THE DESIGN OF A RELATIONAL AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM FOR

6th GRADE FEMALE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Relational aggression is the use of ostracism, manipulation of social relationships, rumors, and gossip with the intent to injure or manipulate a relationship (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). Relational aggression (RA) and bullying have become problematic for many schools (National Association of School Psychologist, 2010). The National Education Association website reports that six out of ten American teenagers witness bullying in school at least once a day. Additionally, 86% of girls report experiencing harassment in school. Victims of relational aggression experience depression, loneliness, anxiety, peer rejection, and school avoidance (Card & Hodges, 2008; Crick, Casas, & Nelson, 2002; Yoon, Barton, & Taiariol, 2004). This dissertation explores the literature concerning relational aggression in the context of gender, developmental stage, social networks, popularity, and gender socialization. The purpose of this dissertation is to design and develop a program to help prevent relational aggression and assist girls already dealing with relational aggression. The program is designed for a target population of sixth grade female students in a public suburban elementary school. The program is based on a needs assessment conducted in the elementary school. The needs of the target population in the Socialization Domain were assessed with both a self-report and a peer nomination tool. The needs assessment revealed that 72% of the girls in the sixth grade class were nominated by their peers as being relationally aggressive. Additionally, girls who were nominated as being relationally aggressive also reported being victimized by relationally aggressive peers. The program consists of 12 lunchtime sessions that focus on awareness and identification of relational aggression and enhancing social and emotional learning skills such as assertiveness, effective
communication, and social problem solving. This dissertation includes lesson plans and handouts. Finally, limitations and implications for school psychology are discussed.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Relational aggression and bullying have become problematic in many schools (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010). The National Education Association website reports that six out of ten American teenagers witness bullying in school at least once a day. Additionally, one in three students in grades six through ten report witnessing bullying. Eighty-three percent of girls report experiencing harassment in school. These statistics show that harassment and bullying are pervasive. The victims of these encounters report feeling afraid of going to school, using the bathroom, getting on the bus, and diminished ability to learn (National Education Association, 2010).

Relational aggression is defined as the use of ostracism, manipulation of social relationships, rumors, and gossip, with the intent to injure or manipulate a relationship (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). In terms of relational aggression, specifically, Nixon and Cook (2006) reported that victims of these acts report crying for no reason, headaches, trouble sleeping, fatigue, and stomachaches. Additionally, 55% of students report seeing relational aggression daily during recess or break time. Crick, Casas, and Nelson (2002) found that children who are targets of relational aggression experience more peer rejection and more internalizing symptoms such as depression and loneliness than children who are not targets of relational aggression. They may also experience more anxiety and lower self-esteem or attribute the cause of the victimization to themselves (Yoon, Barton, & Taiariol, 2004). They may come to feel that they deserve or have instigated the aggression. Card and Hodges (2008) explain that victims of relational
aggression feel less liked and often try to avoid school so as to avoid victimization. Rasauskas and Stoltz (2004) note that victims of relational aggression exhibit more somatic symptoms and may end up in the school nurse’s office trying to avoid victimization.

There are a number of factors that enhance or inhibit relational aggression such as gender, developmental stage, and school environment. For example, Crick and Grotpeter (1995) found that girls are significantly more likely to exhibit relational aggression than boys. Since girls’ social goals include the forming and maintenance of intimate relationships, they are more damaged by relational aggression as it is used to destroy social relationships (Neal, 2007).

Adolescents use relational aggression more than pre-adolescents or late adolescents (Neal, 2007). Research has shown that, during adolescence, the desire for belonging to a peer group increases, while peer groups become more stable. The result is that children begin to compete for a “scarce resource” of friendship (Neal, 2007). As this occurs, relational aggression use increases to reduce competition for friendships.

Another important factor in use of relational aggression is the desire for popularity. Research has shown that popularity and likeability are different concepts (Lease, Kennedy, & Axlerod, 2002; Sandstrom & Cillesen, 2006; etc.). Popular students are able to use relational aggression to gain and maintain social status. They are also socially savvy enough to use some pro-social behaviors so that they are able to use relational aggression while still being accepted by peers (Mayeux & Cillesen, 2008; Puckett, Aikins, & Cillesen, 2008).
In recognition of the serious nature of bullying in schools, some researchers are developing initiatives to address relational and other forms of aggression. One way to address similar issues in the schools is with social and emotional learning (SEL) programs (Zins & Elias, 2006). Zins and Elias (2006) report that SEL programming in the schools is intended to enhance growth, help develop healthy behaviors, and prevent children from engaging in maladaptive behaviors. SEL programs posit that by teaching children healthy behaviors and how to better manage emotions, they will not participate in negative actions such as relational aggression. They argue that developing social and emotional competence is a key to success in school and life. They further argue that because emotions affect how and what we learn, it is essential to help children process and manage emotions. Zins and Elias report that social and emotional learning is associated with positive effects on academic performance, has benefits to physical health, improves citizenship, and reduces the risk of maladjustment, interpersonal violence, and substance abuse. They suggest that social emotional learning should be incorporated into schools.

Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation was to conduct a needs assessment pertaining to relational aggression use and victimization among sixth grade girls in a suburban, public elementary school and design a program based on those needs to be implemented during the lunch hour. This program aims to enhance specific social and emotional learning competencies such as assertiveness, communication, and social problem solving. Additionally, the program aims to impede the bully-victim-bystander relationship and support positive peer networks. The goal was to create a realistic, structured program to
help girls create positive friendships with peers, protect against the negative effects of relational aggression, and teach them skills to appropriately confront relationally aggressive situations.

Summary

The following section of this dissertation is an overview of the recent literature on relational aggression. This section more fully explains the various factors that affect relational aggression such as gender, developmental stage, and school environment. Additionally, a review of other theories of relational aggression is included. Finally, this section reviews the importance of social emotional learning in the schools. This section, along with the needs assessment results, served as a foundation for the design of the program.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relational Aggression History

Relational aggression is defined as the use of ostracism, manipulation of social relationships, rumors, and gossip, with the intent to injure or manipulate a relationship (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). Relational aggression can be used in two ways. Young, Boye, and Nelson (2006) state that relational aggression can be used covertly or overtly. Specifically, relational aggression can be used to hurt someone’s relationships without his/her knowledge (covert aggression), such as when gossiping or spreading rumors. It can also be used directly with the person (overt aggression), such as when someone is told that he/she will be excluded unless he/she follows the leader’s rules. Relational aggression can also be used reactively or instrumentally. When a person uses relational aggression reactively, it is because the person perceived a threat or a slight and is using this type of aggression to attack back. More often, it is used instrumentally. This is when relational aggression is used to exert power or control over others or is used to further a person’s social status.

Crick and Grotpeter (1995) were among the first to recognize relational aggression as a separate form of aggression. Until this point, aggression had been defined as behaviors intended to hurt or harm with examples of these behaviors being mostly physical (Block, 1983). Additionally, most research had presented a gender difference, with boys exhibiting more aggression than girls (Block, 198; Kendrick 1987). The
historical aggression research also showed that the difference in amount of aggression displayed by boys and girls persists throughout adulthood (Kendrick, 1987). Crick and Grotpeter (1995) proposed that aggression was equally present in female relationships, although it was being expressed differently. They hypothesized that girls were using aggression in ways that were salient for them such as damaging intimate social relationships. They proposed that, “when attempting to inflict harm on peers, children do so in ways that best thwart or damage the goals that are valued by their respective gender groups” (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995, p.710). Their research demonstrated that as a group, girls were significantly more relationally aggressive than boys.

Crick, Bigbee, and Howes (1996) took the next step forward in relational aggression research. They found that boys and girls associated relationally aggressive acts, specifically manipulation, with anger and “meanness”. This finding helped illuminate the different perceptions held by adults and children. They also found that older girls, specifically fifth and sixth grade girls, rated relationally aggressive acts as normative angry behavior when compared to younger girls. This finding supported the idea that as girls get older, they use relationally aggressive acts to express their anger more often than other forms of aggression. Along with this finding, Crick et al. found that overt and physical aggression were perceived as normative angry behavior for boys. This further supports the pattern of gender differences among aggressive children.

Crick (1996) also demonstrated that relational aggression has an impact on future social adjustment. Her research found that relational aggression is relatively stable over time, showing that relationally aggressive girls maintained their use of relationally aggressive behaviors at three points over an academic year. She also found that relational
aggression uniquely predicted future social maladjustment for girls, beyond what was predicted by overt aggression. Additionally, prosocial behavior uniquely predicted social adjustment, beyond what was predicted by overt and relational aggression. Crick interpreted these results to mean that without intervention, relationally aggressive children are likely to remain aggressive over time. Additionally, interventions focusing on increasing prosocial skills may contribute to later social adjustment.

Crick and Nelson (2002) examined relational aggression within dyadic friendships. Previous research studied relational aggression in the larger peer group context. Crick and Nelson examined its occurrence within friendship pairs. They found that even within these pairs, boys are more often physically victimized by friends and girls are more frequently relationally victimized. Additionally, friend victimization was associated with adjustment issues.

Other researchers also demonstrated that victims of relational aggression experience a myriad of problems. Researchers have found that victims of relational aggression experience more peer rejection, internalizing symptoms, anxiety, low self-esteem, and avoidance of social and school situations (Card and Hodges, 2008; Crick, Casas, & Nelson, 2002; Yoon, Barton, & Taiariol, 2004).

This line of research illuminated new concepts about girls and aggression. Aggression in girls not only exists, but it exists at the same level as physical aggression in boys (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Relational aggression is detrimental to social adjustment, remains stable over time, and exists even within friendship dyads (Crick & Nelson, 2002). Once relational aggression was established through this series of research, researchers examined its different aspects. For example, relational aggression and gender,
developmental stage, and popularity are all areas of newer exploration (Neal, 2007, 2009; Sandstrom & Cillesen, 2006; etc.). Additionally, relational aggression became recognized as a problem that needed intervention in schools (Crick, Casas, & Nelson 2002; Card & Hodges, 2008). The following is a review of the recent research exploring the more nuanced aspects of relational aggression.

Gender and Development

While it has been established that relational aggression is used more often by girls than by boys (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) and more often by adolescents than children (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996; Neal, 2007), there is also research that gives insight into why this occurs. Specifically, girls and boys have different social goals (Gavin & Furman, 1989). Girls’ social goals include more collaborative and intimate relationships than boys’ social goals (Gavin & Furman, 1989). This goal’s byproduct is to increase the importance of a stable peer network for girls.

Gavin and Furman (1989) conducted early research on the importance of peer groups for adolescents. They found that early and middle adolescents placed more value on being in a popular peer group than pre-adolescents or late adolescents. They also perceived more group conformity and leadership in their peer groups than pre-adolescents or late adolescents. Early and middle adolescents also reported more antagonistic interactions within their peer groups than pre-adolescents or late adolescents. Additionally, girls reported greater intimacy and emotional investment in their peer groups than boys. They reported being more bothered by antagonistic interactions than boys. Gavin and Furman demonstrated that the importance of the peer group increases when children reach early and middle adolescence. Additionally, they found that girls had
different social goals, specifically intimacy and emotional investment, and thus were more hurt than boys by actions that damaged the peer group, such as antagonistic interactions.

Hoff, Reese-Weber, Schneider, & Stagg (2009) had similar findings while examining the association between high status positions and aggressive behavior in early adolescence. Since peers are so indispensable during early adolescence, relational aggression becomes more hurtful and more useful than in pre-adolescence. Being a part of a peer group, particularly a popular peer group, becomes a central focus during early adolescence and particularly for girls.

Neal (2007) reviewed other aspects of girls’ and adolescents’ social groups. Girls’ peer groups tend to be smaller allowing for more conversation and greater opportunities to learn personal information about other peer group members than is allowed for in boys’ peer groups. She reports that the tightly knit cliques of girl friendships provide opportunities for members to confide in one another. Relational aggression can thrive in these situations because in order for relational aggression to be effective, the perpetrator must have intimate knowledge of the victim. Additionally, when groups are smaller, the aggressor needs to convince fewer members to be exclusive and exclude non-group members.

Neal (2007) also discusses how developmental stage contributes to the use of relational aggression. One feature of early adolescents’ networks is that the peer group increases in salience for a period of time. For example, Crockett et al. (1984) found that the importance of the peer group increased between sixth and eighth grade. Additionally, friendships and networks increase in stability over time. Neal suggests that because the
availability of positions decreases over time and because networks are still relatively fluid during this time, it becomes imperative for early adolescents to find and maintain membership in a peer group. Neal further suggests that as positions become a “scarce resource”, clique membership rewards members with increased social status. Relational aggression becomes a means for vying for these positions. Relational aggression and popularity or high social status has recently become a widely researched topic.

Social Networks, Popularity, and Relational Aggression

As noted, recent research is suggesting that it is important not only to know who relational aggressors are, but also where they are located in their social networks (Neal, 2007, 2009). The unique features of adolescent girls’ social networks may increase the opportunities for relational aggression to occur. Previous research has found that girls who use relational aggression are isolated and unpopular. The research has demonstrated that relational aggression does not make a child well liked by peers. Much of this research, however, used a traditional sociometric strategy of asking children to nominate who they liked the best. From this, researchers derived popularity. However, newer research has shown that popularity and likeability are not the same concept.

Lease, Kennedy, & Axlerod (2002) examined perceptions of perceived popular fourth through sixth grade students. Perceived popular students are perceived by their peers to be prosocial, bright, attractive, and have the ability to spend money. Perceived popular students who were also disliked were perceived to have all of the above qualities but had high ratings of relational aggression and social visibility such as “being cool” or athletic. They found that children who are perceived as popular had more social control and admiration from peers even when they were disliked.
Sandstrom and Cillesen (2006) examined both sociometric and perceived popularity in fifth through eighth grade students. Sandstrom and Cillesen suggested that although previous research has associated popularity with pro-social behaviors and social adjustment, this concept goes against some generally held beliefs about popularity. Specifically, they noted that popularity is often associated with social manipulation and power as evidenced by depictions of popularity in the popular media. They suggested that sociometric popularity, a child’s overall likeability, is different than perceived popularity, which is a child’s status, influence, and social centrality. Additionally, they hypothesized that these different types of popularities would be associated with different behaviors and implications for future social adjustment. Sandstrom and Cillesen (2006) found that sociometric popularity was positively associated with pro-social and inclusive behaviors while perceived popularity was positively associated with overt and relational aggression. Further, being perceived as popular at the end of fifth grade was associated with higher levels of externalizing behavior in eighth grade, while being sociometrically popular was associated with lower levels of externalizing behavior. Additionally, sociometric popularity was associated with lower levels of internalizing symptoms in girls; however this was not found for girls with perceived popularity.

Neal (2009) discusses how using social network analysis is important in understanding relational aggression. She suggests that both network centrality, the proportion of relationships that a child has with grade level peers, and density, the degree to which children’s acquaintances are also related to one another, has implications for providing opportunities for relational aggression to occur. In terms of centrality, children must have some level of network ties in order to employ relational aggression. In
particular, children with a moderate level of centrality have many opportunities to use relational aggression to move up the social ladder since they have some space to move up. She hypothesized that relational aggression would be positively associated with moderate centrality.

In terms of density, children high in density are likely to be in tightly connected networks. These networks increase the opportunity for relational aggression by promoting increased intimacy and competition for social status. As stated previously, increased intimacy is needed in order to use certain acts of relational aggression such as betrayals of trust (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996, Neal, 2009). Highly dense networks increase the availability of intimate information. Highly dense networks also promote exclusivity. Since young adolescents place great value on being part of a popular group (Gavin & Furman, 1989), relational aggression may help maintain or gain position in a highly dense network.

Neal’s (2009) results supported her hypotheses that relational aggression would occur more at moderate levels of social centrality than other levels and that being a member of a high-density network would be associated with higher levels of relational aggression. Additionally, Neal found that these network features explain the unique variance in relational aggression beyond demographic characteristics suggesting that they play a role in facilitating and instigating acts of relational aggression.

Hoff, Reese-Weber, Schneider, and Stagg (2009) also researched aggression and centrality. They examined both the centrality of children’s peer groups, as well as the centrality of a child within a peer group. Hoff et al. found four levels of network centrality. Some students were nuclear, indicating that both their peer group’s status and
their individual status within the peer group were high. Others were secondary, indicating that either their peer group status was high but they were individuals of average status or their peer group was average but they were high within the peer group. Next, students were classified as peripheral. Peripheral students were either members of a low status peer group or they were low status members within a high status peer group. Finally, students who were nominated as isolated or who received no nominations from their peers were classified as isolated. Hoff et al. (2009) found that students that were nominated as aggressive were seen as cooler and were highly visible within the larger social network. Additionally, aggressive students attained higher levels of status within their own peer group and were perceived as cooler than other members of that peer groups. They found that adolescents displaying relational aggression, in particular, were perceived as “cool” within all peer groups but especially within peer groups already perceived as “cool”. Finally, relational aggression significantly predicted social centrality and “coolness” even when controlling for overt aggression, but this finding was not significant in the reverse.

Not only has relational aggression been shown to be used by popular students (Hoff et al., 2009; Neal, 2009), but studies have also shown that relational aggression is used by adolescents to gain and maintain certain social goals such as popularity (Neal, 2007; 2009).

Cillesen and Mayeux (2004) found that relational aggression is used defensively to maintain high status positions. They found that relational aggression and perceived popularity were relatively stable over five years. Additionally, perceived popularity and relational aggression became more positively correlated over time while relational
aggression and sociometric popularity became more negatively correlated over time. Also, perceived and sociometric popularity became more negatively correlated over time. Cillesen and Mayeux (2004) interpreted these results to mean that relational aggression becomes increasingly reinforced and peers are increasingly accepting. Children use relational aggression to maintain their status after it has been reinforced for a number of years.

Murray-Close, Ostrov, and Crick (2007) also found that relational aggression increases with time. They found that as girls grow older, they spend more time with friends and have increased social-cognitive capacities. This allows for more sophisticated and frequent displays of relational aggression. Additionally, as girls have more intimate exchanges with friends, they have more relationally aggressive interactions. The authors suggest that the increased intimacy increases knowledge of close friends, which is an important factor in relational aggression. For example, girls who know intimate knowledge about a peer are more able to damage that peer’s relationships with gossip and/or rumors than someone without intimate information.

Walcott, Upton, Bolen, and Brown (2008) examined aggression between peer-perceived status and aggression in young adolescents. They discussed social dominance theory (Long & Pellegrini, 2003) and its similarity to adolescent popularity. Social dominance theory explains that dominance serves to place individuals within a social hierarchy according to resources. Those who are more dominant reach the top of the hierarchy by commanding the resources. In this theory, Long and Pellegrini (2003) found that aggression is used mainly to establish dominance or popularity and less to maintain it. Specifically, they found that bullying was elevated when dominance was being
established, at the beginning of middle school and decreased once the dominance had been established. Walcott et al. (2008) found that highly popular adolescents used aggression to enhance social dominance. Additionally, they found that even unpopular youth use relational aggression suggesting that youth find relational aggression essential to gaining social dominance. Finally, Walcott et al. suggest that what separates high and low status youth is not the presence of aggression per se, but how effectively the aggression achieves social goals.

Additional research (Mayeux & Cillesen, 2008; Puckett, Aikins, & Cillesen, 2008) also found that it is how effectively youth use relational aggression that helps them gain and maintain social status. Mayeux and Cillesen (2008) found that in addition to being popular, being aware that one is popular contributes to the use of relational aggression. Specifically, when adolescents are aware of their high status positions, they are aware that it provides them a certain protection. For example, when a member who is high status displays aggressive behavior, her/his high status protects her/him from losing popularity. When adolescents are aware of this, it provides them additional freedom to use relational aggression to help maintain their high status position. They found that adolescents who were rated as popular and who were acutely aware of that status had the highest levels of aggression when compared to those who were unaware or who had lower status positions. They note that, “popular aggressive adolescents are especially socially savvy, acutely aware of social milieu, and have social skills to successfully manipulate their peer group” (Mayeux & Cillesen, 2008).

Puckett, Aikins, and Cillesen (2008) also found that relational aggression and popularity were most strongly linked in the presence of other social characteristics.
Relationally aggressive adolescents were most successful at reaching their social goals, such as maintaining popularity when relational aggression was included in a repertoire of other prosocial skills. Specifically, relationally aggressive adolescents who were high in social self-efficacy, leadership, cooperation, and peer sociability were higher in status than relationally aggressive adolescents with low levels of these skills.

Hawley, Little, and Card (2007) also found that a certain combination of factors allowed relationally aggressive girls to be accepted. They found that a combination of coercive and prosocial strategies allows girls to most effectively increase their social status. Hawley et al. deemed those children who could use coercive and prosocial strategies as bi-strategic controllers. They found that bi-strategic controllers were rated highest on measures of friendship intimacy, fun, and friendship conflict. Although bi-strategic aggressors used more relational aggression, they were most effective at obtaining social goals and resources because of their use of prosocial behaviors.

Putallaz, Grimes, Foster, Kupersmidt, Coie, and Dearing (2007) also discussed the skillful use of relational aggression. They found that children who used the most aggressive behaviors were members of sociometrically rejected and controversial groups. The children in the controversial group were popular and admired. The authors interpreted these results to mean that rejected children were unskilled in their use of relational aggression and were therefore rejected. The members of the controversial group were skilled, by including some positive behaviors, to obtain resources and, therefore, gained popularity.

Rose and Swenson (2004) had similar findings. They found that relationally aggressive girls who were popular did not have friendship conflict. Relationally
aggressive and disliked girls had friendship conflict. They suggested that relationally
aggressive popular girls used strategies to maintain friendships because they need friends
to be effectively relationally aggressive. For example, the authors note that without
friends to spread rumors, a rumor would not have much impact. They also found that
relationally aggressive popular girls are more likely to have relationally aggressive
popular friends. Overall, this research shows that using relational aggression helps gain
and maintain popularity (Neal, 2009; Putallaz et al., 2007; Rose & Swenson, 2004, etc.)
most effectively when adolescents have other pro-social characteristics that make their
aggressive behaviors more acceptable.

Additional Theories

While the research above suggests that adolescents use relational aggression to
increase their position on the social hierarchy and subsequently maintain it, other theories
have suggested other bases for the use of relational aggression.

One study by Soensen, Vansteenkiste, Goosens, Duriez, and Niemiec (2008)
examined social learning theory and its role in relational aggression. Soenesn et al.
discussed how psychologically controlling parenting could be an antecedent for relational
aggression use. Specifically, psychologically controlling parents use manipulation and
intrusive behavior in their relationships with their children. According to social learning
theory, a child learns to interact with other people, such as his/her peers, from the
relationship he/she has with his/her parents. Therefore, a child may use relational
aggression because relational aggression is comprised of manipulation and intrusive
behaviors, similar to the behaviors he/she experiences in his/her parent-child relationship.
Soensen et al (2008) found that parental psychological control was related to greater use
of relational aggression. Additionally, they found low levels of friendship quality and high levels of loneliness in the relationships formed by children of psychologically controlling parents. The authors note that along with demonstrating a model, psychologically controlling parenting contributes to insecurity and lack of authentic relatedness. This carries over so that children feel insecure in relationships and conditionally accepted by peers. Relational aggression helps them to cope with a sense of insecurity and protects their personal status.

Other studies have examined certain personality characteristics such as self-esteem and attribution tendencies. Sandstrom and Jordan (2008) examined defensive self-esteem and aggression. They reported two types of self-esteem, implicit, which is an automatic and reflexive self-appraisal, and explicit, which is a conscious, deliberate, assessable self-view. Further, children who are measured to have high levels of self-esteem seem to be of two types. The first is secure high self-esteem. Secure self esteem is genuine and is comprised of both high levels of implicit self-esteem and high levels of explicit self-esteem. The second is defensive self-esteem. This type is discrepant and includes low levels of implicit self-esteem and high levels of explicit self-esteem. This type of self-esteem allows children to express positive self-views while internally believing otherwise. Sandstrom and Jordan (2008) found that children with defensive self-esteem used more relational and physical aggression and exhibited more negative personal and behavioral characteristics suggesting that relational aggression is used by insecure students.

Yeung and Leadbeater (2007) explored the hostile attribution bias and relational aggression. The hostile attribution bias suggests that aggressive children misperceive
neutral interactions as hostile interactions. When they perceive an interaction as hostile, they retaliate with aggressive behaviors (Crick & Dodge, 1996). Generally, hostile attribution bias has explored physical and overt aggressive behaviors (Crick & Dodge, 1996). Yeung and Leadbeater explored this theory with relational aggression. Yeung and Leadbeater looked at relational aggression, relational victimization, and hostile attribution bias over a five month period in elementary school children. They found that students who were more often relationally victimized used more relational aggression toward their peers than students who were not relationally victimized. At time one, the hostile attribution bias mediated this finding, suggesting that once students are relationally victimized they may misperceive neutral interactions as hostile interactions and use relational aggression to retaliate against the perceive threat. At time two, hostile attribution bias did not mediate the relationship. However, Yeung and Leadbeater note that relational aggression was lower at time two and that may have contributed to that finding.

Another major theory, aside from popularity, is the gender socialization theory. This theory, which has been cited by both authors of scholarly articles (Letendre, 2007; Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2007) and authors of mainstream parenting books such as “Queen Bees and Wannabees” (Wiseman, 2002) and “Girl Wars” (Dellesega & Nixon, 2003), suggests that relational aggression is used because it is the only way that girls can express their angry and aggressive tendencies once they are socialized in American society.

Letendre (2007) explores this issue further. Letendre explains that girls learn to place high value on relationships, consideration of the needs of others, empathic sharing,
and mutual sensitivity, while boys learn to place emphasis on individuality and individual success. Since American society socializes girls to place importance on these factors, girls’ sense of self becomes deeply intertwined with connection to others. Additionally, girls learn that there are societal and cultural restrictions on direct expression of feelings and needs. In particular, girls are not encouraged to express anger or aggression. Since this becomes taboo for girls, they learn to express their feelings and needs covertly. Adding to these factors, “ideal” physical attractiveness and pressure to become involved in heterosexual relationships contribute to girls’ need to express their feelings covertly. Letendre (2007) suggests that societal and cultural pressure to value gender roles and ostracism for using physical and overt aggression causes girls to use relational aggression when they feel anger or frustration. Relational aggression is an acceptable form of aggression because it is covert and girls can still maintain friendships while using it. Additionally, girls use relational aggression to damage relationships, which they are taught from an early age to highly value.

Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz (2007) also explore this issue. They suggest that girlhood and ideal femininity becomes defined by society. Since there is a narrow idea of that which ideal femininity consists, girls who have those qualities automatically receive more power in peer situations. Currie et al. suggest that girls use this power by continuing to invoke “unspoken rules about girlhood” that they learn from society. Relational aggression serves as a means to invoke these rules. For example, not wearing the right clothes, styling hair the right way, or having the right accessories can stimulate girls who do these things “correctly” to gossip or ostracize those who do not. Currie et al. (2007) call this use of relational aggression “the power to squash people”. They maintain that
girls do not use this method because there are no other options for expression, but rather because it helps maintain the power they receive through the socialization of girls in society.

**Emotional and Psychological Impact**

Relational aggression is a problem because it is connected to so many negative consequences. Crick, Casas, and Nelson (2002) reviewed the literature on relational aggression. They reported that relational aggression is consistently found to have harmful effects on children and adolescents. Crick et al. report that relational aggression is one of the most commonly cited mean behaviors by children. Additionally, relational aggression is identified by children as harmful throughout developmental stages. Crick et al. report that children as young as pre-school and through adolescence report relationally aggressive acts to be hurtful. They also report that studies consistently find significant, concurrent adjustment problems including poor peer relationships, internalizing problems such as depression and loneliness, and externalizing difficulties. Finally, Crick et al. report that being a victim of relational aggression predicts future peer adjustment. They report that once a child has been identified as a victim by an aggressor, it becomes more difficult for them to find acceptance by other peers.

Yoon, Barton, and Taiariol (2004) attained similar findings. They found that victims are more likely to exhibit depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem than non-victims. They also found that frequent targets are less accepted by peers. Yoon et al. report that victims are exposed to the same type of aggression over time. They suggest that because of the lack of available friends and a high need for intimacy, victims’ chances of being victimized again increase. Additionally, victims may come to attribute
the cause of their maltreatment to themselves. Yoon et al. also report that aggressors also present with externalizing symptoms associated with conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder.

Card and Hodges (2008) explain that victims of relational aggression feel less liked and often try to avoid school in order to avoid victimization. Rasauskas and Stoltz (2004) note that victims of relational aggression exhibit more somatic symptoms and may end up in the school nurse’s office to avoid victimization. They report that chronic victims report skipping school to avoid victimization and having difficulty concentrating because of fear and humiliation.

Sandstrom and Cillesen (2006) found that there are negative consequences for perpetrators of relational aggression as well. For example, they found that perceived popularity, which is defined as others rating someone as popular on a sociometric rating scale, is associated with higher levels of acting out behaviors and overt and relational aggression. Yoon, Barton, and Taiariol (2004) also note that relationally aggressive children exhibit more oppositional behavior and lack pro-social skills.

Crick, Ostrov, and Werner (2006) also found that relationally and physically aggressive children had negative consequences. They found that being both relationally and physically aggressive was the strongest predictor for future social-psychological problems. Specifically, both types of aggression were related to both internalizing and externalizing behaviors in boys and girls. Additionally, relationally aggressive girls were more likely to have increased internalizing and externalizing symptoms than non-aggressive girls over a one-year period.
Crozier and Skilopidou (2002) attempted to investigate the long-term consequences of relational aggression. They explored adult’s recollection of name calling and teasing during their school years. They found that adults who had been called hurtful names recalled their school years as less pleasant and rated higher feelings of unhappiness, anger, and embarrassment. For most adults in the study, the feelings of unhappiness decreased over time. However, for those who rated their name-calling experiences as very or extremely hurtful, the negative experience was more pervasive. These adults not only rated their school years as less pleasant, but they said that the experience of name calling affected their attendance, participation in activities, friendships, and quality of academic work. They also rated more negative effects on their current personalities and attitudes, and their current feelings about these past events as more negative. Overall, these adults were still feeling the pain of their childhood experiences with relational aggression.

Remillard and Lamb (2005) found that girls who are very hurt by relationally aggressive interactions with friends have immediate consequences as well. They found that the more hurt a child was after a relationally aggressive interaction, the greater the likelihood was for them to blame themselves, keep to themselves, and engage in tension reduction as opposed to seeking social support.

Putallaz et al. (2007) found that victims of relational aggression were rated as sad and depressed by multiple informants in the school. Additionally, they reported higher levels of loneliness, were rated as avoiding social situations, and were afraid of negative evaluations by their teachers.
Skara, Pokhrel, Weiner, Sun, Dent, and Sussman (2008) found that relational aggression was also related to substance use. Specifically, Skara et al. found that when controlling for relational aggression, physical aggression was found to predict alcohol use one year later for males. When controlling for physical aggression, relational aggression predicted marijuana and cigarette use among females. However, relational aggression was found to predict later alcohol and hard drug use across genders.

Relational Aggression and School

Relational aggression is often used during school hours and can go unseen because it is such a covert form of aggression. The school setting both has an impact on and is impacted by the use of relational aggression. Kuppens, Grietens, Onghena, Michiels, and Subramanian (2008) explored the impact of classroom aggression norms on relational aggression. Kuppens et al. base their hypothesis on Bronfrenbrener’s (1986) theory that the immediate environment has an impact on children’s behavior. Based on this, Kuppens et al. hypothesized that children’s peer interactions, specifically those including relational aggression, will vary according to the classroom setting because classroom characteristics will either inhibit or facilitate the use of this behavior. They found that while children’s use of relational aggression was positively correlated with perceived popularity and peer rejection and was highly stable over time, classroom environments impacted use as well. Specifically, they measured classroom aggression norms, which were defined as the extent to which relational aggression happens in a classroom as a whole. Kuppens et al. found that an individual’s use of relational aggression was more likely associated with classrooms where relational aggression was more prevalent. These findings suggest that using relational aggression is facilitated by a
classroom context where the behavior is frequently used. Diminishing the acceptability of relational aggression in the classroom may help reduce the frequency with which individual students use relational aggression in school.

Yoon and Kerber (2003) also found that school environment contributes to relational aggression use. They found that when presenting teachers with relationally aggressive scenarios and overtly aggressive scenarios, teachers viewed relational aggression as normative and less harmful than physical aggression. Teachers were more likely to ignore, be less involved, and have less sympathy in responding to the relationally aggressive scenarios than the overtly aggressive scenarios. Additionally, Yoon and Kerber note that when victims do not receive helpful responses from their school or teachers, they are less likely to feel safe in their school environments.

Other research has found that relational aggression contributes to less safe school environments. Buhs, Ladd, and Herald (2006) conducted a study that examined the relationship between peer group rejection, a common form of relational aggression, and children’s classroom engagement and achievement. They found that children who were chronically excluded or maltreated were more disengaged from school and had lower classroom achievement. When a classmate dislikes a child, that dislike can become shared among others and the child becomes rejected by a large number of students. This affects the social climate of the classroom and school. They suggest that chronic exclusion by some classmates sends the message to others that that child is not an integral part of the classroom and should continue to be excluded resulting in the child’s disengagement from the classroom activities.
Goldstein, Young, and Boyd (2008) also found that relational aggression negatively impacts the school environment. They found that students who had more exposure to relational aggression, either by being a victim or by witnessing it occur, perceived their schools as less safe. Students who were victims of relational aggression had overall negative perceptions of the school climate. Goldstein et al. also found that male students with more exposure to relational aggression were more likely to carry a weapon to school. Overall, they concluded that relational aggression contributes to a hostile and potentially unsafe school environment.

Social Emotional Learning in Schools

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is used in schools to combat problems similar to relational aggression. SEL is used to increase perceptions of school safety and reduce problematic behaviors such as aggression and bullying (Zins & Elias, 2006). Zins and Elias report that social emotional learning in the schools is essential because without feelings of safety and belonging, children are unable to succeed to their potential and some children will experience negative consequences. For example, they report that some of the major reasons for dropout, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, include issues that could be addressed with social and emotional learning programming. Specifically, the reasons include not getting along with teachers, not getting along with peers, feeling left out, and not feeling safe.

Wang, Haertel, and Wahlberg (1997) found that 8 of the 11 most influential factors that contribute to learning were under the category of social and emotional factors. These factors included student-teacher social interactions, classroom climate, and
peer group. Wang et al. concluded that intervening and supporting social emotional factors would help increase learning.

Greenberg et al. (2003) reviewed the evidence supporting social and emotional learning programs. They found that SEL programs are most beneficial when they are coordinated with explicit attempts to change and improve competence and connections with others and contribute to communication. These programs reached these goals in a variety of ways, including focusing on changing school environment, person centered approaches, or multiple method approaches. Furthermore, the SEL programs had different central content. For example, some programs focused on youth development. These programs improved peer relationship quality, academic achievement, and reduction in problematic behaviors with the general strategies of skill building and environmental change. Other programs focused on mental health. These programs enhanced competencies of assertiveness, communication, and self-confidence.

Kress, Norris, Schoenholz, Elias, and Seigle (2004) describe how SEL programming fits into schools’ missions. They report that true education encompasses more than academics. Children need a safe environment to learn and achieve. Without that, learning is impeded. They report that emotions drive attention, learning, and memory. Unaddressed emotions can interfere by distracting students and making simple academic tasks difficult to accomplish. Kress et al. note that the goal of social and emotional learning is to strengthen a person’s ability to understand, manage, and express emotional and social aspects of life. They report that while SEL programming does not often target academic variables, by helping students manage emotions and increase social competence, these programs influence school success.
Zins and Elias (2006) report that SEL programming in the schools is intended to enhance growth, help develop healthy behaviors, and prevent children from engaging in maladaptive behaviors. They argue that developing social and emotional competence is a key to success in school and life. They further argue that because emotions affect how and what we learn, it is essential to help children process and manage emotions. Zins and Elias report that social and emotional learning is associated with positive effects on academic performance, has benefits to physical health, improves citizenship, and reduces the risk of maladjustment, interpersonal violence, and substance abuse. They suggest that social emotional learning should be incorporated into schools on three levels. The first level would be to offer SEL programming to all students in a prevention model, the second would be to offer specified programming to students at risk, and the third would be to offer treatment to students who already exhibit problems. Zins and Elias note that all SEL programming should include the key components of SEL, specifically, social awareness, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, and relationship skills.

Relational Aggression Programs

While there are many empirically supported SEL programs available, they do not focus exclusively on relational aggression. However, relational aggression research often includes implications for practice that fall in line with key components of SEL (Card and Hodges, 2008; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2004; Yoon, Barton, & Taiariol, 2004). For example, Card and Hodges (2008) suggest a comprehensive approach that includes a curriculum based on skill building, collaborative activities, and education. Yoon, Barton, and Taiariol (2004) and Raskauskas and Stoltz (2004) suggest changing the school
environment so that all types of aggression are not tolerated and positive social behavior is rewarded. Raskauskas and Stoltz also suggest increasing social connectedness and building social skills.

Two widespread interventions that address relational aggression based on the case-based literature, Owning Up (Wiseman, 2002) and the Ophelia Project (Pipher, 1997), use many of the components of SEL. These school based programs address the roles that girls play in relational aggression. Both programs aim to increase competence in assertiveness, communication, and self-esteem. Additionally, both programs aim to show children that there are alternative means to solving problems, thereby increasing their social decision making skills. Owning Up is a program that teaches students to recognize when inappropriate aggression is being exhibited and provides ways to stand up to aggression and create a positive environment. The program’s goal is to enhance problem solving skills and conflict resolution styles while dealing with popularity, self-image, and pop-culture. In a program evaluation of the Owning Up program (Empower Program, 2001), female students’ acceptance of violence significantly declined post-program. Additionally, verbal aggression, physical aggression, and overall aggression decreased significantly post-program. The evaluation also noted that female and male participants were significantly more likely to agree that they could think of solutions to problems post-program than pre-program.

The Ophelia Project (1997) is a project that works to increase capabilities in those who have been affected by relational aggression. It also works to create safe social climates. These projects work to help girls create safer environments by not allowing relational aggression to occur, fostering positive relationships, creating safe
environments, and increasing awareness about one’s own role in the problem. The Ophelia Project’s Creating a Safe School (CASS) program was found to reduce relational aggression by 23% in female participants (www.opheliaproject.org, 2006). The program was also found to reduce relational aggression by 10% in male participants and reduce aggressive behavior by 16.7% in sixth grade aggressors.

Summary

The purpose of this literature review is to synthesize the current relational aggression research. A variety of theories and factors have been discussed and effects have been reported to highlight the severity of the problem. Overall, relational aggression is a problem that affects children’s learning, quality of school community, and friendships. Relational aggression has been correlated with depression, anxiety, and a decrease in school attendance. The available literature suggests that schools make intervening in and attempting to prevent relational aggression a priority and provide services to children that build their social and emotional skills to combat the growing use of relational aggression. Social and emotional learning research provides strategies for intervening and preventing behaviors similar to relational aggression. The research presented in this literature review, in conjunction with the results of a needs assessment, will help guide and inform the design of the program for intervention and prevention of relational aggression.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

A needs assessment was conducted following Maher’s (2001) systematic model for program planning and design. For the purpose of this dissertation, two phases of Maher’s approach were utilized. The Clarification Phase includes specifying the target population, determining the needs of the target population, and delineating the relevant context. The second phase, Design, includes describing the program purpose and goals, considering design alternatives, developing the program, and documenting the design. The Clarification Phase is the phase in which data were collected in order to determine the needs of the target population.

Target Population

The target population for this dissertation involves the sixth grade female students (n=32) at a public, suburban elementary school. The majority of students at this school are socio-economically middle class and White. One percent of the students in the school receive free lunch and 2% of the students receive reduced-fee lunch. Seventy-eight percent of the students are White, 10% are Asian, 9% are Hispanic, and 1% is Black. The average household income is $82,197 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Needs Assessment

After identifying the target population, the next step is to delineate the needs of the target population by identifying the broad domain where the needs fall (Maher, 2001). The needs of these sixth grade female students fall under the Socialization Domain. Relational aggression falls under the broad category of the Socialization Domain because the Socialization Domain is defined as a domain that reflects the function of relating to
individuals and groups in social contexts including social discourse and leadership
dimensions (Maher, 2001). Once the domain is identified, needs assessment questions are
developed.

For each needs assessment question, data collection points, data collection
methods, and data collection procedures are identified. Additionally, the structure of
needs is identified. Maher (2001) states that a need is the extent to which a discrepancy
exists between a current state of affairs (CSA) and a desired state of affairs (DSA). For
this target population, three needs assessment questions have been identified.

1. To what extent are 6th grade girls experiencing aggression at school?
CSA: 6th grade girls experience aggression at school. DSA: 6th grade girls do not
experience aggression at school.
2. To what extent do 6th grade girls utilize aggressive behaviors at school?
CSA: 6th grade girls utilize aggressive behaviors at schools. DSA: 6th grade girls do
not utilize aggressive behaviors at school.
3. To what extent do 6th grade girls who use aggressive behaviors experience
aggression from others?
CSA: 6th grade girls who experience aggression are aggressive towards others. DSA:
6th grade girls who experience aggression are not aggressive towards others.

For question 1, the data collection points are as follows: experience of physical
aggression, experience of relational aggression, and experience of pro-social behaviors
from others. For question 2, the data collection points are as follows: number of girls
using relational aggression, number of girls using verbal aggression, number of girls
using physical aggression, and number of girls using pro-social behaviors. For question 3,
the data collection points are as follows: experience of physical aggression is related to physical aggression use and experience of relational aggression is related to relational aggression use.

Measures

Two measures were used to answer the needs assessment questions. To answer question one and collect data on the related data collection points, the Children’s Social Experiences Questionnaire – Self Report (CSEQ-S) (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996) was used. The CSEQ-S is a 15-item, likert-type scale questionnaire that assesses victimization in school. It includes three, 5-item scales: Overt Victimization, Relational Victimization, and Recipient of Pro-Social Behavior. An example item on the CSEQ-S is, “How often do other kids leave you out on purpose when it is time to play or do an activity?” The scale was designed for use on third through sixth grade students. The authors have reported good reliability with a .77-.80 internal consistency score. The authors did not establish validity.

The second measure, which was used to answer question two and collect data on the related data collection points, is The Children’s Social Behavior Scale- Peer Report (CSBS-P) (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). The CSBS-P is a 15-item, 4-scale peer nomination tool. The scales include Physical Aggression, Verbal Aggression, Relational Aggression, and Pro-Social acts. Students are given a class list with their classmates’ names and corresponding ID numbers. The students are then asked to listen to items read aloud. The students pick three students that correspond to the item and write the ID number of each student on their answer sheet. For example, students are asked, “Find the number of three kids who try to make another kid not like a certain person by spreading rumors about
them or talking behind their backs.” The authors report good reliability with this scale. This scale has .82-.90 test-retest reliability and .83-.94 internal consistency. The authors did not report validity. In the original use of the scale, the authors report why a peer nomination instrument is best for assessing use of relational aggression. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) report that because of the relatively indirect and covert nature of relational aggression and because of its focus on peer relationships, those outside the peer group may not be able to reliably observe or report on this type of aggression. They add that peer nominations have been used extensively in past research on childhood aggression. As this dissertation is focused on relational aggression, a peer nomination tool was chosen as the most reliable way to obtain information about the use of relational aggression in this target population.

Procedures

Each child was sent home with an introduction letter and an informed consent form for their parents or guardians prior to data collection. The informed consent form was given a due date of one week from the day that it was given to the children in homeroom. The children were asked to return the form whether or not their parent gave consent. Any parents of girls who did not return the form in one week received a phone call and were asked to return the form or give a verbal “no”. Any child without a returned form was considered ineligible to partake in data collection.

In order to minimize disruption to the school day, the elementary school principal and the three sixth grade teachers chose an agreed upon time for data collection. All students with returned consent forms worked at the same time. This investigator introduced the task to all the students. This investigator explained that she was collecting
data for a project and that their parents have agreed to let them participate in this project. The child assent form was read to them and they were asked to sign. Questions were answered for students who were unsure of their desire to participate. All students present that day signed the assent forms. Once those forms were collected, this investigator distributed the CSBS-P, the class list, and a colored sheet of paper for covering answers. This investigator explained the directions of the CSBS-P and informed the students that the teacher would read the items to them. The students were asked to find their name on the class list and write their ID number on the top of the answer sheet. They were then asked to cross their name off the list because they were not able to choose themselves for any item. The teacher then began to administer the scale. This investigator repeated this process with the second group. When the first class completed the CSBS-P, all of the answer sheets and class lists were collected and sealed in an envelope until data analysis. The students then received the next scale and this investigator read the directions to them. As part of the directions the students were told, “Some of these questions will ask you about other kids doing or saying mean things to you. If other students have said mean things to you, or bullied you or harassed you, it is very important that you let an adult know what has happened to you so that he/she may help you. You can let your teacher, Mr. S., Ms. P., the School Social Worker, or another adult in school that you trust know when these things happen to you so that they can help you with these kinds of problems.” They were instructed to write their ID number on the space provided. After a student finished the CSEQ-S, he/she was instructed to raise his/her hand so the scale could be collected. The scale was placed in a second envelope. When all of the scales were received, the envelope was sealed. Each group completed the same activities. When all
scales were collected, this investigator checked once more for any class lists that may have been missed in order to ensure that they were all removed from the classrooms. The teachers and students were thanked for their participation. This completed the data collection process.

The results were reviewed within one week. Any child who identified himself/herself as experiencing physical or relational aggression at a 4 (Almost all the time) or a 5 (All the time) was to be identified and a referral was to be made to the elementary guidance counselor. No child identified himself or herself as experiencing relational aggression at that level. The class lists were placed in a final sealed envelope and placed in a locked drawer. The names of the students corresponding to the numbers were not needed for data analysis. Only numbers were used from this point forward.

Data Analysis

For all data, only the girls’ data were analyzed. The male students were given the scales make it easier for the teachers and to reduce further disruption of the school day.

For the CSEQ-S, descriptive statistics were conducted. A mean of 3 (Sometimes) or higher on any one item was to be considered problematic as the purpose of the CSEQ-S is to determine whether students experience aggression in school and a mean of 3 (Sometimes) suggests that students are in fact experiencing aggression. Overall scales were to be considered as well, and a mean of 15 or higher was to be considered problematic for the same reason. Inferential statistics were not conducted at this time.

For the CSBS-P, descriptive statistics were conducted. Frequency counts were looked at in particular. Each female student with one nomination in one area was considered aggressive in that domain. For example, a student who receives a nomination
for leaving others out was considered relationally aggressive. The purpose of the CSBS-P in this dissertation is to determine how many girls are using aggression and how many girls are using each act (item) of aggression. The percentage of girls using each aggressive behavior was determined by calculating the percentage of girls who were nominated for each item.

Finally, the ID numbers on the CSEQ-S and nominations on the CSBS-P were cross referenced to determine if girls who reported being victimized in some domain were also nominated as being aggressive in that domain.

The results of data analysis were used in two ways. The first was to answer the needs assessment questions outlined above and therefore establish that a need exists in this population in this area. Second, the specific item results informed the areas of strength and weakness in this population to best design a program that meets their needs. For example, if it was found that the most girls are using gossip, but only a small percentage are using isolation when being relationally aggressive, the program design will not focus heavily on isolation but will spend more time on gossip. In this way, the program will be tailored to the needs of the specific population.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Context Assessment

*Ability to Commit Resources*

This school has a number of resources that can be committed to this program. To begin, human resources are available. Specifically, the school social worker is based in this building and has a smaller caseload to allow for counseling and group counseling programs. The school social worker, along with one of the sixth grade teachers who has previously conducted relational aggression groups in this school, have the ability to run this program during the lunch hour when other school clubs are run. In terms of technical resources, equipment such as smart boards, computers, and televisions are available for use as they either exist in the classroom or can be borrowed from other rooms for the purpose of the program. Also, other materials such as pencils, papers, or copies of documents are available. Informational resources are available as the curriculum will be designed and written for use in conducting this program. There are also physical resources in the form of classroom space for the program and many clubs are run in the classrooms during the lunch period. One resource that is lacking is financial resources. As with any other lunchtime club, group leaders are able to purchase items and get reimbursed up to $40.

*Values that People Ascribe to the Target Population and Its Needs*

One of the values held by the teachers and administration at this school is a commitment to quality service. Specifically, the teachers and administration are focused on quality teaching as well as good test scores. The teachers and staff also value meeting
both the academic and emotional needs of the students. This has been shown in the way that this school is always willing to implement social emotional learning programs such as the Good Citizenship Awards which awards students who meet criteria for social growth and the Teach Tolerance program which emphasizes accepting and welcoming other’s differences. Also, teachers recognize and support students who appear to have emotional difficulties and make sure that the school psychologist or counselor sees them. Finally, the faculty and staff at this school value school-wide traditions. Specifically, the staff values school wide celebrations and events that are often centered on holidays. Some examples of these are the sixth grade DARE and patrol picnics, the Halloween parade, holiday assembly and school wide Christmas tree, and Family Fun day. These events have been in place for a number years and the staff values the sense of community and safety around school that it creates for the school community.

The traditional responses of the organization toward addressing the needs of the target population, sixth graders using relational aggression, are to attempt to be aware of the use of relational aggression and to be responsive to the situation, if possible. However, while the organization is responsive, it is often responsive in a traditional disciplinary manner. The needs are either addressed on a case-by-case basis or by alerting the entire grade to the consequences that will result from harassing behaviors. The organization does not typically respond in a programmatic way. Finally, the level of commitment is present but not a priority. Teachers want to commit time to this issue because the issue has become prevalent in the media and they have recognized its growing presence in their school.

*Beliefs Stakeholders Have About the Current State of Affairs*
The teachers and the client are clear about the task that is to be accomplished. The client, the school principal, and I explained to the teachers that I would be designing a program to address the needs of the sixth grade female students, specifically those surrounding relational aggression.

Currently, the sixth grade students receive services such as clubs, groups, individual counseling and assemblies. In the past, a relational aggression club has been conducted in the school. The teachers and client would like a program specific to the needs of this target population. The teachers view helping the target population as a professional response. They have had problems with these behaviors in the past and are looking to help students before the problem becomes unmanageable. The teachers feel that it is a necessary, but not yet overdue, response.

Circumstances Within the Organization

It is likely that the principal will remain in his position for at least the next five years. This is his third year as principal of this school and he came after a principal who was in the position for nine years. Additionally, many of the teachers at this school have taught there for many years and much of the staff has worked there for many years. The organization is quite stable in terms of administration and staff.

Timing

In terms of timing, the principal is willing to allow time to be devoted to the program during lunch hour. He also allows teachers and social workers to determine what is needed for the students. While there are no sources of funding to support the program, there are a number of other resources to support it such as human, technical, material, and
informational resources. Finally, the recent media attention surrounding bullying and the harmful effects indicate that this is an advantageous time to begin a program such as this.

**Obligation to Assist the Target Population**

In terms of active supporters of a programmatic approach with the target population, there are a number of people that can be identified. First, the principal is in support of whatever the school social worker does to address the needs of the target population. The teachers and social worker are active supporters because they recognize the increasing use of relational aggression in this population and want to address it. It is not anticipated that there is a group that would not support this program.

**Resistance**

There is no anticipated resistance to this program because the teachers and community recognize the need to address relational aggression. The program will be run during the lunch hour and will not disrupt the school day in any manner. Many clubs are run during the lunch hour so participating in a program such as this will not be isolating for members of the target population. However, there may be some resistance from the target population if the material is not relevant to them or if they are not comfortable with addressing the problem.

**Yield**

In terms of potential benefits, the teachers and social worker see a number of benefits. First, the students will be helped and one of the values held by the organization is to meet the emotional needs of the students. Second, the teachers and social worker dislike addressing bullying issues. The teachers and social worker are hoping that the program
will increase pro-social behavior and decrease relational aggression so that fewer such instances occur.

Descriptive Statistics

Parental consent forms were provided to each teacher to send home with the students in October 2010. There are 57 students in the sixth grade, 32 girls and 25 boys. Of the 57 consent forms that went home, 38 were returned with consent to participate, a 67% response rate. For the girls, 20 were returned with consent to participate, a 62.5% response rate. All students who were present on the day of data collection also signed child assent forms, which were read and explained to them. All directions were read aloud and the same messages were read to all students.

Experience of Relational Aggression

Needs assessment question one, “To what extent are 6th grade girls experiencing aggression at school?”, was measured by the Children’s Social Experience Questionnaire – Self Report (CSEQ-S). On this measure, students were provided with 15 questions that measured their experiences of relational aggression, overt aggression, and receipt of pro-social acts. Students were asked to respond with how true each item was for them on a five point likert-type scale from “never” to “almost always”. There are no reference points for these means, as the developers did not include them in their development.

For the purposes of data collection, means were determined for each item as well as for each scale. The median was also determined for each item and each scale. See Table 1 below for means, standard deviations, and medians.
Table 1
Means and Medians

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<tr>
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Utilization of Relationally Aggressive Acts

Needs assessment question two, “To what extent do 6th grade girls utilize aggressive behaviors at school?” was measured by the Children’s Social Behavior Scale – Peer Report (CSBS-P). On this scale, students were read items that described aggressive and pro-social acts. They nominated peers from a class list that listed all their sixth grade classmates. Frequency counts were measured for this scale. Any girl who was nominated at least once for one act is considered relationally aggressive.

Seventy-two percent of girls in the sixth grade class were nominated to be relationally aggressive in at least one way by their female peers. This indicates that well over half of the girls in the sixth grade have been identified as being relationally aggressive to their classmates. Forty percent of the girls received between 1 and 5 nominations for relationally aggressive acts, 25% received 0 nominations, 12% received
between 6 and 10 nominations, 6% received between 11 and 15 nominations, 9% received between 16 and 20 nominations. One girl received 21 nominations and one received 39 nominations.

For the five relational aggression items, the nominations were as follows: 47% of the girls were nominated as talking behind others backs, 47% were nominated as keeping people out of their group when mad, 50% were nominated to ignore or stop talking to people when they are mad, 50% were nominated to stop liking their friends unless they do what they want them to do, and 44% were nominated to exclude people. For the two verbal aggression items, the nominations were as follows: 38% were nominated to insult their classmates, 38% were nominated to call classmates mean names. For the three physical aggression items, 22% were nominated to hit their classmates, 34% were nominated to push others around, and 19% were nominated to threaten to beat others up if they don’t do what they want. For the three prosocial items, 69% were nominated to do nice things for others, 66% were nominated to help others join the group, and 72% were nominated to cheer others up when they are upset.

**Aggression and Victimization Cross Reference**

Needs assessment question three, “To what extent do 6th grade girls who use aggressive behaviors experience aggression from others?” was measured by cross-referencing the ID numbers of the girls who identified themselves as being victimized in some way by the nominations for that ID number for being aggressive in that same way. Of the 14 girls who identified themselves as being left out, 42% of them were nominated as having left someone out. Of the 18 girls who identified as having been excluded from a group, 56% were nominated as excluding others. Of the 12 girls who identified
themselves as having lies told about them, 58% were nominated as using rumors against others. Of the 9 girls who identified themselves as having been told they won’t be liked unless they do what the other wants them to do, 56% were nominated to tell that to others. Finally, of the 11 girls who identified themselves as having mean things said about them, 18% were nominated as saying mean things about others.
CHAPTER V

PROGRAM DESIGN

Purpose and Goals

Statement of Purpose

All sixth grade female students at Yantacaw School, contingent upon parental consent, will be given the opportunity to participate in this program. Over the course of 12 weekly lunch sessions, students will be exposed to information about relational aggression, guided discussion, role-play, and activities surrounding these issues. The program will assist students in learning specific social and emotional learning competencies such as assertiveness, communication, and social problem solving. Additionally, the program will aim to impede the bully-victim-bystander relationship and support positive peer networks. Through this program, girls will be helped to create positive friendships with peers that protect against the negative effects of relational aggression as well as teach them skills to appropriately confront relationally aggressive situations.

Goals

Goal 1: At the conclusion of the program, students will be aware of the behaviors that are considered relational aggression and the roles that people play in relational aggression

1. It is anticipated that 90% of students will be able to orally answer the question, “What is relational aggression?” correctly, in accordance with what behaviors the program associates with relational aggression.
2. It is also anticipated that 90% of students will be able to orally answer the question, “What is a Queen Bee (or other role) and what does she get out of being a Queen Bee?” correctly, in accordance with the Who’s Who informational handout.

3. Finally, it is anticipated that students will be able to identify relationally aggressive situations in real life and in simulated role-plays or written scenarios.

4. At the end of the program, the group leader will ask these questions to the group.

**Goal 2: At the conclusion of the program students will:**

A. Maintain or increase their current levels of social and emotional learning skills. Specifically, they will maintain or increase their use of defending others, being assertive, and communicating effectively.

B. Decrease their current levels of relational aggression. Specifically, they will decrease their use of gossip, exclusion, and bystanding.

1. It is anticipated that students will rate their use of social and emotional learning skills more frequently on a rating scale from the beginning of session 1 to the conclusion of the program.

2. It is anticipated that students will rate their use of relationally aggressive behaviors less frequently on a rating scale from the beginning of session one to the conclusion of the program.

3. Students will rate their personal use of social and emotional learning skills at the beginning of session one and the conclusion of the program.
Eligibility Standards and Criteria

A student is eligible to participate if she meets the following criteria:

1. Is a sixth grade female student
2. Has written parent permission
3. Agrees to participate in 12 weekly lunch sessions

The eligibility criteria have been considered from the beginning of the program planning process. Female students exhibit the greatest need to have skills to manage relational aggression appropriately. Additionally, the literature suggests that females use relational aggression more often than their male counterparts and that relational aggression results in more problematic situations for females. Sixth grade students are those with the greatest need regarding relational aggression and therefore, the program is limited to that grade level. Additionally, research indicates that relational aggression is most prevalent in early adolescence (12 to 14 years old). The sixth grade population falls at the beginning of this range. Parental permission is a standard eligibility criterion for working with minors in schools and it is therefore, included in this project. Finally, the students and their parents must agree that the student will attend the majority of the 12 weekly sessions. In order to maintain and build upon the skills, students need to have learned the previous skill. The program covers many concepts in 12 weeks and it is necessary that the group members attend most, if not all, of the sessions to keep the pace and to maintain the established group dynamics.

Policies and Procedures

Policies
1. Only students who meet the eligibility criteria can participate in the program.

2. Students must be actively engaged in the role-plays, discussions, and activities to continue their enrollment in the program.

3. Students must abide by the confidentiality agreement on the permission slip. Violations of confidentiality will be dealt with at the discretion of the group leader. Two confidentiality violations may warrant removal from the group.

4. Student attendance is required. Two missed sessions warrants removal from the group.

The policies for this program provide the administration and group leader with specific facts about how the program should operate. The policies outline how to deal with violations of group rules and highlight the importance of certain rules.

Procedures

1. All sixth grade girls will be given a permission slip in homeroom with an introductory letter.

2. The group leader will hold an information session for the sixth grade girls who are interested in joining the group.

3. The permission slips will be gathered one week from the date of the information session.

4. The group leader will allow new members up to two sessions beyond the initial session. The group will be closed to new members from that session forward.

5. Students will be advised of the expectations at the information session and at the beginning of each session.

6. Group membership will be contingent on the policies outlined above.
7. Each session will begin with 15 minutes for lunch followed by a 45-minute session. The session will begin with a check in, follow the outlined lesson plan, and end with “homework”.

8. The lesson plans should be followed sequentially as they move from one phase to the next and each new lesson builds upon the previous one.

These procedures outline how the program should proceed from beginning to end. The procedures for obtaining consent, allowing new members, and following the curriculum are outlined so that any group leader will know how to begin and follow the program.

Methods and Techniques

There are four main methods that will be utilized in this program: guided discussion, small group discussion, modeling, and role-play. The first method, guided discussion, is used most frequently in this program. Guided discussion is a method that is used to help the students discuss ideas about relational aggression pertaining to the lesson topic. The technique involves facilitating the discussion by asking questions to the group and synthesizing the responses as they relate to the topic. The procedure includes introducing the topic to the group, asking a question to the group, allowing the students to answer and formulate their own ideas about the topic, summarizing the responses, relating the responses to the topic, and asking a new question to move the discussion along.

The second method is small group discussion to allow students to practice and come up with ideas on their own. The technique involves breaking the students into groups, giving them a task, and monitoring their completion of the task. The procedure
includes introducing the task, breaking the students into small groups, walking around and monitoring the discussion, giving feedback, reconvening the full group, having the students share their group’s ideas, and relating the group discussion to the lesson topic.

The third method is modeling social and emotional learning skills to teach a new skill. The technique includes modeling the skill for the group. The procedure includes asking for a volunteer, modeling the skill, and asking the students to give their opinions and ask questions about the skill.

The final method is using role-plays to allow the students to practice modeled skills. The technique includes soliciting volunteers to enact the role-play and having others critique the use of the skill. The procedure is getting volunteers, having students role-play, having the rest of the group critique the use of the skill, discussing the role-play, and repeating the procedure three to four times.

Materials

Although this program largely uses guided discussion, there are some materials that are needed for certain activities. These materials include chalk, chalkboard, poster, copies of included handouts, pens/pencils, blank paper, yellow paper, and markers. Other materials will vary based on the final project that the group selects. Some possible materials needed would be additional posters, t-shirts, paint, or copies of scripts created by the group. The materials are outlined below:

1. Chalkboard and Chalk – The chalkboard and chalk will be used during the “What is a Friend” activity to write down student ideas. This material will be used during the first session. It is expected that this will help synthesize and summarize information for students.
2. Poster/Easel– The poster or easel paper will be displayed each session and will be used to display the group rules. It is expected that this will aide the students in remembering the group rules, particularly the rule about confidentiality.

3. Handouts– Handouts are included with each appropriate session. The handout will pertain to the objective of the lesson and be printed on paper and given to each member of the group. The leader will read over the handout with the group. It is expected that the students will be able to use the information on the handout to stimulate their own ideas so they can share those ideas with the group and learn new terminology and concepts for talking about relational aggression.

4. Scenario sheets– Scenario sheets and worksheets will be printed out for each small group. The small groups will read over the scenario and use the worksheet to apply relational aggression concepts. It is expected that the students will be able to use the scenario sheets to practice identifying roles that people play and motivations for relational aggression.

5. Project Materials– Project materials will depend on the project selected by each group. It may include t-shirts, scripts, posters, markers, or paint. It is expected that the students will use the project materials to create an out-reach project to teach other students in the school the skills they learned in Chick Chat.

6. Yellow paper and markers– The yellow paper and markers will be used during the Be Yellow activity. Each student will write her name on the yellow sheet and the rest of the students will write positive qualities about her on her sheet with her name. It is expected that the students will be able to identify the positive
friendship qualities of other group members and share that with each member using these materials.

Equipment

There are no equipment or tools that will be used as part of this program. All the elements of the program can be included under materials and forms.

Facilities

The facility needed for this program is one classroom. The chairs should be arranged in a circle at the beginning of each session. The teachers and students take lunch at the same time and classrooms are already used during lunch clubs. Therefore, obtaining a classroom will not be problematic as it is common practice in the school.

Components, Phases, Activities

There are three phases to this program: 1) Awareness and Understanding, 2) Social and Emotional Learning, 3) Spreading the Word. The first phase is the Awareness and Understanding phase. This phase includes information and discussion based on becoming aware of relational aggression and learning terminology and concepts important for understanding relational aggression. Sessions one through four are included in this phase. The second phase is the Social and Emotional Learning phase. This phase includes social and emotional learning skills that will be taught to the students for use when confronted with a relationally aggressive situation. Sessions four through nine are included in this phase. The third phase is the Spreading the Word phase. During this phase, students create a project to teach other students the skills and concepts they learned in the program. Sessions ten and eleven are included in this phase. Session twelve is a celebration of their accomplishments.
Personnel

Roles

There are two roles in this program. The first role is the direct service provider(s) or group leader(s). The direct service provider’s role is to implement the program according to the design and follow the curriculum. The second role is that of the consultant. The consultant is to provide assistance to the group leader by answering questions and providing informational support.

Responsibilities

The direct service provider’s responsibility is to instruct the students and guide the group according to the lesson plan. He or she must gather the necessary materials, present the lesson topic, and guide and monitor the group. The direct service provider is responsible for attending training with the consultant, reaching out to the consultant for support, and following the curriculum. The consultant’s responsibilities are to provide training to the direct service provider on the curriculum and general relational aggression concepts and information. The consultant is also responsible for troubleshooting issues with the program and providing support and information when the direct service provider requests help.

Relationships

The consultant and the direct service provider will have a close relationship throughout the program. The consultant and the direct service provider will be in contact from the initial training through the last session of the program on a monthly basis and as needed to answer questions. The direct service provider will also have a relationship with the group members, as the program is implemented, and other relevant school personnel such as teachers or principals.
Incentives

While there are no monetary incentives for this program, there are some non-monetary incentives for both the direct service provider and the students. For the direct service provider, the incentive is that engaging in this program should reduce some of the relational aggression issues that affect the culture and climate of the school. Parents are aware of these issues and the New Jersey legislature passed a law in January 2011 (“Anti Bullying Bill of Rights, A3466) that would require schools to show that they are aware of and intervening in bullying issues. This program would fit with that need. Additionally, the direct service provider will have access to consultation with the consultant on bullying and relational aggression issues. This incentive assures that participation in the program will create a direct line for communication on these issues.

For students there are two non-monetary incentives. The first incentive is that the students will be designated as leaders in their school. Their “Spread the Word” project identifies the students who participate as leaders who are helping to stop bullying and relational aggression. Additionally, the students can be referred for the popular peer-leadership group in the middle school as a “peer leader with a specialization in reducing relational aggression.”

Program Evaluation Plan

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation questions are focused on the goals of the program. Specifically, the questions are framed to determine if the needs of the target population have been met.
The questions are as follows:

1. To what extent have sixth grade female students become more aware of the definition and concepts of relational aggression?

2. To what extent have female sixth graders increased their use of social and emotional skills, specifically defending others, being assertive, and communicating effectively?

3. To what extent have female sixth graders decreased their use of relational aggression, specifically, gossip, exclusion, and bystanding?

Data Collection Variables

The data collection variables are the use of specific behaviors. The students will rate their use of the behaviors before and after the program on a 6th Grade Student Questionnaire (See Appendix C). These behaviors are integrated into a scale designed for students to rate their use of each one.

Behaviors to Reduce:

1. Gossip – spreading rumors or talking about others behind their backs

2. Excluding – not allowing someone to join an activity or event

3. Bystanding – not intervening when observing relational aggression occur

Behaviors to Increase:

1. Defending – intervening when someone is being targeted, teased, or made fun of

2. Being Assertive – standing up for yourself by appropriately confronting a person or group who is aggressing against you
3. Effective Communication – using appropriate methods, such as going directly to the source and using “I statements”, to communicate and gather information rather than using gossip or rumors

In terms of the question of awareness, there are two other data collection variables. The data will be collected by asking students two orally presented questions related to these variables. The variables are as follows:

1. Awareness of relational aggression- students are able to label and identify behaviors that are relationally aggressive

2. Awareness of relational aggression roles – students are able to label and identify roles that people play in relational aggression and can identify the benefit a person might gain from a particular role.

**Methods, Instruments, Procedures for Data Collection**

In order to collect the data, students will be assessed in two ways. The first assessment will be related to goal one. The students will be asked two questions in order to assess the extent to which the sixth grade female students are aware of behaviors that constitute relational aggression and the roles and motivations for roles in relational aggression. These questions will be presented orally at the conclusion of session one. The students will raise their hands and respond. Many different students will have the opportunity to respond. Ninety percent of the students called on should be able to identify the behaviors and consequences of harassment. These questions are:

1. What is relational aggression?

2. What is a Queen Bee (or other role) and what does someone get out of being a Queen Bee?
The second method is giving the 6th Grade Student Questionnaire (See Appendix C). The questionnaire lists all the behaviors related to goal two. The students will receive this questionnaire at the beginning of session one and at the conclusion of the program. The students will be able to rate their use of each behavior prior to the program and after the program. The program will be considered to have met the needs of the sixth grade students, if the students maintain or increase their use of social and emotional skills and decrease their use of relationally aggressive behaviors.

Methods and Procedures for Data Analysis and Interpretation

Since the data will be collected for each individual student, it will be beneficial to see the percentage of students who have been helped. For each student, each item will be looked at to see if they increased, decreased, or maintained each behavior. The percentage of students who increased or maintained each SEL item and decreased each relational aggression item will be calculated. Additionally, a mean score for each item will be calculated. The data will be displayed in a bar graph with the pre and post mean adjacent so the improvement will be easily visible. Additionally, a mean score for behaviors to reduce and a mean score for behaviors to increase will be determined. Also, any themes from the open-ended section of the questionnaire will be reported.

Guidelines for Communication Evaluation Results

The three sixth grade teachers and the principal will receive the program evaluation information. They will receive a summary of how the sixth grade students rated their use of each behavior before and after the program. This will be communicated in a written report that will include the bar graph mentioned above, written by the direct service provider and the consultant.
The teachers and principal will receive this information in order to see the progress of the students in the program. It will show whether the program has met the goals designed. It is important that all of the implementers receive this information in order to show how their participation has made a difference for the students.
CHAPTER VI

CURRICULUM – CHICK CHAT

Introduction

This program was developed according to both the needs of the target population and the relevant research on relational aggression (see Chapters II and III). The needs assessment indicates that girls can identify relationally aggressive behaviors in over half of their classmates. This warrants intervention because the research indicates that relational aggressive is emotionally and psychologically damaging (Card and Hodges, 2008; Crick, Casas, & Nelson, 2002; Yoon, Barton, & Taiariol, 2004). Relational aggression is also detrimental to the overall feeling of safety in the school (Goldstein, Young, and Boyd, 2008) and the ability to learn in school (Wang, Haertel, and Wahlberg, 1997).

The first section of the program aims to increase understanding of relational aggression and awareness of the definitions and behaviors that constitute relational aggression. This section also addresses potential motivations for relational aggression. The understanding and awareness sessions were designed from the research based definitions and understandings of relational aggression and adapted from popular media such as Queen Bees and Wannabees (Wiseman, 2002) and Girl Wars (Dellesega & Nixon, 2003), which are practically oriented help books. Although both of these books are based on gender socialization theory and much of this program is based on the understanding that relational aggression is an instrumental tool to increase or maintain one’s popularity or power, they provide basic terminology and information written for
easy understanding of relationally aggressive acts and identification of the roles that girls play in relational aggression. Popularity and power are concepts that are included because the research indicates that much of relational aggression is used to instrumentally increase or maintain one’s popularity and power (Hoff et al, 2009; Mayeux & Cillesen, 2008; Neal, 2009; Walcott et al, 2008; etc.).

The social and emotional learning skills were adapted from general social and emotional learning programs (Zins and Elias, 2006), which suggest teaching children healthy behaviors and how to manage their emotions in order to reduce the incidence of aggressive and maladaptive behaviors. The program aims to increase girls’ skills in certain prosocial behaviors such as effective communication, assertiveness, and standing up for others, while providing them with the opportunity to develop genuine friendships with other group members. Greenberg et al. (2003) found that SEL programs are most beneficial when they are coordinated with explicit attempts to change and improve competence and connections with others, and contribute to communication. Once the students are comfortable with dealing with relational aggression for themselves, the outreach lessons allow them to teach others. In this way, the information in the program spreads to as many students as possible.

The program also follows the general methods used by the two most prominent programs available for preventing and intervening in relational aggression. Owning Up (Wiseman, 2002) and the Ophelia Project (Pipher, 1997) aim to increase competence in assertiveness, communication, and self-esteem. Additionally, both programs aim to show children that there are alternative means to solving problems, thereby increasing their social decision making skills.
The program was designed for the sixth grade population but could be used for students in grades five through seven. The program requires a level of understanding and reflection that is developmentally appropriate for upper-elementary and middle school ages students. The program was designed for this population, as the research indicates that this age group (grades six through eight) experiences and utilizes relational aggression more than other age groups (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996; Neal, 2007). Additionally, this program was specifically developed for use during the lunch hour. As it is important for relational aggression to be addressed in many schools, the program was designed to fit into the lunch time-slot (60 minutes) that would not remove students from academically based lessons. The lunch period at a specific school in this district allows enough time for the material to be covered but is practical for schools since there is no need to schedule around the use of this program. Additionally, because it can be run during the lunch hour, it is more likely to be acceptable in schools where there is more resistance to counseling groups.

The lessons are designed to be followed in the order that they are presented. The order in which they are presented allows the beginning sessions to be informational and awareness based with the intervention and skills based lessons following. While the program should follow its designed order, the needs of the students in each group should take precedence. If the students move quickly or do not have much to talk about during one lesson, a leader may be able to move quickly through it and begin the next lesson in the same session. If the students need more time to work out their thoughts and experiences on a particular lesson, the leader could spend one and one half sessions on the topic. The two essential pieces to the program are the Awareness and Understanding
Component and the Social Emotional Learning Component and the most time should be spent on these lessons. The Spread the Word component should not take more than the two sessions allotted.
Session 1: Awareness and Understanding

Objectives: Discuss confidentiality
Identify qualities of good/bad friendship
Identify qualities of current friendship

Materials: Poster or easel
Markers
Chalkboard or Poster
Yellow and blue chalk or markers

Lesson

I. Confidentiality

Discuss with the students the meaning of confidentiality. Explain that confidentiality means that students can share whatever they feel comfortable with and it will not be shared outside the group unless a student was going to hurt someone else, going to hurt herself, or someone else is hurting her. Explain that in this group, students will be discussing personal stories and that it is important that what is said in the group stays in the group. Ask them how they would feel if they knew everything they said in group would be shared with non-members. Would they still share? Explain that if a student is found to be speaking about things shared in group with other people outside of group, they will not be allowed to continue in group because others would not be able to share comfortably.

Ask the girls if there should be any other rules for the group. Write them down on the poster or easel and bring them to group weekly. Should they know what will happen were someone to learn that confidence was broken? I think with this age, examples should be included. Confidential is difficult to comprehend and more difficult to know how to carry out.

II. What is a friend?

Ask the students what words they think of when they want to describe a friend. Write the words they come up with in yellow chalk on the chalkboard or White Board. Ask them to come up with words that would describe a bad friend. Write those words in blue chalk.

Discuss the responses with the students.

Possible discussion questions:
1. Right now, do you have any friends who are sometimes blue?
2. Do you always feel that your friends are yellow to you or others in the school?
3. Do you think that you are ever blue?
4. What kinds of blue things have happened to you recently?

This discussion may evoke some intense emotions. The leader should be prepared to see any student privately afterward and guide the group in giving any upset student emotional support.
III. Homework

Be yellow! Ask the girls to do their best to be a yellow kind of friend. Ask them to look around this week and see if they can identify classmates doing any of the blue things they came up with during the lesson.
Session 2: Awareness and Understanding

Objectives: Identify and define relational aggression
Identify and define roles of relational aggression

Materials: Who’s Who handout

Lesson

I. Check In
Check in with the girls to see if they have anything they want to share immediately. Review the homework. Ask the girls how they were yellow in the past week. Ask if they would like to share any situations of blue behavior (without names). Relate their stories to the current topic if possible.

II. Blue Behavior = Relational Aggression
Tell the students that the blue behavior they talked about last week has a name; it is called relational aggression. Define relational aggression and discuss some of the typical ways girls are relationally aggressive such as gossiping, keeping people out of their groups, ignoring others and making people do what they want.

III. Who’s Who
Hand out the Who’s Who handouts. Read over the roles with the girls. Explain that like in a play or in a movie, people play different roles in life. For example, in your family you are a daughter and maybe a sister. You might also be a niece or granddaughter. In relational aggression, girls play roles too. Start a guided discussion to identify the roles in their school (no names should be used during discussion or sharing stories).
Possible discussion topics:
1. Think of someone who falls into one or more of these categories
2. Which role do you think you play? Just think about it, you don’t have to share if you don’t want to say it out loud. Even though we might all want to be “floaters”, in this room, we are not all floaters. Try to be honest with yourself about which role you have played.
3. Do you think people can be different roles at different times?

IV. Homework
Be yellow! Identify what roles you think people are playing around you.
Session 3: Awareness and Understanding

Objectives: Identify and discuss possible motivations for relational aggression
            Apply knowledge of roles to novel scenarios

Materials: Scenario handouts
            Why are we mean? Handouts
            Pencils/Pens

Lesson

I. Check In
    Check in with the girls to see if they have anything they want to share
    immediately. Review the homework. Relate their stories to the current topic if possible.

II. What Makes Us Mean
    Give out the “Why are we mean?” handouts. Read over the sheet and discuss the
    motivations with the students. Discuss popularity and power.
    Possible discussion questions:
    1. Why should you want popular?
    2. When might you be mean because you are scared?
    3. What do you think you get out of being popular?
    Refer back to the Who’s Who sheets and read the “what she gets” sections. Ask the girls
    to discuss what they think they get out of being a good friend and why someone might
    choose to be relationally aggressive instead of be a good friend. Do they get more out of
    being relationally aggressive?

III. Scenarios – Pizza Problems, Boy Troubles, Hobbies and Problems
    Break the students up into small groups of 2-3 students per group. Hand out
    different scenarios to each group. Ask them to read the scenario and fill out the scenario
    worksheet. Bring the groups back together and ask them to read their scenario to the rest
    of the group. Ask them to share how they filled out the worksheet. Ask the rest of the
    group to share if they would have filled out something differently. Repeat with the other
    groups.

IV. Homework
    Be yellow! Think about why you are acting in certain ways this week. What are
    you getting out of being nice/being mean?
Session 4: Awareness and Understanding

Objectives: Identify and discuss popularity and power  
Identify and discuss bystanderism

Materials: N/A

Lesson

I. Check In
Check in with the girls to see if they have anything they want to share immediately. Review the homework. Relate their stories to the current topic if possible.

II. Guided Discussion - Popularity
Ask the girls to discuss what it means to be popular in their school.
Possible discussion questions:
1. What does it mean to be popular?
2. Sometimes girls say that there are two different kinds of popular (everyone likes you, or everyone thinks you are popular). Is that true here?
3. Who let’s relationally aggressive girls be popular?

III. Guided Discussion - Bystander
Discuss and define being a bystander. A bystander is someone who does not participate in the relational aggression but does nothing to stop it.
Possible discussion questions:
1. Why don’t we step in when someone is being made fun of/ excluded?
2. What might happen to us?
3. How do you think the person being made fun of/excluded/ignored feels when no one steps into help?
4. Is that person likely to help you in the future?
5. If you stepped in to help, would the girl being relationally aggressive have any power?
6. Do we have to allow people to be mean and popular? If we stood up for each other, could people use relational aggression to hurt us?

IV. Homework
Be yellow! Identify people being bystanders this week. Think about if you are ever a bystander.
Session 5: Social and Emotional Learning

Objectives: Identify and discuss empowerment
   Identify and discuss positive and possible negative effects to changing the structure

Materials: N/A

Lesson

I. Check In
   Check in with the girls to see if they have anything they want to share immediately. Review the homework. Relate their stories to the current topic if possible.

II. Guided Discussion – You Should Be in Charge of You
   Discuss and define empowerment. Tell the girls, “Empowerment means to give someone the power and the skills to change their world. Our group is to teach you how to be in charge of your own life, deal with relational aggression the right way, and to help you not have to follow what’s “cool” or what will make you “popular” in order to feel safe and liked.”
   Possible discussion questions:
   1. If everyone decided that gossiping and excluding people wasn’t ok, what would happen?
   2. What might happen if you were empowered to change things? What might the queen bee do?
      - might be mean to you
      - might be “unpopular”
      - might be made fun of
   3. What if everyone in this group promised to be yellow? Who would be left over if we promised to be yellow?
      - power in friendship AND in numbers
      - you might have a group of people who “have your back”

III. Sneak Preview – The Next 3 Sessions
   Tell the girls that in the next three sessions they are going to learn skills that will help them deal with relational aggression. They are going to learn how to be assertive, how to communicate better, and how to stop being a bystander.

IV. Homework
   Be yellow!
**Session 6: Social and Emotional Learning**

**Objectives:** Teach assertiveness as a skill  
Practice assertiveness

**Materials:** N/A

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**Lesson**

**I. Check In**

Check in with the girls to see if they have anything they want to share immediately. Review the homework. Relate their stories to the current topic if possible.

**II. Assertiveness**

Define and discuss assertiveness. Assertiveness means to stand up for yourself in a firm but fair way. Steps to assertiveness when someone has done something relationally aggressive:

1. Take a second to remain calm.
2. Tell the person that you do not like what they did and how it made you feel.
3. Ask for change. For example, “Please let me join your lunch table.”
4. Wait for the other side of the story. Maybe that person felt you did something to them.
5. Apologize if you did something to them. Remind them what you would like from them such as an apology or a place to sit at the table. Tell the person, “I am sorry for _________. I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings. Can we move on? I would like to hang out with you.”

Discuss with the students what might happen if the person doesn’t respond in a good way. There is a chance that the person might laugh or refuse to include them. Have the girls brainstorm some ways to handle this situation. They might walk away, find other friends to hang out with, or tell an adult.

Discuss why assertiveness is better than other ways to deal with a situation like that.

1. Went to the source. No Gossiping.
2. Standing up for yourself lets others know that you can’t be pushed around.
3. Gives the other person a chance to change her behavior.

**III. Practice The Skill**

Have two girls volunteer to do a role-play. Have one girl be mean to the other. Have the other girl practice being assertive. Have the rest of the group critique by saying one thing the girl did well, one thing to work on, and another thing she did well. Have a few more volunteers practice the skill.

**IV. Homework**

Be yellow! Be Assertive!
Session 7: Social and Emotional Learning

Objectives: Teach effective communication
Practicing effective communication

Materials: N/A

Lesson

I. Check In
Check in with the girls to see if they have anything they want to share immediately. Review the homework. Relate their stories to the current topic if possible.

II. Effective Communication
Ask the students to think about the ways that they communicate now. Discuss how gossip is used to communicate. Discuss how a girl might think she should tell her friend if another girl is talking about her. This is gossip even though the intent is to help her friend. Discuss how the ways that girls often communicate help increase relational aggression.

Effective communication is better than the current ways because it does not increase relational aggression and it allows everyone the chance to explain their side before anyone jumps to conclusions.

Steps to effective communication:
1. Go to the source – go to the person who may or may not have gossiped about you.
2. Use I statements. An I statement looks like this “I feel ________ when you _________, I would like it if you could ___________.”
3. Apologize for any part you played. Ask for change again if needed.

III. Practice The Skill
Have two girls volunteer to do a role-play. Have one girl be mean to the other. Have the other girl practice effective communication. Have the rest of the group critique by saying one thing the girl did well, one thing to work on, and another thing she did well. Have a few more volunteers practice the skill.

IV. Homework
Be yellow! Be Assertive! Communicate!
Session 8: Social and Emotional Learning

Objectives: Teach intervening/ no bystanding

Materials: N/A

Lesson

I. Check In

Check in with the girls to see if they have anything they want to share immediately. Review the homework. Relate their stories to the current topic if possible.

II. How to Stop Being A Blue Bystander

Discuss being a bystander.

Possible discussion questions
1. How might the target feel when you are a bystander?
2. How can you help?
   - Stand up for a friend – “I’ve got your back.”
   - Step In and tell the person, “That’s not nice. ______ is my friend.”
   - Don’t exclude anyone. Tell the person, “I want everyone to be welcome.”

III. Practice The Skill

Have three girls volunteer to do a role-play. Have one girl be mean to another. Have one be the target and one be the bystander. Have the bystander practice standing up for her friend. Have the rest of the group critique by saying one thing the girl did well, one thing to work on, and another thing she did well. Have a few more volunteers practice the skill.

IV. Homework

Be yellow! Be Assertive! Communicate! Stand up for your friends!
Session 9: Social and Emotional Learning

Objectives: Review learned concepts

Materials: What to Remember sheets

Lesson

I. Check In
   Check in with the girls to see if they have anything they want to share immediately. Review the homework. Relate their stories to the current topic if possible.

II. Review and Relate
   Go over the concepts learned in Chick Chat. Ask the students to give examples of the concepts learned.
   1. Recognize a person’s role and what she’s getting out of her role.
   2. Remember you are in charge of you. Be Assertive.
   3. Remember gossiping is not being a good friend. Go to the source and use “I Statements”.
   4. Remember unless you are helping to stop relational aggression, you’re keeping it alive. Get your friend’s back, don’t be a bystander, there is power in friendship.

III. Homework
   Be yellow! Be Assertive! Communicate! Stand up for your friends!
Session 10: Spreading the Word

Objectives: Discuss the responsibility of being a leader
Create a project to “Spread the Word”

Materials: Paper
Pens/Pencils

Lesson

I. Check In
Check in with the girls to see if they have anything they want to share immediately. Review the homework. Relate their stories to the current topic if possible.

II. Leadership
Tell the girls that they now have skills that other girls don’t have. This means that they are leaders and they are examples for others to follow. Discuss what it means to be a leader and the responsibility of being a leader.

III. Create a Project
Discuss with the girls possible projects to help spread the word. Have the girls come up with ideas or vote on the possible ideas.
Possible Ideas
1. Skits to present to other classes.
2. Got Your Back Day – Create shirts with handprints on the back. Talk about not being a bystander with other kids in the school.
3. No Way RA Day – Anti-relational aggression day
4. Poster Promise – create a poster with a promise to stop RA and have the girls sign. Hang in the hallway and have other students sign if they want to be a part.
5. Have the girls create a presentation to give to the third grade students.

IV. Homework
Be yellow! Be assertive! Communicate! Stand up for your friends! Be a leader! Spread the word!
Session 11: Spreading the Word

Objectives: Work on the project

Materials: Will depend on the project

Lesson

I. Check In
   Check in with the girls to see if they have anything they want to share immediately. Review the homework. Relate their stories to the current topic if possible.

II. Work on the Project
   Assist the girls in working on their project.

III. Homework
   Be yellow! Be assertive! Communicate! Stand up for your friends! Be a leader! Spread the word!
Session 12: Celebrate Friendship Party

Objectives: Review learned concepts
Celebrate the accomplishments

Materials: Yellow paper
Markers
Snacks

Lesson

I. Check In
Check in with the girls to see if they have anything they want to share immediately. Review the homework. Relate their stories to the current topic if possible.

II. Review
Review the concepts. Discuss how to keep using Chick Chat skills when Chick Chat is over. Do the Be Yellow activity – have each student write her name on a yellow piece of paper. The other students go around and write a way that each person is yellow on their papers. At the end, each girl should have one yellow thing written about her by each other girl in the group.

Ask for anyone who would be interested in being referred to the middle school Peer Leadership group. The girls would be utilized in Peer Leadership as a peer leader with a specialization in relational aggression. They would be able to help other girls dealing with relational aggression in the middle school.

III. Homework
Be yellow! Be assertive! Communicate! Stand up for your friends! Be a leader! Spread the word!
CHAPTER VII
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this dissertation was to design a program to enhance specific social and emotional learning competencies in pre-adolescent girls such as assertiveness, communication, and social problem solving and support positive peer networks. The program is intended to help create understanding and awareness of relational aggression concepts and increasing specific social emotional learning skills. The needs assessment results along with the relevant literature on the topic of relational aggression informed the design of the program.

Relational aggression use and experience of aggression were assessed using two scales. The first scale, the Children’s Social Behavior Scale – Peer Report (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) is a peer nomination tool that was used to assess the percentage of girls who use relationally aggressive behaviors. The second scale, the Children’s Social Experience Questionnaire- Self Report (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996), was used to assess students’ experiences of relational aggression victimization in school. On the CSBS-P, female students identified 72% of the female students in their grade as being relationally aggressive in one of the following ways: talking behind others backs, keeping people out of their group, ignoring or not talking to someone when mad, and not liking friends if they don’t do what the girl wants them to do. A majority of the girls received between 1 and 10 nominations. Fewer students received between 11 and 20, one girl received 21 nominations and one received 39. These results follow the pattern of relational aggression roles, with two girls emerging as “Queen Bees”, fewer emerging as widely recognized
users of relational aggression, and most girls using it at least occasionally. Also, in line with previous research on relational aggression, the nominations for girls use of physical aggression was much lower than their nominations for relational and verbal aggression. Relational aggression is the primary means of aggression for girls in this sample. Interestingly, as many girls, 72%, as were nominated to be relationally aggressive were nominated to cheer others up when upset. Of the girls who were nominated to cheer others up when upset, 79% were also nominated to be relationally aggressive. This result reflects the complex nature of relational aggression and illuminates the ability of girls to be both mean and kind to the same set of peers.

While the girls identified over half of their class as being relationally aggressive in some way, they reported being victimized by relational aggression “almost never” on the CSEQ-S. It is important to view these results in the context of the administration of the scale. The peer report scale was administered first. The students were asked to choose three students who fit each item. Many of the students reported that they were unsure how to answer, that they could not think of anyone, and, although they had already been given the information, wanted to know who would see the results and how it would be ensured that other students would not see their answers. When they reported that they could not think of anyone, the students were told to do their best to name three people. The CSEQ-S was administered second and was read and completed individually. Upon completing that scale, the students reported that it was “much easier” for them to complete. The context of the administration, including the vocalization of fears that the information reported on the scale would somehow become known to other peers, may have caused the students to underreport victimization. The questioning and resistance
gives insight into how concerned the students were to break the silence on relational aggression. Students were required to name others on the first scale, while on the second scale they were required to report their own experiences of relational aggression. Here, they did not use the scale as intended. In essence, they cut the 5-item scale to three choices on all of the aggression items while routinely reporting “almost all the time” and “all the time” for the prosocial behavior items. This phenomenon, over-reporting socially desirable characteristics while under-reporting bad behavior is known as Social Desirability response bias (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). Crowne and Marlowe (1964) first identified social desirability and described it as the need for social approval and acceptance. They reported that people believe this approval and acceptance can be met by acting in socially sanctioned ways. Crowne and Marlow identified that this need can be revealed by participants’ response patterns on self-report measures. They identified the tendency for people to respond in ways that present them in a socially desirable light regardless of their true feelings about an issue or a topic. Klein, Gould, and Corey (1969) identified social desirability in children using a social desirability scale. They found that girls (between the ages of 7 and 14) scored significantly higher on social desirability than boys. Tulkin, Muller, Conn (1969) examined social desirability and popularity. They found that girls who scored high on measures of social desirability (a greater need for social acceptance) were more popular than other girls.

During the data collection for this dissertation, some students reported out loud to the class that they did not want to report on relational aggression. All the students heard this message as the students vocalized their concerns aloud. When given the opportunity to report on their experiences of relational aggression, the message, “It’s not ok for us to
“talk about this” may have influenced their use of the scale. Since they almost exclusively chose four or five for the prosocial items lends evidence to support this.

While a mean of three was initially intended to be a “problematic” number, the results and the response bias make this number not useful. The mean is no longer descriptive when a scale is not used as intended by the participants. The results of the CSBS-P indicate clearly that relational aggression occurs among the sixth grade female students and warrants intervention. In fact, there may be more students who use relational aggression, as some students chose not to nominate peers on any of the relational aggression items. These results suggest that students were so concerned about retaliation from peers that they were unable to comfortably identify their own experiences of relational aggression and were somewhat deterred when nominating others.

In terms of cross referencing the nominations with the experiences of relational aggression, approximately half of the girls who identified themselves as being aggressed against, were nominated to be aggressive in that particular way for each relational aggression item. However, these findings should be interpreted with caution, as it seems that the girls did not use the CSEQ-S as intended. It is likely that the information would be different had the girls been more honest in their responses on the second scale.

These findings are similar to the literature (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Neal, 2007, 2009) in that the girls in this sample were found to use relational aggression as their primary means of aggression. Additionally, more than half of the girls in this sample were found to use relational aggression. The purpose of this dissertation was to establish a need for a relational aggression prevention program by establishing that girls in this population used relational aggression and were victimized by it. Although the girls failed
to report significant victimization, possibly due to social desirability response bias, the need for this program is well established by the results that 72% of the girls in the sixth grade class can be identified as relational aggressors. While this dissertation did not explore negative effects of relational aggression on these girls, that relational aggression does produce negative effects is well established in the literature reviewed (Card & Hodges, 2008; Crick, Casas, & Nelson, 2002; Rasauskas & Stoltz, 2004; Yoon, Barton, & Taiariol, 2004; etc.). As such, the result that many more than half of the girls in this class are using relational aggression provides enough information to warrant a program to reduce relational aggression use and provide children with ways to cope when being victimized.

Limitations

One limitation is the representativeness of the sample. The sample here included only sixth grade females from a primarily white, suburban, middle-class school. While other districts may find that they have a similar population of students, many districts have a much more diverse population. Importantly, research has demonstrated that relational aggression use exists in other ethnic and racial groups (Osterman et al., 1998; Talbott et al., 2002; Xie, Farmer, & Cairns, 2003). For example, Osterman, Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, Kaukinen, Landau, Fraczek, and Caprara (1998) looked for cross-cultural evidence that girls used indirect aggression. They used students in Finland, Italy, Poland, and Israel to explore whether girls of different ethnicities were prone to using the same types of aggression. They found that across all countries, ethnic groups, and age groups girls used indirect aggression the most and verbal aggression as their second most used style. They also found that indirect aggression was used the least by boys and that verbal
aggression and physical aggression were equally used. Xie, Farmer, and Cairns (2003) examined aggression in different forms among inner-city African American children. They examined social aggression which was defined as relational aggression performed in an indirect way, such as talking behind someone’s back, direct relational aggression which was defined as relational aggression that was confrontational, verbal aggression was defined as using words to hurt someone, and physical aggression which was defined as touching, hitting, or using physical intimidation. In other research, social aggression, direct relational aggression, and verbal aggression would all be considered relational aggression. Consistent with other research, Xie and colleagues (2003) found that boys used more physical aggression than girls. They also found that even in female-female conflicts, physical aggression was used more often than any of the relational aggression types. However, it was clear that by grade 7 the forms of relational aggression were used at higher levels than they were used at grade 1, even though physical aggression was used more often in female-female conflicts. Talbott, Celinska, Simpson, and Coe (2002) examined aggression among African American, Hispanic, and Latina girls in low-income, urban environments. They found that while subtle forms of relational aggression is used among these girls during adolescence; physical aggression also persists through adolescence. The limitation of this project is that this investigator cannot establish a need in a more diverse population. Additionally, although a need is likely to exist in more diverse settings, research has indicated that aggression use is different among Black and Latino children. This suggests that additional lessons or components may be necessary when providing programming for these populations. Finally, this needs assessment was conducted among sixth grade students. Again, sixth grade students are not a highly
representative sample of relational aggressors because a need for a program such as this was not established among other grades.

Another limitation is that the program was not implemented or evaluated. For the purposes of this dissertation, a need was established and a program was designed. Once this program is implemented and evaluated there will be program modifications based upon a process evaluation.

Further Directions and Practical Implications

Further researchers may choose to implement and evaluate this program. An evaluation plan is included in the design of the program. The evaluation plan follows Maher’s (2001) program evaluation framework and includes procedures to evaluate the extent to which the program has met the needs of the target population. This information would be useful in furthering our understanding of relational aggression programs and gathering support for the usefulness of a relational aggression program. Additionally, after implementation and evaluation of the program, further researchers may choose to modify the parts of the program that were unsuccessful or include sessions on topics that they found needed to be addressed.

Future researchers may also consider establishing a need with the male students. While relational aggression is often thought of as “girl aggression” and research demonstrates a difference in use of relational aggression, it has also been established that males utilize relational aggression. It may be beneficial to consider the need for a relational aggression group geared toward male students and modify the program to be more gender appropriate. Importantly, many of the more vocal dissenters to nominating
aggressive peers were male students, indicating that they may also have feared retaliation in the form of relational aggression from their peers.

Practically, this program can be used in any elementary school or middle school during the lunch hour. It can be implemented by any school mental health professional such as a social worker, school psychologist, guidance counselor, or student assistance counselor. Relational aggression has been and is continuing to be a problem for girls during early adolescence. This program provides a clear, structured program to help empower the girls to deal with relational aggression on their own and spread the word to other students. It is short in number of sessions, requires little monetary resources, and can be implemented without disruption to the academic periods of the school day.

Implications for School Psychology

School psychologists are one of only a few mental health professionals in the school and are called on to deal with incidents of bullying and to assist victims of bullying. This dissertation highlights that many girls, 72% of the sixth grade class in this sample, are using relational aggression in school. As such, it is important that school psychologists become familiar with relational aggression and ways to help children cope with and prevent relational aggression from occurring.

Additionally, the NJ Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights requires that schools identify anti-bullying specialists and that the anti-bullying specialist must either be a school psychologist or school guidance counselor. The anti-bullying specialist is required to provide assistance in instances of bullying and help create and implement anti-bullying approaches or programs. This dissertation provides a program which would fall under the category of anti-bullying approach. School psychologists will need to be much more
involved with relational aggressors and victims of relational aggression as the State of New Jersey will now require school staff to identify and intervene in all types of bullying incidents.

Summary and Conclusion

Relational aggression is a widespread problem in schools today. Recently, the media has drawn attention to the results of constant relational aggression victimization by covering the suicides or “bullycides” of teenagers such as Phoebe Prince and Tyler Clementi. Bullycide.org offers personal stories of teenagers who took their lives due to consistent victimization often by peers utilizing relational aggression. Due to these serious consequences of bullying, New Jersey has adopted an improved ant-bullying law that will require all school districts to include anti-bullying programming by the 2011-2012 school year. It is fitting that this program be designed during a time with high need for anti-bullying programming. Using Maher’s (2001) systematic method for program planning and design allows the program to be clear and evaluable after implementation. This dissertation aims to provide a clear and structured program that can be used in schools, without detracting from academic time, for preventing and intervening in relational aggression.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Children’s Social Experience Questionnaire- Self Report (CSEQ-SR)
Crick & Grotpeter, 1996

THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO ME

Gender (CIRCLE ONE)       Boy        Girl       ID Number ___________

Teacher’s Name __________________________

DIRECTIONS: Here is a list of things that sometimes happen to kids your age at school. How often do they happen to you at school?

EXAMPLE:

A. How often do you eat lunch at school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 NEVER</th>
<th>2 ALMOST NEVER</th>
<th>3 SOMETIMES</th>
<th>4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME</th>
<th>5 ALL THE TIME</th>
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</table>

B. How often does your class go outside to play?

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 NEVER</th>
<th>2 ALMOST NEVER</th>
<th>3 SOMETIMES</th>
<th>4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME</th>
<th>5 ALL THE TIME</th>
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</table>

1. How often does another kid give you help when you need it?

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 NEVER</th>
<th>2 ALMOST NEVER</th>
<th>3 SOMETIMES</th>
<th>4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME</th>
<th>5 ALL THE TIME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. How often do you get hit by another kid at school?

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<th>1 NEVER</th>
<th>2 ALMOST NEVER</th>
<th>3 SOMETIMES</th>
<th>4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME</th>
<th>5 ALL THE TIME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
3. How often do other kids leave you out on purpose when it is time to play or do an activity?

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<td>NEVER</td>
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<td>SOMETIMES</td>
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4. How often does another kid yell at you and call you mean names?

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<td>NEVER</td>
<td>ALMOST NEVER</td>
<td>SOMETIMES</td>
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5. How often does another kid try to cheer you up when you feel sad or upset?

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<td>NEVER</td>
<td>ALMOST NEVER</td>
<td>SOMETIMES</td>
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</table>

6. How often does a kid who is mad at you try to get back at you by not letting you be in their group anymore?

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<td>ALMOST NEVER</td>
<td>SOMETIMES</td>
<td>ALMOST ALL THE TIME</td>
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7. How often do you get pushed or shoved by another kid at school?

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<td>NEVER</td>
<td>ALMOST NEVER</td>
<td>SOMETIMES</td>
<td>ALMOST ALL THE TIME</td>
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</table>

8. How often does another kid do something that makes you feel happy?

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<td>NEVER</td>
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<td>SOMETIMES</td>
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9. How often does a classmate tell lies about you to make other kids not like you anymore?
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<td>NEVER</td>
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10. How often does another kid kick you or pull your hair?

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<td>NEVER</td>
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11. How often does another kid say they won’t like you unless you do what they want you to do?

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12. How often does another kid say something nice to you?

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<td>NEVER</td>
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13. How often does a kid try to keep others from liking you by saying mean things about you?

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<td>NEVER</td>
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<td>ALMOST NEVER</td>
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14. How often does another kid say they will beat you up if you don’t do what they want you to do?

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15. How often do other kids let you know that they care about you?

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APPENDIX B

Children’s Social Behavior Scale- Peer Report (CSBS-P)
Crick, Ostrov, and Werner, 2006

Children’s Social Behavior Scale – Peer Report, Sociometric Questions

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

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

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

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

5. **Do Nice Things**
   Find the numbers of three people who say or do nice things for other classmates.

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

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

8. **Helps Others Join**
   Find the number of three kids who help others join a group or make friends.

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

10. **Push Others**
    Find the numbers of three kids who push and shove others around.

11. **Stop Liking**
    Find the number of three people who let their friends know that they will stop liking them unless the friends do what they want them to do.
12. **Cheer Up Others**
Find the number of three people who try to cheer up other classmates who are upset or sad about something. They try to make them feel happy again.

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

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

15. **Mean Names**
Find the number of three people who call other classmates mean names.
ID: _______
TEACHER’S NAME: ________________________________
CIRCLE: GIRL BOY

1. Like
2. Don’t Like
3. Make Other Kids
4. Hit Others
5. Do Nice Things
6. Keep Out
7. Insults
8. Helps Kids Join
9. Ignores Others
10. Push Others
11. Stop Liking
12. Cheer Up Others
13. Will Beat Up
14. Keep People
15. Mean Names
APPENDIX C

6th Grade Student Questionnaire

Please rate how often YOU have used these behaviors in the past 2 weeks. Choose (1) if you Never used it, (3) if you Sometimes used it, and (5) if you Always used it in the last 2 weeks. If you used the behavior somewhere between Never and Sometimes, choose (2). If you used it more than Sometimes but less than Always, choose (4).

1. Gossiped by spreading rumors or talking about someone behind his/her back.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
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</table>

2. Stuck up for someone by stopping others when someone is being targeted, teased, or made fun of.

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Always</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3. Not allowed someone to join your group or activity.

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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
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</table>

4. Stood up for yourself without being mean when someone was being mean to you.

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<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
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</table>

5. Didn’t get involved when you saw someone being mean to another student.

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<th>2</th>
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<th>5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
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</table>

6. Chose to communicate with someone by saying how you felt or going straight to a person instead of talking behind their backs.

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<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. Even if you don’t often use these behaviors, how often do you think other people use these behaviors?

1  2  3  4  5
Never          Sometimes                            Always

Use this space if you want to tell us anything else about these problems in the 6th grade at Yantacaw:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Dear Yantacaw Parents,

I am a student in the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University completing my doctoral degree requirements. I have become interested in the topic of relational aggression—primarily the way girls mistreat each other. Yantacaw School has allowed me to contact you to request your permission for your child to participate in the study. If you agree, I will also briefly explain the study to the children who have returned this permission slip, and also ask for their agreement to participate. I plan to design a program, to be held in school, to teach sixth grade students about coping with relational aggression and being a better friend.

The subject of my research project is: The Design of a Relational Aggression Prevention Program for 6th grade Female Students. Children who participate will be asked to complete two questionnaires about their experiences with aggression. One will be about their experiences of physical and relational aggression in school. For example, one item asks, “How often do other kids leave you out on purpose when it is time to play or do an activity?” The other will ask about their perceptions of their classmates’ likeability, popularity, and use of aggression. For example, one item asks, “Find the number of three kids who try to make another kid not like a certain person by spreading rumors about them or talking behind their backs.” Their names will not be written on the questionnaires, but they will be asked for their gender and an ID number linked to their name. The questionnaires will take about one hour to complete and will be given during one agreed upon time by the 6th grade teachers. Your child, at any time, may choose to stop completing the questions without any penalty and will return to their deskwork.

There are no known risks to your child for participating in this study, and your child will not benefit directly from participation. However, if your child becomes upset at any point during the process they will be offered school counseling services. Their grades will not be affected in any way, whether they participate in the study. However, the data collected may lead to increased understanding about the use of relational aggression in 6th graders. If you would like to have a report of the study when it is completed, please indicate this at the bottom of this form.

This data collection process is confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about your child. Particularly, the questionnaires will include ID numbers that will be linked to your child’s name. I will keep this information confidential.
confidential by limiting individual’s access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. After the initial data collection, lists that can link your child’s name to the ID number on the questionnaires will be kept in a sealed envelope in a secure location. The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties who will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated, unless you have agreed otherwise.

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact me by email at gfurnari@eden.rutgers.edu or phone at (973) 284-0405. If you have any questions about your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at:

Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects   Office of Research and Sponsored Programs   3 Rutgers Plaza   New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559   Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104   Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please sign and return this form by THURSDAY OCTOBER 14, 2010.

Sincerely,

GraceAnn Furnari, Psy.M.

Informed Consent

_____ I DO agree to have my child participate
_____ I DO NOT agree to have my child participate

Child’s Name:________________________________________________________
Child’s Class:________________________________________________________
Your Name:___________________________________________________________
Signature:___________________________________ Date:_______________________
PI Signature:___________________________________ Date:_____________________

_____ I would like a copy of the report when it is complete.
APPENDIX E

CHILD ASSENT

Dear 6th Graders,

My name is Grace and I am a graduate student at Rutgers University. Like you, I was once a 6th grader here at Yantacaw! I am working on a project about how kids treat each other in elementary school. You are invited to take part in this study.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to fill out two questionnaires that will take about one hour to complete. Your name will NOT be on the questionnaire, but you will be asked to write your gender (whether you are male or female) on the form. Please don't write your name anywhere on the questionnaire. The first questionnaire will ask about your experiences about how other children treat you in school. For example, one question asks, “How often do other kids leave you out on purpose when it is time to play or do an activity?” The second questionnaire will ask you to choose students who behave in certain ways in school. For example, I may ask you to “Choose three people who say or do nice things for other classmates.” Each person will have a code for their name but no names will be on the questionnaires.

Your grades will not be affected in any way by your decision to participate or not participate in the study. You will not receive any benefits from taking part in this study; however, your answers may increase understanding of how kids treat each other at Yantacaw School.

You may skip any questions that you are not comfortable with, and you may decide to stop participating at any time without any penalty to you. One of your parents will also be required to provide permission for you to participate in the study, and they will be given a phone number for me, in case you or your parents have any questions about the research. They will also have a phone number for the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at Rutgers University, in case there are any questions about your rights as a research subject. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Sincerely,

GraceAnn Furnari

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
If you agree to participate in the study, please sign below:

Student name (printed) ____________________________
Student signature ________________________________ Date_____________
PI signature _____________________________________ Date_____________
APPENDIX F

PROGRAM HANDOUTS

Who’s Who?

* The Queen Bee *
  • The Queen Bee rules the group.
  • She intimidates others.
  • What she gains: She feels powerful. She’s the center of attention.
  • What she loses: A sense of self. She’s defined by how others see her.

* Sidekick *
  • Second in command to the Queen Bee.
  • Backs up the Queen Bee no matter what.
  • What she gains: She feels powerful because the Queen Bee is her best friend. She has a close friend.
  • What she loses: She can’t have her own opinions, only the Queen Bee’s opinions. She’s not her own person.

* Banker *
  • She knows all the gossip.
  • Many people trust her with secrets.
  • What she gains: Security because she knows everyone’s secrets. She feels powerful.
  • What she loses: People don’t trust her when they find out that she gossips.

* Floater *
  • She has friends in different groups.
  • She doesn’t like to exclude people.
  • She’s nice to almost everyone.
  • What she gains: Lots of different types of friends. People like her for who she is.
  • What she loses: nothing.

* Bystander *
  • She’s always in the middle.
  • She wants to do the right thing but doesn’t want to upset the group.
• What she gains: Popularity. Power by being in the group.
• What she loses: She has to make herself fit in the group so she has to give up some things that she likes. She can’t always be herself.

* Pleaser/ Wannabe/ Messenger *
• She does the “dirty work” for the Queen Bee.
• She’s always trying to please the Queen Bee because she’s afraid of being kicked out.
• What she gains: She feels like she belongs.
• What she loses: She’s insecure. She can never really be herself.

* Target *
• She’s made fun of by the other girls.
• She gets picked on by the Queen Bee and her group.
• What she gains: She can be herself. She can make the decision to stay out of the clique. She learns the costs of fitting in.
• What she loses: She’s helpless and vulnerable. She’s ashamed of being rejected just for being who she is. She’s made to feel alone.

Adapted from:
Scenarios

Scenario 1 – Pizza Problems

Amanda, Jessica, and Christy were all eating at Ralph’s for lunch. Amanda and Jessica were best friends and today Christy, who was their friend but not their best friend, went along too. When Jessica was up buying her pizza from the counter, Amanda said to Christy, “Ugh. I can’t stand Jessica anymore. She is so annoying and she wears the same sneakers every day!” Knowing that she had an opportunity to become closer with Amanda, Christy said, “I know! Someone should really tell her those shoes are so ugly.” Amanda replied, “Maybe you should. It would be sooo funny!” When Jessica returned to the table Christy made a point to make fun of her shoes. Jessica looked at Amanda for help but Amanda just laughed. Jessica walked away from the group and back to school because she was so upset. Amanda invited Christy over to her house after school to hang out without Jessica.

Scenario 2 – Boy Troubles

Angela, Hannah, and Alexis are all good friends. Most people trust Angela because she is always willing to listen to their problems. She will often say, “You can trust me. I won’t say anything, I swear!” Alexis was one of the people who trusted Angela with her secrets. Since she always told Angela her secrets, Alexis didn’t think anything of it when she told Angela that she liked the new guy in class, Paul. What Alexis didn’t know was that Hannah liked him too. Angela, however, knew about it. Angela knew that if Hannah ever found out she would get really mad at Alexis but she also knew that if she told, Hannah would like her more and trust her more for being a really good friend. Angela told Hannah who Alexis liked and Hannah was furious! She didn’t want anyone competing with her for Paul. Hannah decided to ignore Alexis and stop inviting her places and she started becoming closer with Angela. Angela kept telling Alexis that she could trust her but also repeated some things Alexis told her to Hannah in order to stay close with her.

Scenario 3 – Hobbies and Problems

Rachel isn’t very popular. She has a few good friends but they know they aren’t part of the popular group. Rachel doesn’t care that much because she and her friends always have a good time together and they are able to do things they really like such as go horseback riding, read, and bake. The popular group doesn’t think these things are cool. Heather is the most popular girl in the grade and Mia is her best friend. Mia had been Heather’s best friend since they were in 1st grade. One day, Rachel was giving a presentation on her favorite things to do. When she was talking about her hobbies, Heather started snickering. At lunch Heather went up to Rachel and said “Why do you think you horses are so cool? They’re not. Nobody does that or reads the dumb American Girl books that you read.” Mia also joined in, “Yeah, seriously!” she said. Rachel tried to stay calm and she said, “You don’t have to like those things, but I do. That’s just who I am.” Heather looked at Mia, prompting her to say something. Mia picked up the message from Heather’s eyes and said, “Whatever, you guys are so immature. You’ll probably be like 20 before you ever get a boyfriend!” Heather laughed and the two walked away.
## Scenario Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Girl 1</th>
<th>Girl 2</th>
<th>Girl 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is her role?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How was she feeling?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are her motivations (positive, negative, or both?)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What will happen to her next?</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did she learn about her role?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How could she have been more yellow?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Why Are Girls Mean?

Fear – I’m scared that if I’m not mean to the target, someone else will be mean to me. I’m scared that people are talking about me so I’m going to talk about them. I don’t feel safe in my group of friends if I don’t do what they want.

Control – Things feel out of control for me in my life. Things are happening that I can’t stop or change. If I can control my friends then at least I’m in control of something. I’ll always know where I stand.

Popularity- Being mean to the people the queen bee doesn’t like will get me closer to her. Being closer to her means that I’ll be more popular with her friends, other less popular people will be scared of us, and the boys will like me better.

Security – I know that staying in this groups means that I have to always do what the queen bee wants. I have to make sure that my position is secure. I don’t want to be on the outs so I’ll be mean if I have to.

Power – I feel powerless. I feel like I can’t change things. If I do what this group wants, I’ll have power over other people. I’ll get to make the decisions about what’s cool and what’s not. I’ll be on top for once.