

**The Effects of a Bully Intervention Program on the Relational
Aggressive Behaviors of 5th Grade Girls**

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Abstract

Using a mixed method design, this study investigated the effectiveness of a bully intervention program aimed at fifth-grade girls. The Ophelia Project provided the framework for a six-week prevention program. Results showed that the bullying intervention program did decrease the relational aggressive behaviors among the participants and indicated that interventions increased participants' knowledge of relational aggression.

Keywords: girls and aggression; relational aggression; bullying and girls

**The Effects of a Bully Intervention Program on the Relational
Aggressive Behaviors of 5th Grade Girls**

This study investigated if implementing the Bully Intervention Program, Ophelia Project, would reduce relational aggressive behaviors, including verbal comments in a cold or hostile tone of voice, eye-rolling, spreading rumors, “mean” facial expressions, and exclusion in 5th grade girls. Relational Aggression is a type of bullying that involves exclusion and isolation of others, manipulation of relationships, gossip, and rumors prevalent among adolescent girls.

There can be a number of angry students that enter guidance offices everyday. In most instances, girls handle their anger and fighting differently than boys. Boys, when angry, typically fight, but after a couple of days, they are often done with it, and some are back friendly with each other within a week of the incident. Girls, on the other hand, can hold grudges and go days, even months without speaking to each other. They can also be guilty of spreading rumors. When children experience relational aggression, it is more than likely affecting their education.

Relational aggression and any other forms of bullying are primarily student-experienced problems. The students are the perpetrators, victims, and the bystanders. Social aggression among girls includes behaviors, social ostracism, gossip, talking behind backs, verbal attacks, glaring and eye-rolling, and manipulating relationships (Willer, 2009). It is also known that the most determined adult, whether it is a teacher, counselor, or parent may not even know or be able to stop these types of aggression alone. Research shows that any type of bullying is more likely to occur when there is minimal to no adult supervision. Due to these findings, it is suggested that implementing student-driven approaches might further enhance anti-bullying programs (Lepkowski, Overton, & Packman, 2005).

Approaches that are student-driven tend to aim at involving all students, especially those not directly involved with bullying as victims or perpetrators. Bystanders usually are too intimidated to intervene, or gain a vicarious thrill from observing the oppression of another student. Lepkowski, et. al. (2005) stated that peer group power is an important way to help stop bullying. When there are larger percentages of bystanders who enjoy seeing students humiliate other students, then perhaps they would respond differently to bullying behaviors if they were amongst a group of students who did not feel oppressing others was appropriate. Once the children who are neither bullies nor victims adopt the attitude that bullying is an unacceptable

behavior, schools are well on their way to having a successful bullying program (Lepkowski et. al., 2005).

Rationale

Relational aggression in girls occurs because of the cultural beliefs surrounding what girls are like and how girls should behave. Unfortunately, many girls do not see relational aggressive behaviors as unacceptable and it has even become expected from girls. It can be argued that the culture's expectations for girls warrants reconsideration and American society can encourage girls by giving them the tools to become less malicious and more supportive.

In order for girls' relational aggressive behaviors to change and be effective, school counselors need to become more in touch with how relational aggression works and make the necessary efforts to respond to it when and before it arises. Thus, prevention methods are needed that not only educate girls on relational aggression, but also include faculty, staff, and parents of girls. Preventative programs are only effective if everyone is agrees to participate.

Both bullies and victims are at risk for negative future outcomes. Milsom and Gallo (2006) reported that as bullies go through adolescence, they are more at risk for severe problems such as delinquency, alcohol and drug abuse, and dropping out of school. Bullies, as well as victims, have been found to be more depressed than students who are not involved in bullying. Since depression is associated with bullying and victimization, it can lead to academic problems, self-defeating behaviors, and interpersonal problems. Moreover, if bullying behaviors are severe and prolonged, there will be additional factors involved, including suffering from academic problems, absenteeism, loneliness, and loss of friends (Milsom & Gallo, 2006).

Unfortunately, relational aggression is at times undetectable. Technological gadgets, such as cell phones and computers, give students access to texting, instant messaging and social

networking sites, which allow relational aggression to occur outside of school (Milsom & Gallo, 2006). Through guidance lessons and group sessions, discussions about bullying and relational aggression can be brought into the classroom.

Review of Literature

Defining Relational Aggression

Recently, there has been an increase in information available on relational aggression, through popular media such as movies, books, and websites. However, the works of scholars, such as Crick and Grotpeter (2005) have contributed to a boom in research related to relational aggression in school-age girls. Aggression is an overarching construct, which includes covert and overt behaviors. Intent to harm is the common thread among all of the types of aggression. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) suggest that there are critical differences between the forms of aggression. Overt aggression is hurting someone with physical aggression and intimidation. On the other hand, relational aggression is purposefully damaging peer relationships through manipulation.

Aggressive acts occurring between individuals involve a specific intent to harm, but do not necessarily involve repeated negativity. It is important to distinguish between aggressive acts, which occur between individuals/groups of equal power and bullying, where the victim generally feels that they have less or no power. Acts of aggression can be considered to involve a two-way process of attack and retaliation, whereby each party has a relatively equal stake in the conflict. Bullying, however, describes a one-way attack situation whereby the perpetrator has more power and where the victim rarely feels able to retaliate. The key issues of intent to harm, repeated and ongoing negativity, as well as a power imbalance, are generally agreeable. Bullying has been defined and conceptualized in many different ways by researchers and educators.

Relational aggression encompasses behaviors that hurt and harm others by damaging, threatening to damage, manipulating one's relationships with his/her peers, or by injuring one's feelings of social acceptance. Studies continue to show that relational and other nonphysical forms of aggression are just as harmful to a student's ability to learn, as well as grow and succeed (Cappella, 2005). Relational aggression and bullying occur throughout the school day and across school property. Some studies have reported that conflict is most likely to arise in the classroom during free work or independent time, while others suggest that such behavior is apt to occur in crowded unsupervised areas. The underlying message here is clear: anywhere or any time students are unsupervised the likelihood for conflict and aggressive behavior increases. In a breakdown of such behaviors, hallways, buses, and bathrooms have been identified as some of the most problematic areas for such behavior (Cappella, 2005).

Traditionally, the term aggression denotes physical acts committed against another person; these include hitting, punching, and kicking. However, recent research indicates that gender plays an important role in the way young people display aggression. Though both genders are aggressive, boys tend to exhibit overt, physical aggression, while girls display signs of relational, manipulative aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Although there are a variety of definitions for relational aggression, there is a general consensus that this includes acts aimed at damaging the target's social status or self-esteem, such as: sarcastic verbal comments, speaking to another in a cold or hostile tone of voice, ignoring, staring, gossiping, spreading rumors, "mean" facial expressions, and/or exclusion.

Research on Relational Aggression and Bullying

Elementary school is a crucial time in a child's life, and it is imperative that students learn normative beliefs that foster cooperation, respect, and effective conflict resolution (Crick &

Grottpeter, 1995). When aggression occurs, it not only affects children's social and emotional well-being, it makes it difficult for children to focus on academic learning. Researchers have recently shown that girls engage in just as much aggression as boys. Importantly, the expression of aggression among girls is different from that of boys. Both boys and girls use verbal aggression, such as verbal insults, but the nature and content of verbal assaults are likely to differ for boys and girls. Whereas boys are more likely to engage in physical forms of aggression, girls are more likely to use more covert forms of behavior that harms others by damaging or manipulating their social relationships through relational aggression (Crick & Grottpeter, 1995).

Until recently, bullying has been a behavior that is rarely punished or taken seriously by schools because it was thought of as something that all kids go through, or something that kids need to work out for themselves. In rare and severe circumstances, bullies have been sent to guidance offices for the obligatory slap-on-the-wrist punishment. Since gun violence and weapons are on the rise, aggressive behavior of all types has been taken very seriously (Crick & Grottpeter, 1995). Few people can recall their school years without remembering the one or two kids singled out or picked on for various reasons.

So, why do girls feel the need to express their aggression in such psychologically destructive ways? Studies suggest that relational aggression is probably learned. For decades, researchers believed that boys were more aggressive than girls were because girls presented with less overt displays of anger and hurt. However, in the past decade, experts have realized that while boys chose to exhibit anger and aggression in physical or verbal ways, girls show aggression through manipulation of relationships and social structures in order to inflict emotional pain (Bjorkqvist et al, 1992). While boys tend to have loosely knitted groups of friends, girls' social networks are far more tightly knit, which enables such kinds of relational

aggression to occur. Close friendships are what lead relational aggression tactics such as gossiping, shunning members of a “clique,” giving the silent treatment, spreading rumors and using friendships with others as weapons of revenge (Bjorkqvist et al, 1992).

Little is known about girls' bullying behaviors, how they perceive these behaviors, the impact on the victim, or the significance of friendships in relation to these behaviors. Research building on what is known and asking new questions relevant to girls' behaviors in schools is needed because this population has been ignored. According to Milsom & Gallo (2006), bullies gain control over others through physical force or threats, verbal teasing, and exclusion from peers. There are four specific types of bullies: physical, verbal, relational, and reactive. In many cases, physical bullies hit, kick, or shove others. Verbal bullies tend to use words to harm others through name-calling, insulting, making racist comments, or harsh teasing. Relational bullies often focus on excluding one person from their peer group and usually do so through verbal threats and spreading rumors. Finally, reactive bullies are individuals who are often both bully and victim - typically victims first, then they respond to victimization with bullying behavior. While both boys and girls engage in and are victims of bullying, research has shown differences in their bullying behaviors. For example, boys engage in bullying more frequently than girls. Additionally, boys are more likely to engage in physical or verbal bullying, while girls often revert to relational bullying (Milsom & Gallo, 2006).

To study and eventually help relationally aggressive students, one must first identify them, which can be more difficult than expected. Identification of relationally aggressive girls (and boys) is subjective and reliant upon chance observation of the behaviors, or reports from victims. Crick and Grotpeter (2002) provided an interesting perspective on girl bullying, saying that girls who are relationally aggressive are disliked by their peers. The authors also stated that

it was possible that being rejected by one's peers lead girls to act in relationally aggressive ways. Relational aggression is significantly related to maladjustment (e.g., depression, loneliness, social isolation). Additionally, relationally aggressive children feel unhappy and distressed about their peer relationships.

Youth violence and the problems associated have become a national priority given to youth, our school systems, and to society. Males typically use physical means to a greater extent than females, who use more verbal means (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992). Investigations of youth aggressive behaviors have several key limitations. These include a focus on physical and overt forms of aggression (i.e. - hitting, pushing, shoving, kicking) rather than the more subtle manifestation of social exclusion and rumors, a focus on aggressive boys rather than aggressive girls, and the development and validation of school-based interventions that focus almost exclusively on physical manifestations (Leff & Crick, 2010). Continuing, Leff & Cricket (2010) found that victims of relational aggression believe that their school is less safe and rate their school-based social experiences as being relatively negative. As mentioned by (Bjorkqvist, et al, 1992), during the ages of 11 and 15, girls begin to form tighter groups and develop more pairs, which can lead to the use of manipulation of friendship patterns as an aggressive strategy. Additionally, girls are known to mature faster verbally than boys, which can facilitate the usage of indirect means of aggression by increasing the verbal skills needed for the manipulations. It is essential to develop early interventions for relational aggressors, which enables victims to hold much promise for improving the health and well-being of school-age children, their schools, and their communities.

Consequences for Bullies and Victims

Bullies and victims are equally at risk for negative outcomes in the future. According to Milsom and Gallo (2006), as bullies go through adolescence they are more at risk for severe problems such as delinquency, alcohol and drug abuse, and dropping out of school. Bully victims are targeted, taunted, harassed, threatened, and generally made miserable by the bullies or gangs who are determined to torment them. Needless to say, school may not be top priority for the victimized students. Both bullies and victims have been found to be more depressed than students who are not involved in bullying. Depression associated with bullying and victimization can lead to academic problems, self-defeating behaviors, and interpersonal problems (Milsom and Gallo, 2006). Lastly, victims are particularly at risk if there is no emotional support provided or if the bullying behavior is severe and prolonged. These victims are more likely to suffer from academic problems, absenteeism, loneliness, and loss of friends. According to the Safe School Initiative issued by the United States Secret Service, in over 2/3 of school shooting/homicides, “the attackers felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured by others prior to the incident” (Vossekuil, Reddy, & Fein, 2000, p. 7).

There is no question that physical aggression and “traditional” bullying remain serious problems in the schools. However, relational aggression among students, particularly girls, is just as problematic. It is much easier to witness a child bullying another physically; pushing and fighting are much more obvious than rumor spreading, gossip, and peer-exclusion. School counselors can serve a critical role in lowering the incidence of relational aggression in the school environment.

Research on Bullying Intervention Programs

Only recently has relational aggression become a prevalent topic in the media, as well as, in schools. Programs that have a focus on bullying have often included decreasing physical aggression and attitudinal change as primary goals. Relational aggression is often left out of school based bullying programs. Girls in late childhood and early adolescence may be involved in social aggression exclusively whereas boys participate in overt aggression. This literature review yielded no investigations that evaluated programs designed to reduce social aggression in schools.

Schools provide little or no support for students experiencing bullying and harassment (Crockett (2004). As a school resource for social and behavioral as well as cognitive issues, the school counselor must be able to provide worthwhile assistance to teachers and other school personnel who may witness this behavior frequently. Hodges and Rodkin (2003) suggested that school professionals should help teachers develop a more active role as an aggressor of school bullying issues rather than passively condoning these behaviors through a strategy of noninterference. Orpinas, Horne, & Staniszewski (2003) state that bullying intervention programs have a higher chance of success when implemented at the school level by the teacher, rather than an at-home, parent-driven program.

Often schools address bullying by attempting to get tougher on bullying. Zero tolerance policies have grown in popularity and, used alone, have shown little evidence of increasing school safety. Milsom and Gallo (2006) suggest that many recommendations have been made with regard to how to approach the problem of bullying. Most researchers agree that effective programs should be comprehensive - targeting students, schools, families, and the community. It

is important to understand that attending to the needs of victims is as essential as intervening with bullies and assessing school climate.

Anti-bullying programs generally focus on building school environments that create (1) warmth, positive interest, and involvement from adults, (2) firm limits on unacceptable behavior, (3) consistent application of nonpunitive, nonphysical sanctions for unacceptable behavior or violation of the rules, and (4) adults who act as authorities and positive role models (Lepkowski et al, 2005). Many other anti-bullying approaches include student and faculty education, increased awareness of the problem of bullying and adult involvement, in addition to counseling for individual victims and bullies (Lepkowski et al, 2005).

Milsom & Gallo (2006), bullies are more likely to continue engaging in bullying behavior when they feel no one will intervene and there will be no consequences for them.

Acknowledging that bullying occurs and that it will not be tolerated is an important start in helping students to recognize a school's commitment to protecting them from bullies. After communicating this awareness, school personnel are encouraged to develop policies that include clear definitions of bullying, outline policies for reporting inappropriate behavior, and list possible ramifications of bullying.

Bully Intervention Program: The Ophelia Project

The Ophelia Project is unique to bully-prevention programs in that it focuses entirely on relational aggression among girls. The goal of the Ophelia Project is to prevent bullying through character development, and to prevent the negative influences on girls in our culture today. Their program includes:

(1) Bringing together a community of caring adults (teachers, administrators, parents) and high school students to address the specific social and emotional needs in a school or school district.

- (2) Giving participants the organizational tools needed to begin to organize for systematic change.
- (3) Creating the organizational structure using a school/district task force and teams to plan/ implement what it means to have a safer, social climate. Raise the collective awareness of the extent of peer aggression in the school.
- (4) Teaching a common language and body of information to use with aggression intervention.
- (5) Motivating parents to serve as an integral part of a safe school climate.
- (6) Empowering students to take a major role in changing the environment.
- (7) Creating a force that can reach beyond the school to change the social environment for families (Ophelia Project, 2007).

Analysis of Literature

Based on the literature reviewed, it appears that the body of research regarding relational aggression among girls is growing. However, as most of the research found is recent, the study of relational aggression among girls is still very new. While school counseling and other school-based fields have previously focused on bullying as it relates to physical violence and aggression, peer-reviewed research and popular literature are becoming more focused on relational aggression and social dominance among school-aged girls. Unfortunately, the preparedness of schools for dealing with this issue is not on the same trajectory.

Methodology

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate if implementing the Bully Intervention Program, Ophelia Project, would reduce relational aggressive behaviors, including verbal comments in a cold or hostile tone of voice, eye-rolling, spreading rumors, “mean” facial

expressions, and exclusion in girls currently in the 5th grade. This research included a mixed-method approach combining quantitative data (questionnaire survey) and qualitative data (small group sessions).

Classroom lessons and survey questions were given to build general awareness and small groups were conducted so that it would be more effective for the girls directly involved with or likely to experience relational aggression. Students who seemed to be at risk for relational aggression were identified by their teachers as being a victim and/or perpetrator of relational aggressive behaviors and invited to participate in the study. These sessions included a mixed group of girls: (1) those who are bullying/aggressive and (2) those who are insecure and lack assertiveness, which could in turn make them easy targets of relational aggression. In many cases, girls who are picked on or excluded often respond well to group sessions, as it is a place where they can get emotional support and have further opportunities for positive social interactions. During the duration of the classroom lessons, the students learned how to:

- identify positive self qualities in each other
- identify feelings, recognize what makes them angry, and how to show it
- distinguish between thoughts that are positive and negative
- identify cliques/true friendships, and how they can be that type of friend
- develop strategies for resolving conflicts/empathy
- identify cultural/societal expectations of girls
- identify being mean/compliments
- identify gossip, rumors, and jealousy
- develop effective communication and confrontation skills

Research Questions

1. Will the effects of a Bully Intervention Program reduce/decrease relational aggression among elementary school age girls?
2. Do interactive presentations with videos and audience participation increase the girls' knowledge of relational aggression?

Participants and Sample Selection

The participants surveyed for this study were fifth grade girls at a rural Georgia elementary school. Eighteen girls were identified by their teachers as being a victim and/or perpetrator of relational aggressive behaviors and were invited to participate in the study. Those girls who voluntarily complied to become a part of this study and returned signed permission slips participated in small group sessions and completed a survey on aggressive behavior.

This study's participants identified as African American female students; no other race is represented in the fifth grade. The students' ages ranged from ten to eleven years old at the time of the study. Participants were ethnically representative of the school from which the sample is drawn. Participants in this study were divided into treatment and control groups. In order to protect the confidentiality of the child, a number and not the child's name appeared on all of the information recorded during the study. The students met in the counselor's office twice a week for a six-week period.

Instrumentation and Interviews

A six-week prevention program developed by the Ophelia Project that focuses directly on relational aggression was conducted. The study assessed outcomes based upon a bully/aggression instrument developed by the Ophelia Project. The 12- question survey was very

brief and completed during the group on aggression. The girls also watched a video during group on “Bullies and How to Help Them” to increase their knowledge of relational aggression.

Informal qualitative data was collected throughout the group sessions. The groups were conducted and data collection during a timeframe when the students had more available time without testing interruptions (February – March).

Data Collection

A mixed-method approach combining quantitative data (questionnaire survey) and qualitative data (small group sessions) was conducted in this study.

Phase 1: Data were collected and analyzed from the answers given from the aggression survey of the fifth grade girls selected to be in the group. The questions ranged from “Has a close friend ever talked about you behind your back?” to “Have you ever noticed another girl’s clothes and tried to hurt her by telling everyone how weird she looks?” The girls also watched a video during group on “What I Learned about Bullying.”

Phase 2: Data were collected and analyzed from the 6-week intervention program. An overview of the topics covered follows. In Lesson One, *The Language of Peer Aggression*, the stage was set for the lessons to follow by creating a common language to describe peer aggression. The girls were introduced to the types of aggression: physical, verbal, and relational. Girls also identified two roles played in aggressive incidents - aggressor and target. Lesson Two, *The Bystander: You Can Make a Difference*, introduced the third role in the bullying situation - the bystander, also referred to as the kid in the middle (KIM). Lesson Three, *Normative Beliefs*, addressed the relationship between what we believe and how we act, whether true or false. Girls were able to identify common normative beliefs, differentiate norms from rules, and analyze anti-bully laws. In Lesson Four, *Friendship*, the girls learned qualities we look for and admire in

our friends, as well as characteristics of healthy relationships. Additionally, girls learned how to connect to each other and establish friendships. In Lesson Five, *Leadership* was the focus. They were able to define qualities of a leader, and to define positive and negative qualities of popularity. In the final lesson, *Cyber-bullying*, the girls were able to compare and contrast verbal and nonverbal communication, identify common emoticons/internet abbreviations and assess the writer's intentions in ambiguously written statements.

Phase 3: An End of Group Questionnaire was given and information gathered during the sessions through recording and note writing was compiled. The questions included: (1) What did you learn in group about relational aggression? (2) What things have you seen from members of the group change in behavior? (3) What things have you seen in yourself change in behavior? (4) What do you plan to do with the knowledge you learned in the group? (5) What, if group was done over, would you change or add? This process was conducted over a period of one day after the six-week program was completed and done with each student individually.

Data Analysis

To determine whether the bullying intervention program, Ophelia Project, has decreased relational bullying among the elementary school aged girls, teachers were given a post-evaluation to describe the behaviors of the students they chose to be a part of study. All data was analyzed by t-Tests

To increase the girls' knowledge of relational aggression, interactive presentations with videos and audience participation was done during the six-week intervention program. The girls watched a video during classroom guidance on "Bullies and How to Help Them" to increase their knowledge of relational aggression. The students' answers from the End of Group

Questionnaire and reactions to interactive activities were also used to determine changes in behavior. Data collection on bullying and relational aggression began in February.

Results

Research Question 1: Will the effects of a Bully Intervention Program reduce/decrease relational aggression among elementary school age girls?

Data was collected and analyzed from the answers given from the aggression survey created by the Ophelia Project of the fifth grade girls selected to be in the group. According to the results of the survey, the girls answered yes to 8 of the 12 questions. These questions included (1) Has a close friend ever talked about you behind your back? (2) Has anyone ever spread a hurtful rumor about you? (3) Do your friends ever spread gossip about others over the phone or on the computer? (5) Have you ever seen girls picking on another in school or trying to exclude her? (7) Have you ever been pressured to pick on or exclude someone just to fit in and look cool? (8) Have you seen somebody using body language to be mean to someone else (e.g. rolling their eyes)? (9) Have you ever noticed another girl's clothes and tried to hurt her by telling everyone how weird she looks? In addition (11) Have your friends ever ignored you and you had no idea why?

The researchers collected data and analyzed by t-Tests of the teacher's Pre- and Post Surveys of the treatment and control groups. The teachers were asked the same question for each student. The question was "Does this child show signs of relational aggressive behaviors, including verbal comments in a cold or hostile tone of voice, eye-rolling, spreading rumors, "mean" facial expressions, fighting, victimization, and exclusion of girls in the classroom. This child is also having academic failure or underachievement problems." According to the results of the survey question, students in the treatment group showed more improvement in relational

aggressive behaviors than the controlled group over the course of the 6 weeks in which the program was implemented. Additionally, the treatment group showed significant improvement in relational aggressive behaviors from the pre- and post survey of the teachers. Below are the tables showing the results of the teacher pre- and post surveys.

Table 1: T-Tests Results and Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Pre- and Post Surveys of Treatment Group

Outcome							95% CI for Mean Difference			
	Pre-Survey			Post Survey						
Teacher Ratings	M	SD	n	M	SD	n			t	df
		2.00	.00	9	1.33	.50	9	.949, 1.72		8

$p < .05$

The difference between the two means is statistically significantly different from zero at the 5% level of significance. There is an estimated change of .67 between the pre- and post surveys for the treatment group. Therefore, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that there was a decrease in relational aggressive behaviors of the treatment group from the beginning to the end of intervention program.

Results of Teachers' Pre- and Post Surveys of Treatment Group

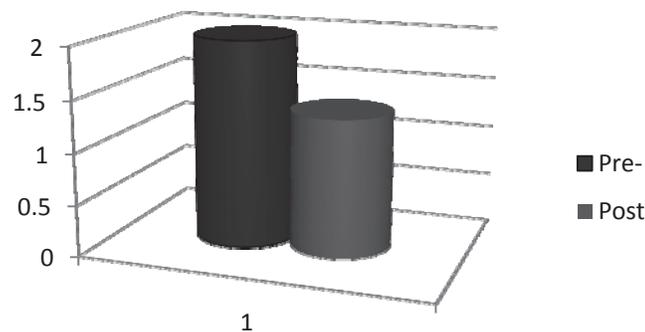


Table 1: The t-test results indicate the teacher ratings for pre- and post surveys of the treatment group are statistically different at the .05 level of significance. It appears that the bullying intervention program did reduce/decrease the relational aggressive behaviors among elementary school age girls.

Table 2: T-Tests Results and Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Post Surveys of Treatment and Controlled Groups

Outcome							95% CI for Mean Difference		t	df
	Treatment			Controlled			Lower	Upper		
Teacher Ratings	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	.949, 2.05		10	16
	1.33	.50	9	1.67	.50	9				

$p < .05$

The difference between the two means is statistically significantly different from zero at the 5% level of significance. There is an estimated change of .34 between the teacher ratings of the treatment and controlled groups. Therefore, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the intervention program did decrease relational aggressive behaviors of the treatment group as it compares to the controlled group.

Results of Teachers' Post Survey of Treatment and Controlled Groups

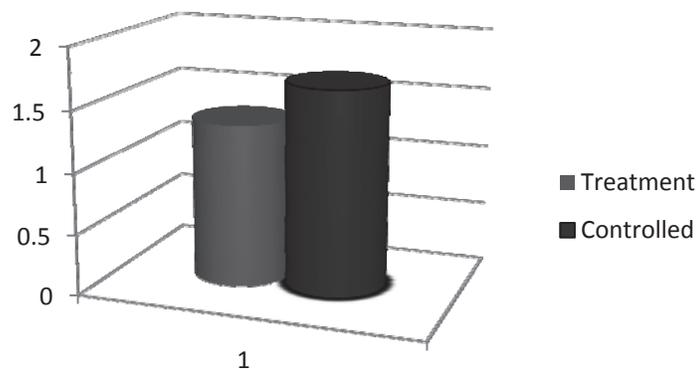


Table 2: The t-test results indicate the teacher ratings for post surveys of the treatment and controlled group are statistically different at the .05 level of significance. It appears that the bullying intervention program did reduce/decrease the relational aggressive behaviors among the treatment group.

Research Question 2: Do interactive presentations with videos and audience participation increase the girls' knowledge of relational aggression?

Additional data was collected and analyzed from the End of Group Questionnaire that was conducted following the 6- week Bullying Intervention Program. Responses to each of the

questions have been summarized. The questions were answered by each student as a group and discussed with them individually.

Question #1: What did you learn in group about relational aggression?

For question 1, five out of nine students said they learned a lot. One student stated that she learned that rolling her eyes and talking back to her teachers is relational aggression. Two out of nine students mentioned that it is best to walk away instead of fussing with other girls. Other responses included learning a lot about why not to spread rumors and how to stop talking back to her teachers, that being mean is not nice and the differences between norms and rules.

Question #2: What things have you seen from members of the group change in behavior?

In question #2, 50% of the students responded that they have seen the attitudes of the other girls in the group change for the good. One out of nine girls said members have not rolled their eyes as much. Other responses were other members have stopped fussing with teachers, less bullying is occurring, they are calmer and they have been doing their work.

Question #3: What things have you seen in yourself change in behavior?

In question #3, seven out of nine students said that their attitudes have changed in a positive way. Two out of nine girls stated that they have not rolled their eyes in a long time. Two out of nine also said that they are not talking back to the teacher. Other responses included grades have come up and fussing with other people has decreased.

Question #4: What do you plan to do with the knowledge you learned in the group?

The responses to question #4 were similar. 100% of the responses were positive. Responses to the question included thinking good thoughts, using information to lessen drama, share with other girls, take it to the middle school (6th grade), and keeping a good attitude daily.

Question #5: What, if group was done over, would you change or add?

The responses to question #5 varied. Six out of nine girls shared that they would not change anything about the program. One of the girls said she would add more acting out scenarios and another said she would use more eye contact exercises. Two of the nine girls expressed adding more people to the group.

The girls watched a video entitled “Bullies and How to Help Them” to increase their knowledge of relational aggression. The girls learned simple techniques to deal with bullies, to reason with, or to avoid them. They also learned that if they witnessed bullying that they should not go along with it and laugh; instead be cool and stand up for what is right. Additionally, the girls gained insight into sometimes getting help from an authority is the only thing you can do. One of the most important things they learned was that if they were bullies, they should stop, and that if they do not like it when someone bothers them, then they really do not want to make others feel bad. Instead, they should use their power in a positive way.

Some of the main points presented in the 24 minute video include: (1) defining the word bully, (2) tips on what to do if faced in a bullying situation (i.e. - walking away), (3) the two scenarios of bullying, (4) how to deal with the problem, and (5) being strong enough to care about others (Discovery Education, 1997). The girls had a discussion afterwards in which they seemed to have more knowledge about bullying and how bullying relates to relational aggression.

In addition to the video, the girls also participated in lessons as part of the Ophelia Project six-week program. In *The Bystander: You can make a difference*, the girls had an opportunity to role play in a Bystander Role Play activity. They were able to act out scenarios and discuss the ways to make them positive. In the lesson focused on Normative Beliefs, the girls

had the opportunity to place different comments (i.e. - Girls cannot play football. / The speed limit on the highway is 55 mph) under either rules or norms on the board. In the lesson focused on Leadership, the girls were able to pair up and guide each other through Tanagram Leadership. Each girl had to instruct another girl on how to arrange the tanagrams and the follower could not move any of the pieces unless instructed by the leader. In the last lesson of Cyberbullying, the girls were able to play charades with different emoticons and internet abbreviations. According to the girls' reactions to the lessons, as well as, their comments from the End of Group Questionnaire, the interactive presentations with videos and audience participation did increase the girls' knowledge of relational aggression.

Discussion

Implications for Counseling

Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships is an important developmental task for children. Unfortunately, relational aggression works against the development of these relationships and negatively affects students' social skills. Ultimately, relational aggression is very hurtful, damages self-concept, and interferes with academic and physical development (Ophelia Project, 2007).

The Ophelia Project Relational Aggression Program proved effective in reducing/ decreasing relational aggressive behaviors of the group members. Participants demonstrated less aggressive confrontations and negative behaviors and seemed to learn new ways of relating to others to preserve friendships. These new behaviors have translated into fewer discipline issues and a safer more positive school environment.

Since relational aggression is a form of bullying which may harm girls emotionally, it is important that counselors become aware of these types of hurtful behaviors that girls display

toward each other and help all students develop strategies to report, seek support and develop anti-bullying coping skills to use when students encounter these problems in their social circles. Additionally, counselors should have one-on-one contact with students in order to identify students' needs in social relationships. Just as in this study, students can be identified through teacher referrals, as well as, through peer surveys, self-reports, disciplinary referrals, and observation. After students have been identified, counselors can implement relevant intervention programs such as the Ophelia Project. School counselors can help students examine how to create successful relationships. Fortunately, in many cases, counselor encouragement is essential. When students are known as bullies, but have shown signs of being nice to another student or helping another student in need, it becomes important for the school counselor to give positive feedback to the student for their efforts toward a more positive attitude.

Counselors can also play a major role in assisting girls with developing their own "sense of self." They should conduct classroom guidance or small group activities that demonstrate healthy self esteem, in addition to providing activities where appropriate and safe choices in friendships are created. School counselors can help in preventing girls showing relational aggression behaviors from turning into bullies by showing children how to become empathetic and teaching social skills classes at an early age.

Limitations to Study

The limitations to this study included limited demographic representation (race) and a small sample size. The PI invited eighteen girls to participate in the study. The girls were randomly selected to treatment and control groups (9 in each group). Each treatment and control group will have the opportunity at different times to participate in the It Has a Name: Relational Aggression Girls' Curriculum under the Ophelia Project. The number of girls per group was

determined by the number of students willing to participate and who had returned signed permission slips.

Although this study suggests that the bullying intervention program developed by the Ophelia Project did decrease the relational aggressive behaviors among elementary school age girls and that the interactive presentations with videos and audience participation increased the girls' knowledge of relational aggression, there could still be some areas that can be addressed in future research. Future research could explore relationships among developing healthy friendships, satisfaction of the need for being liked by others and relational aggression. One of the big challenges for future research is determining whether there is a connection between the relationships between parenting, relational aggression, and children social development. Additionally, correlating this intervention to measurements such as discipline referrals, absences, referrals to the counselor and grades would support program effectiveness as a school intervention.

Conclusion

Relational aggression is a behavior intended to hurt someone by harming her relationships with others. Covert and subtle, uncovering relational aggression requires careful observation and monitoring. Most importantly, school counselors cannot consider these behaviors as "kids just being kids." The findings of this study suggest that the bullying intervention program did decrease the relational aggressive behaviors among elementary school age girls. Results also showed that the interactive presentations with videos and audience participation increased the girls' knowledge of relational aggression. This research's finding suggest that school counselor interventions can reduce girls' relational aggression and facilitate accomplishment of age appropriate developmental tasks.

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