces the existence of conflict between adolescent females. Many of the participants of *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes,* attributed betrayal, and the damaging of trust as the foundation for the existence of conflict with their friends. Natalie's account of girl drama supports this assertion, "…the main issue is trust. It's hard for us girls to trust people especially give 2nd chances to them, and I've had so many witnesses with that."

While trust is a factor that may contribute to the existence of girl drama, adolescent girls often struggle with constructing their identities with their friends, while also maintaining loyalty to cultural expectations. Erikson (1968) supports this assertion, through his argument that identity is not to be considered solely in personal terms, but must be integrated in terms of culture; there is for him, "a unity of personal and cultural identity (Erikson, 1968, p.20). Kaylanna struggled with the development of this unity.

From the beginning Kaylanna attributed her lack of understanding of how to navigate relationships—both male and female, to the lack of guidance from her mother. She was resentful because she believed it was her mother's responsibility to help her negotiate this part of her existence. Kaylanna had been involved in a sexual act or relationship with several young men, which many people found out about. Perhaps her rationale for this involvement was to gain positive acceptance or notoriety from her peers, but the reality is that these experiences ostracized her from the peer group and subjected her to isolation, alienation and ridicule. This experience supports Erikson's (1968) assertion that one of the most important conflicts for individuals in identity formation is the degree to which their own cultural identity is nurtured by members of their own culture and how it is validated by others in the community. Part of how adolescent females construct their identities is contingent upon whether or not the decisions they make about who they are will be accepted by members of the social community. It becomes conflicting, when those decisions that construct their identities are not accepted by the social community—because one may feel pressure to change who they are and modify their behavior based on the expectations of the social community. Failure to do so may result in ostracism, or ridicule, which some can't handle.

Kaylanna's sexual experience opened her up to scrutiny and caused her to regret the decision. While she initially believed that this experience would validate her in the community it did not have that effect. Not only was she subjected to scrutiny and ostracized by her peers, her family's response was more of the same initially. Kaylanna's mother eventually shared that she too had had a similar experience as an adolescent female, and that the experience had taught her how not to be used by men. This example helps to validate the idea that there is a tremendous amount of pressure for adolescent females because it is up to the individual, to create and maintain a dynamic conception of oneself while balancing expectations from both the community culture and the peer group.

While there was some truth to Kaylanna's experience, and her involvement in these encounters was valid from her own accounts, this experience help to identify an emerging theme in *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes* which was the myth of the slut.

Rumors played a significant role in social aggression among adolescent females. Quoting Shibutani (1963), White (2003) defines a rumor as a message that is transmitted by word of mouth from person to person. White (2003) further contends that rumors thrive in populations that are trying to understand their environment. They flourish during times of crisis, tension or boredom. Rumors can have a detrimental effect on the life of an adolescent girl—especially rumors surrounding sexual promiscuity, which is how the rumor of the slut emerges.

White (2003) states:

> "Slut is a word everyone knows, a word that always provokes a response. The word is provocative power and the continued vitality of the myth behind the word slut implies that slut is not a monster but a sign: a window into the unconscious, a way of deciphering how the culture dreams of women…she's the girl that can lead us into the Underworld."

While the word "slut," has been replaced in some school contexts with "bop," or "hoe," its meaning is still prevalent today. The insinuation of sexual promiscuity further continues to tarnish reputations of countless adolescent girls—even those who are not sexually active. Carrie expressed her frustration with this reality.

> "Those that are virgins and don't have a lot of contact with all of that, those are the girls that get called whores and bops, and the girls who have already had sex are considered like the good ones, and there's no name for them…that's how I feel."

Carrie expressed her frustration with this stigma because she had been victimized by it after refusing to date a boy. She accounted how he made up stories about her and even showed up at her house unannounced with his friends—while all the way generating this fictious story of their sexual encounter. White (2003) suggests that as adolescents are overcome with hormones, rumors become something for them to hold on to. The power of sex makes teenagers want to define and control it. "The slut becomes a way for the adolescent mind to draw a map. She's the place marked by danger, and where girls should never wander (pg. 13)."

The rumors circulating around Carrie's promiscuity had also led to her involvement in a physical conflict. This further validates the idea that physical conflict can be an alternative form of communication. While Carrie's words were ignored, and the rumors regarding her sexual promiscuity continued, her involvement in a physical altercation would further send the message that she was strong, and the rumors were unfounded, and she was further not going to tolerate the continued assault on her character.

It's All Just a Performance

The experience of conflict and how adolescent females navigate this area can further be considered a performance -- where each participant, including the social group, serves as actors in the process. The actions in this performance are based on interdependence, and how one actor responds to another in the conflict mediation process. The action is further an ongoing process as each actor responds to the other during the interaction. George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) was a social theorist who was well known for his theory of action. Although this theory was published in 1934, its claim is still relevant and may be applied to the understanding of how girls navigate conflict. Mead's description of the four stages of the individual act: impulse, perception, manipulation, and consummation (Mead, 1934), further provide an understanding of this claim. This data analysis will use Charon (1992) as an intermediary to further suggest how participants in *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes* provided understanding to the existence of each of these stages.

The impulse stage can be connected to the performance of conflict because during this stage there is tension, specifically between two or more people, that leads to one or the other taking action, which may make the other party feel uncomfortable. The action taken may be confrontational or nonconfrontational.

One day Cherise came to school late. She posted on Facebook that she wasn't coming to school, but then she decided to go because she was bored at home. When Cherise arrived at school, Katrice, posted a negative comment about her arrival on Twitter—another social media site. She stated, "Oh, so she said she wasn't coming to school and now she's here? Hoez need to stay at home."

Citing Mead (1934), Charon (1992) suggested that during this time an act begins with a problem to be solved, a goal to be reached, something to be overcome by the human being in the environment (p. 125). Clearly the posting by Katrice was an indication that a problem existed between her and Cherise. And Cherise was determined to get to the bottom of the problem at hand.

During the perception stage citing Mead (1934), Charon (1992) suggested that humans perceive or define their situation. This stage correlates to the performance of conflict between adolescent girls because at this stage adolescent girls may be trying to identify what the conflict is, and who it involves. They may begin to question whether or not an isolated issue exists with one individual or a group of individuals. In order to make these determinations they may attempt to read and analyze the signs of relational aggression and what they represent.

After the initial encounter, Cherise was determined to get to the bottom of the problem with Katrice. Katrice continued to wage war against Cherise using social media as the vehicle for communication. Katrice was attempting to solicit supporters through this strategy, and posted comments about Cherise on the pages of people in which the two girls were mutual friends. Katrice was appealing to the audience and Cherise was reading the signs. Charon supported this assertion through his explanation of how individuals define goals and they perceive and define objects in situations to reach their goals and overcome problems. At this stage of the act, both actors play a role (p. 126). One person may be responsible for establishing the foundation of the conflict, which in this case was Katrice, while the other, Cherise was reading and interpreting the signs in order to understand what strategies may be used to confront this issue.

The manipulation stage is where humans manipulate their environment by using objects according to goals they have defined for themselves (Mead, 1934). This stage has a direct correlation to the earlier presented findings by Xie, et. al., (2002) who suggested that accurate knowledge of the interpersonal relationships that exist within the peer group as well as savvy manipulation skills may help the perpetrator control a conflict mediation situation. If the

perpetrator can persuade others to buy-in to participating in socially aggressive behaviors toward another person, the perpetrator may be viewed as having the upper hand in the performance of conflict.

In this case the perception and manipulation stages were related. As Katrice layed the foundation for the conflict, she was eliciting supporters. Katrice was urging other people to buy-in to disliking Cherise by spreading rumors and boasting about her personal dislike. Katrice was popular, and Cherise felt as if people were buying in to Katrice's allegations in an effort to gain favor with Katrice and increase their status of popularity. In this stage both actors still have a role to play in this type of situation, because the victim has to find a legitimate response to these actions.

After conducting a study of how adolescent females cope with relational aggression, Remillard & Lamb (2005) found that adolescent females coped either by using emotion focused strategies-- which included avoidance, ignoring, withdrawing or problem focused strategies-- which included the use of outside support to help resolve the conflict, or organizing a plan of action to address the problem directly. Cherise organized a plan of action. She was determined to confront her attacker directly and defend her reputation.

The goal during the consummation stage is to meet the goals that were identified when the need for conflict or forms of relational aggression was established. Equilibrium is restored momentarily (Charon, 1992, p. 127). Cherise's strategy for confronting her attacker directly included agreeing to engage in a physical altercation and determining a meeting site. The meeting site was outside of the buses—which was an area that had the least amount of supervision from security personnel.

When Cherise got to the meeting site, two things were different from the original plan. First Katrice, was accompanied by two other girls—and Cherise perceived that the two wanted to be more than the audience and we're conspiring to jump her. Secondly, there was security presence. In fact there were two security guards in this area—someone had given an anonymous tip that a fight was planned for after school in this area. Cherise was able to evade a physical altercation at this point, and at the time of the final interview, equilibrium had been restored, there wasn't much talk about what happened, or the prospect of the physical altercation.

Typically after consummation takes place another sequence of impulse, perception, manipulation, and consummation may take place, and the stream of action may continue, which

may have occurred after the study concluded. This interaction is a possible narrative interpretation of how adolescent girls may mediate conflict, and how adolescent girls may actively perceive, define and manipulate their environment to achieve goals.

Limitations of the Study

Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes was a qualitative, case study that explored how girls navigated conflicted, with the intent of discovering patterns of navigation strategies implemented and understanding the variations used by adolescent females during this process. Each participant in the study experienced social aggression—while some were victims others were obviously aggressors. Each participant further implemented their own strategy during the conflict navigation process. The strategies ranged from the use of alienation, exclusion and gossip to the use of physical aggression as means of communication.

The study included 15 participants from an urban middle school that consisted of a multicultural environment—in terms of race and socioeconomic status, which provided the opportunity for a diverse sample of participants. Although the initial intent was to identify patterns of mediation strategies using commonalities of race or socioeconomic status, limited information was collected during the interview process to make definitive determinations of these indicators. This served as a limitation because definitive connections to participants based on these indicators, could not be made. The reader therefore is left to their own devices, to draw conclusions on the patterns that existed based on rich descriptions of the lived experiences of adolescent females.

Another potential limitation to the study was the time period over which the study was conducted. The study was conducted over a six week time period, and each participant was interviewed at least three times, with one exception. It was during this process that relationships evolved, and it would have been helpful if more time could have been spent with each participant in an effort to gain more information or insight into their experiences with conflict.

Final Thoughts

Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes was a qualitative, case study that explored mediation strategies of adolescent females. There are several implications that may inform the practices of educational practitioners from this study. Based on the accounts of each participant, and their experiences with social aggression, it is accurate to suggest that the experience of "girl drama,"

may be a normal process that all girls experience. The full extent of these accounts further suggests that the experience may be multifaceted and there is no prescription to determine the extent of how girls will experience girl drama or what strategies they will implore during the navigation process.

Identity construction may be impacted by the experiences that adolescent females have within their peer groups, specifically as it relates to conflict and other forms of relational aggression. Their identity may be shaped based on how they choose to navigate these experiences. Their approach may differ based on their experience and the context under which the experience occurs; however the decisions that are made through this process will have a significant impact on how their identity is constructed.

This case study further offers a message to educational practitioners that it is important not to make generalizations about the experiences of girl drama. While some practitioners may generalize the significance of this process and fail to take the time to help adolescent girls navigate these experiences, we lose the opportunity to help positively impact their identity construction through this experience. It's important that we further take the time to offer mediation strategies, in an effort to help educate adolescent females identify alternatives in mediation that can be further utilized not only as they experience conflict, but throughout their lived experiences.

Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes further offers a narrative interpretation to the performance of conflict argument. In every situation there were multiple actors and an audience existed, and each had an impact on how conflict was performed throughout the stream of action. While the future of each participant is uncertain, the reality is that the experience of how they navigate conflict will not only impact their lived experiences as adolescents, but shape their adult identities. After Natalie pursues and reaches her goal of becoming a school counselor, she'll remember her experiences with betrayal and the support she needed through the process. Cherise will use her strong desire to establish and defend her reputation as the precipice for her pursuit of success in the field of law, and Carrie will become self-confident and believe in her ability to accomplish her dream of becoming a school teacher, as she overcomes the myth of the slut.

Epilogue

Before I started this research, I had preconceived notions of what the research would reveal based on my experiences as an educational administrator. Most of the adolescent females who had been involved in acts of physical aggression were minorities from these experiences, and the majority of the cases in which I provided mediation were with Caucasian females—therefore an assumption was made that this research study would support these notions and identify trends that existed based on commonalities of race. I even suspected and generalized that if this study did not bring about commonalities regarding race, it most certainly would introduce commonalities based on socioeconomic status—because I believed either one or the other had an impact on the strategies adolescent girls implored when navigating conflict. The results of this study did not support either assertion. In fact this study provided validity to the idea that a formula does not exist to determine what actions participants will use when engaging in conflict navigation.

The question I now have is whether or not the strategies I employed had an impact on the findings. One profound limitation from the study was that strong conclusions could not be drawn on the socioeconomic status of participants. Before I started this process, I thought categorizing girls into economic categories would be easy. But when the study began, there was some concern that existed regarding this categorization. I felt honored that each participant had agreed to share their experiences with me, and throughout the process, I felt a sense of responsibility because of the trust that they instilled in me, while sharing their stories and individual perspectives. I became reluctant about asking pointed questions regarding their socioeconomic status out of fear of insulting them and betraying their trust. I felt like questions regarding their socioeconomic status may hinder the rapport or relationship that developed with each participant. After reflection, I realize that strategies could have been implored by way of surveys or data collection from school records in order to successfully obtain this information without hindering relationships.

As an emerging qualitative researcher I also struggled with how much of my interpretation to include in each of the participants accounts. I wanted the research and the experiences of each participant to speak for themselves and I wanted to stay away from making generalizations about these accounts. Each participant shared a unique experience throughout the

conflict navigation process, and I struggled with creating a balance between their accounts and my lens as a researcher about what their accounts may have suggested. There were some obvious connections to the existence of social aggression, identity construction and the performance of conflict—which were all covered in the review of the literature, but beyond that there were limited connections made to emergent themes. The myth of the slut and the significance of rumors and sexual promiscuity were explored, but perhaps more research could have been conducted to delve deeper into participants' accounts. This study is just the beginning of future opportunities to explore conflict navigation experiences with adolescent females. There is a whole world that can be dedicated to cyber bullying, the significance of acts of physical aggression or the role of bystanders. Again, this study provided a window into uncovering several areas that may impact the conflict navigation experience for adolescent females.

Within this struggle there was also the question of how much was too much information to divulge. Which details were relevant? How do I determine relevance? Should I have discussed the fact that Beth and her sister were known for fighting throughout the school? Should I have mentioned that Natalie had often given her friends advice about when to fight and when not to, because she had appointed herself the "queen," of the 8th grade—and therefore she assumed she knew it all? While each account and experience has helped to paint a picture of the conflict navigation process for adolescent females, it is equally important that the message to educational practitioners be clarified.

Again, the overall goal of *Girl Drama: Behind the Scenes* was to offer an understanding of how girls navigated conflict. In fact this study provided validity to that concept when my own preconceived generalizations of socioeconomic status and race could not be proven. This study was also intended to help inform educational administrators about the conflict navigation process, so that they would be equipped with more information throughout conflict mediation that occurs with adolescent females. One obvious conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the experience of adolescent girls within their social groups is very different from adolescent males. Adolescent girls experience a lot of pressure as they try to construct their identities, and face the competing realities of what their friends expect versus cultural or family expectations, and we as educational practitioners must be more understanding in that regard.

One of the key tenets of symbolic interactionism that applies to this study is that adolescent females and their behavior cannot be understood apart from the social community in

which they live. If we as educational practitioners, attempt to view the acts of adolescent girls independently, and not consider the action as it relates to the social community of adolescent females—the acts may seem irrational and our judgment harsh as it relates to their behavior, and subsequent disciplinary consequences that we may enact. Harsh judgments may destroy trust which may further impede the conflict mediation process. That's not to suggest that an understanding of this process should exonerate adolescent girls from disciplinary consequences, but it is meant to suggest that the goal during the mediation process should be to weigh in and take into account the actions that are taken in the context of their peers, and help them find a solution to the conflict that exists. It's also important that we take the time to give both parties the opportunity to share their perspectives—by listening intently, and providing an environment as such that both parties feel safe and further feel as if they are respected as individuals and their opinions matter.

The interactionist perspective also offers an alternative means of understanding the role of communication throughout the conflict mediation process. The actions that are taken by adolescent girls during the conflict navigation process may serve as a means of communication of their intentions and motivations. For example when Cherise was late to school, her adversaries posted a comment on a social media site about her arrival, "Hoez should just stay at home." While Cherise could have ignored the comment, and acted as if she was not the intended target, she chose not to, and this decision gave evidence to the validity of the existence of the performance of conflict specifically the perception stage. It was Cherise's perception that this comment was directed toward her that motivated her to take action, in an effort to prove to her peers—her social group, that she was not afraid, and she would not allow for people to talk about her and do nothing. Here, the stream of action began and subsequent stages—impulse, manipulation and consummation stage took place.

While there is no prescription that suggests that one adolescent female may utilize one strategy over another, one thing is for certain—conflict navigation is an experience that has a significant impact on adolescent females—we must never lose sight of that. It's also important that we further continue to understand that conflict navigation may be a performance for adolescent females where each person plays a role in the navigation process. This is important to our understanding of the conflict navigation process because one person may be considered a victim while the other may be an aggressor. The role of the social group is important in this

process because they act in the capacity of the audience. The role of the audience or bystanders is further significant because they may sway the performance, depending upon which party or actor they favor. Adolescent females should be provided with strategies of how to interact with the audience within the conflict navigation process. It's important that they have these strategies so that they know how to respond after they leave the mediation space. It's also important that educational practitioners understand that conversations may need to be take place with members of the audience in an effort to cease the drama that may perpetuate through the constant spreading of rumors.

Developing an understanding into the world of "girl drama," is so important because as each participant chooses their roles in the conflict mediation process and how they are going to respond to the actions or communications that take place they are constructing their identity. Educational practitioners, parents, mentors or other members of the community all share in the responsibility of helping to construct the identity of our young people. The importance of this process and the long term consequences of these decisions should not be minimalized, because we are responsible for the future of our society.

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Appendix A: Research Consent Form

Dear _____:

My name is Rashida Savage-Gentry and I am a graduate student in Educational Leadership at Miami University.

Your daughter has been invited to participate in a study of adolescent female interactions, so that adults -- counselors, teachers and administrators, may better understand and respond to issues of conflict from students' perspectives. This study will take place at Princeton City Schools during non-instructional time -- either during homeroom or at lunch, based upon your daughter's availability. The study consists of 3-5 interviews that will not exceed 30 minutes per session. Each interview question will relate to your daughter's experience with conflict—how she defines conflict, her previous experiences with conflict, and what she has witnessed through the experiences of her peers. Interviews will be conducted beginning in January 2013, and last through March 2013. **Participation in this study is voluntary, and your daughter may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or consequence.** Your daughter may further decline to answer any questions that make them feel uncomfortable. Your daughter will not be asked to do anything that exposes them to harm or emotional risks beyond those of everyday life.

The results of participation in this study will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without the prior consent of yourself and your daughter, unless otherwise required by law. The interviews and observations will be taped (audio). Access to the tapes will be restricted to the primary investigator. Information will be stored in a secure area (e.g., locked filing cabinet) and the tapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. The tapes will be transcribed, and the words of your daughter may be quoted. If so, a pseudonym will be used to ensure that your daughter cannot be identified in any way.

If you have further questions about the study, please contact Rashida Savage-Gentry at 513-349-4952 or savagers@miamioh.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at 513-529-3600 or email: humansubjects@miamioh.edu.

Please sign both copies of this form and return one to the researcher.

By signing below you consent to your daughter's participation in this research study.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY. My child is free to decline to participate in this research study, or I may withdraw their participation at any point without penalty. Their decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no influence on their present or future status at Princeton City Schools.

My child _____ has my consent to participate in the research study on female interactions.

Student is a minor: _____
(age)

Parent/Guardian: _____ _____
(please print) (signature)

Date: _____

Appendix A: Student Assent Form

Dear _____:

My name is Rashida Savage-Gentry and I am a graduate student at Miami University.

You have been invited to participate in a study of adolescent female interactions, so that adults-counselors, teachers and administrators may better understand and respond to issues of conflict from students' perspectives. This study will take place at Princeton City Schools during non-instructional time – either during homeroom or at lunch based upon your availability. The study consists of 3-5 interviews that will not exceed 30 minutes per session. Each interview question will relate to your experience with conflict—how you define conflict, previous experiences with conflict, and what you have witnessed through the experiences of your peers. Interviews will be conducted beginning in January 2013, and last through March 2013. **Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or consequence.** You may further decline to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. You will not be asked to do anything that exposes you to risks beyond those of everyday life.

The results of participation in this study will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without the prior consent of yourself and your parent, unless otherwise required by law. The interviews and observations will be taped (audio). Access to the tapes will be restricted to the primary investigator. Information will be stored in a secure area (e.g., locked filing cabinet) and the tapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. The tapes will be transcribed, and your words may be quoted. If so, a pseudonym will be used to ensure that you cannot be identified in any way.

If you have further questions about the study, please contact Rashida Savage-Gentry at 513-349-4952 or savagers@miamioh.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at 513-529-3600 or email: humansubjects@miamioh.edu.

Please sign both copies of this form and return one to the researcher.

By signing below you assent to participation in this research study.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I may withdraw participation from this study at any time. My decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no influence on my present or future status at Princeton City Schools.

My Name: _____

Signature:_____

Date:_____

Appendix B: Interview Questions

First Session:
This session is designed to establish rapport with participants. A brief overview of the study will be provided, and participants will be asked to share background information about themselves.

Second Session:
1. (Hypothetical scenario): Janine had been absent from school for 3 days because she was sick with the stomach flu. When she returned she noticed something different with her friends. Her friends were being distant towards her by not including her in their discussions, and not talking to her to and from class. She also suspected, that one of her friends, Emily was spreading rumors about her.

Why do you think the girls were doing this to Janine?
In your school would girls act this way? If so, why?
How do you think girls are supposed to handle conflict?
How do most girls and boys your age resolve conflict? Is there a difference?

2. Think of a time when a very close female friend either hurt you by excluding, gossiping or saying something mean behind your back. How did you handle it? What happened after the incident? How did this incident make you feel (beyond perhaps feeling hurt)?
3. How would you describe conflict?

Third Session:
4. What are some of the major causes of conflicts?
5. The primary investigator will provide description of non-confrontational versus confrontational behaviors. And ask the following questions:

- Have you or a friend used either of these strategies.
- What are the disadvantages/ advantages of each?
- Do they both yield the same results in your opinion? Why or why not? Explain.

Fourth Session:
6. Tell me about the last time you had an argument or disagreement with an adult that is not a member of your family.
7. How was the disagreement resolved?
8. Did you feel as if you had a voice in the disagreement or your opinion mattered (involving an adult non-family member?
9. Did you handle this argument or disagreement differently than you would have if it was with one of your friends? If so, explain how.

Fifth Session:
10. Do you think girls today are under a lot of pressure (from their friends)? If so do you think adults understand that pressure? Why or why not? Explain.
11. In your opinion what are communication barriers?
12. Do you think communication has played a role in any of the conflicts we have discussed previously? If so, explain.
13. What are some challenges or struggles in mediating conflicts? Why is this such a hard process?
14. How would you suggest administrators or other adults help girls resolve conflict?