

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY STUDIES

A REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON SOCIAL AGGRESSION AMONG ADOLESCENTS
WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS

TANA L. SCHYWSTELL

Spring 2010

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in Human Development and Family Studies
with honors in Human Development and Family Studies

Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Scott D. Gest
Associate Professor of Human Development and Family Studies
Thesis Supervisor

Richard Hazler
Professor of Counselor Education
Second Reader

Kathryn Hynes
Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Studies
Honors Adviser

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

ABSTRACT

In recent decades, social aggression among adolescents has received increasing attention from the media, social science researchers, and school counselors. Socially aggressive behaviors may include “damaging another’s self-esteem, social status, or both” and may take on “direct forms such as verbal rejection, negative facial expressions or body movements” as well as “indirect forms such as slanderous rumors or social exclusion” (Galen & Underwood, 1997, p. 589). The term social aggression was chosen for the present literature review over other terms such as indirect aggression (Björkqvist, 1994) and relational aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) due to its inclusive nature. Although scholars have proposed numerous social and biological theories regarding the origins of aggressive behavior, Social Dominance Theory, which suggests individuals use coercive strategies to increase their social status, may be most effective in explaining motivations of social aggression perpetrators (Hawley, 1999).

The present literature review examines both quantitative and qualitative research on social aggression, focusing on the antecedents and consequences of social aggression perpetration and victimization, and implications for school counselors. Social aggression, which occurs among both male and female adolescents (Mayeux & Cillessen, 2008), may be most prevalent in the middle school setting (Karriker-Jaffe, Foshee, Ennett, & Suchindran, 2008). Antecedents of social aggression perpetration include perceived popularity (Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998), social intelligence (Björkqvist & Österman, 2000), anxiety (Murray-Close & Crick, 2007), and learning/behavioral issues (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006). Such behaviors may result in a variety of damaging

outcomes for victims such as low-self-esteem (Owens, Slee, & Shute, 2000b), as well as internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems (Crick & Nelson, 2002). School counselors should understand these dynamics to provide appropriate social support and intervention programs for both victims and perpetrators; however, they should use caution when disrupting adolescents' autonomy in establishing social hierarchy, as this may be a critical function of development (Goldstein, Young, & Boyd, 2008). More research is needed to fully evaluate the efficacy of anti-bullying programs, but such prevention and intervention strategies should be examined and carefully implemented by counselors to reduce the prevalence of social aggression in the secondary school setting. Overall, while school counselors should be knowledgeable of empirical findings, they should assess the unique needs of their student body and of individual social aggression conflicts before administering programs or social support services.

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Chapter 1 Social Aggression: Definitions and Theories

“Gretchen was starting to get really mad at me. I talked to her about it and I asked her what was wrong. She just said, ‘Oh, I heard something that you said about me.’ But I didn’t say anything about her. Sara was mad at me, I don’t know why. She started being mad at me and then she started making up things that [she said] I said. Sara told Brenda and Gretchen so that they would get mad at me, too. So now I guess Gretchen has made up something and told Wellsley. They are all mad at me and laughing and everything” (Merten, 1997, p. 182).

Gossip, manipulation, exclusion, and strategically harming others’ relationships have emerged as themes of an increasingly popular phenomenon frequently referred to by researchers and the media as social aggression. Given the potentially damaging consequences of social aggression, which often occurs in the school context, an informed secondary school counselor should be aware of current social aggression research to facilitate appropriate prevention and intervention strategies. According to Leadbeater and Hoglund (2006), “...school-based counselors and psychologists can serve as ‘champions’... to help aggressive and victimized children and their families and teachers” (p. 21).

Although physical forms of aggression, particularly among males, have been thoroughly studied for many years, it has become increasingly apparent over the past few decades that the primary definition of aggression, “the intent to harm” (Merrell et al., 2006), extends far beyond external damage to the body. After researchers began to consider the many ways one may attempt to harm another individual, the notion that boys are more aggressive than girls dissipated (Björkqvist, 1994; Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999). So in what ways may adolescents harm one another other than physically? To answer

this question, social science researchers have generated many diverse, yet overlapping ideas regarding forms of nonphysical aggression.

Aggression Subtypes

According to Underwood, Galen, and Paquette (2001b), aggressive behaviors serve multiple purposes including “to harm another physically”, “to obtain desired objects”, “to establish dominance in a group”, “to hurt someone emotionally or psychologically”, and “to hurt someone else by damaging their social relationships” (p. 254). Because most aggressive acts fulfill more than one of these aims, it is challenging to categorize such behaviors as a single specific type of aggression. Different subtypes have emerged for several reasons. First, subtypes are needed to differentiate aggressors’ motives for harming other individuals (Coie & Dodge, 1988). Second, subtypes are used to distinguish between behavioral acts that are empirically associated with different antecedents or outcomes (Underwood, 2003). Third, as individuals move through the life course, they develop more advanced social skills, thus altering or “improving” their aggressive strategies (Björkqvist, 1994).

Björkqvist (1994) describes a developmental progression in the development of aggression. Direct physical aggression (i.e., one toddler hitting another to obtain a toy) is the first form to emerge. As communication skills develop, individuals advance to direct verbal aggression (i.e., a preschooler yelling at a peer to go first in a game). Such direct forms of physical and verbal aggression in which the perpetrator can be easily identified are also commonly referred to as overt aggression. Finally, after achieving an even

higher level of social manipulation, individuals reach what Björkqvist calls indirect aggression. Through indirect aggression, individuals use developmentally advanced strategies to harm their victims and maintain anonymity to avoid counterattack (Björkqvist, 1994).

According to Underwood (2003), aggression can take four primary forms: property damage, physical, verbal, and social, with the two latter constructs being broken down into further subtypes. Verbal aggression may include threatening to physically injure another person, intimidating banter, and name-calling. Social aggression may take both direct and indirect forms, both of which may include manipulating another's relationships, gossiping, and both verbally and nonverbally excluding others (Underwood, 2003). The present literature review will provide an in depth analysis of direct and indirect social aggression research focused on adolescents.

Terminology

Currently, there is great debate over which term—indirect, relational, or social, best describes non-physical forms of aggression. On one hand, definitions that are overly broad may result in an abundance of behaviors and individuals being falsely labeled as aggressive (Underwood, 2003). In result, it may be difficult to examine the causes and consequences of aggressive perpetrators and their actions. On the other hand, definitions that are too narrow may lead studies to center only on the most severe cases and overlook the more common incidences of nonphysical aggression (Underwood, 2003).

When comparing the constructs of indirect, relational, and social aggression, it is crucial to contrast the conceptual and operational definitions of each term (Underwood, 2003). The conceptual definition is most commonly located in the introduction section of a research paper and offers a more general description of the construct. The operational definition, most frequently located in the methods section, typically identifies the specific criteria used to measure the behaviors that will be coded as that construct for the study (Underwood, 2003).

Indirect Aggression

A.H. Buss (1961) first recognized indirect aggression as attempting to solve an issue by preventing the aggressor from being easily identified (as cited by Underwood, 2003). Under this first conceptual definition, indirect aggression can be both verbal and physical. For instance, one may engage in indirect verbal aggression by spreading vicious rumors about another individual, while an arsonist may be considered an indirect physical aggressor. Eight years later, Feshbach (1969) adapted the conceptual definition to indirectly attaining social exclusion and satisfying antagonistic intentions (as cited by Underwood, 2003). Next, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, and Peltonen (1988) suggested that indirectly aggressive perpetrators pursue anonymity to avoid counterattack and social stigma (as cited by Underwood, 2003). More recently, Kaukiainen, Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, Osterman, Salmivalli, Rotherberg, and Ahlbo (1999) suggested that victims of indirect aggression are harmed via social manipulation, rather than through physical or

verbal attacks as previously suggested by A.H. Buss (1961, as cited in Underwood, 2003).

Similar to the constantly shifting conceptual definition of indirect aggression, the operational definition of indirect aggression varies from study to study. While the operational definition used by Lagerspetz and colleagues (1988, as cited by Underwood, 2003) includes socially manipulative items such as “tries to put the other to his/her side”, verbal items such as “argues” and physical items such as “abuses” and “sulks” were also included. Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, and Kaukiainen (1992) coded “gossiping, suggesting shunning of the other, spreading vicious rumors as revenge, breaking contact with the person in question, and becoming friends with someone else in revenge” (p. 125) as indirect aggression. There are inconsistencies in the conceptual and operational definitions of indirect aggression: for example, a key component of the conceptual definition of indirect aggression, anonymity of the aggressor, is inconsistent with overt items such as “argues”, which are operationally used to measure indirect aggression (Lagerspetz et al., 1998). Consequently, indirect aggression may not be the most ideal construct for describing nonphysical, socially manipulative forms of aggression.

Relational Aggression

The second well-known construct, relational aggression, was proposed by Crick and Grotpeter (1995), who conceptualized it as “harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships” (p. 711). Linder, Crick, and Collins (2002) also suggested that relational aggression can be carried out through damaging

one's "feelings of acceptance and love" (p. 70). According to Crick, Casas, and Nelson (2002), examples of relationally aggressive behaviors include withdrawing from a friendship to manipulate, excluding others when angry, and spreading rumors so that a peer group will reject the victim. Crick and colleagues were the first to suggest that similar to physical aggression, relational aggression may be associated with psychological maladjustment.

Three items comprised the operational definition of relational aggression in Crick and Grotpeter (1995), "tells friends they will stop liking them unless friends do what they say", "when mad at a person, ignores them or stops talking to them", and "tries to keep certain people from being in their group during activity or play" (p. 713). Originally, "when mad, gets even by keeping the person from being in their group of friends" (p. 713) was also included as an indicator of relational aggression; however, the item loaded strongly on the overt aggression factor and was removed from the analysis. Although gossip meets the criteria outlined in the conceptual definition of relational aggression, it cannot be used in studies examining differences between overt and relational aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) because it does not fall into one specific category. Another weakness to the construct of relational aggression is that nonverbal exclusionary behaviors (i.e., turning one's nose up at a peer to exclude them from a group) are not included in the operational definition (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Finally, peer nomination instruments used in many studies of relational aggression (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Grotpeter & Crick, 1996) may be effective in

examining extreme cases; however, may result in less sensitive readings of students with moderate levels of relationally aggressive behaviors (Underwood, 2003).

Social Aggression

The final construct, social aggression, was first suggested by Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Ferguson, and Garipey (1989), who defined the term as “the manipulation of group acceptance through alienation, ostracism, or character defamation” (p. 323). Later, Galen and Underwood (1997) built upon the construct of social aggression by conceptualizing it as “...damaging another’s self-esteem, social status, or both, and may take such direct forms as verbal rejection, negative facial expressions or body movements, or more indirect forms such as slanderous rumors or social exclusion” (p. 589). An advantage to using the term social aggression is that it includes nonverbal exclusionary behaviors, which have been found to be hurtful (Lagerspetz et al., 1988). Of the three constructs, social aggression may be the broadest term and encompasses the widest variety of aggressive behaviors that take place in the social context (Merrell et al., 2006).

Galen and Underwood (1997) used hypothetical vignettes of nonverbal exclusionary behavior to operationally define social aggression. For example, the vignette “The group sees you, stops talking, and turns away from you with their noses turned upward” was included (Galen & Underwood, 1997, p. 592). Galen and Underwood (1997) also examined students in the laboratory setting, training an actor to interact with peer groups during a Pictionary game. The actor made statements such as

“You’re not drawing very well” and “I’m going first!” (p. 594). Reactions to such behaviors (i.e., rolling one’s eyes, sneering) were then coded as socially aggressive acts. A downside to using the term social aggression is that it may be too broad and thus it may be difficult to identify specific causes and consequences of such a wide variety of behaviors (Underwood, 2003).

Although the constructs of indirect aggression, relational aggression, and social aggression share many similarities, researchers continue to debate over whether or not such terms outline the same phenomenon (Björkqvist, 2001). According to Underwood (2003), it may be unproductive to attempt to dissect the minute discrepancies between the constructs for two primary reasons. First, instruments are adapted from one study to the next and definitions are altered, thus making it challenging to identify consistent differences. Second, each construct is likely rooted in researcher biases, since research teams are likely to promote their term of choice for both individual and scientific motives. Underwood (2003) advises researchers to take extreme caution in generating additional terms, which are unlikely to possess significant differences from the current constructs.

Why Social Aggression?

For the purposes of the present literature review, social aggression is the most ideal construct due to its broad nature. Social aggression overlaps with the constructs of indirect and relational aggression, and therefore is most effective in describing behaviors examined by studies using all three terms. Social aggression encompasses both overt and

covert forms of socially manipulative acts, as well as both verbal and nonverbal exclusionary behaviors. Overall, the term social aggression best describes the goal to achieve social harm (Underwood, 2003).

Origins of Social Aggression

For decades, scholars have contemplated the theoretical origins of aggression as part of a much larger nature versus nurture debate. While many early theories center on biological influences (Freud, 1930; Lorenz, 1966, as cited in Schaffer, 1996), others focus on environmental and social forces driving aggressive behaviors in children and adolescents (Bandura, 1973; Dodge, 1980; Olweus, 1980, as cited in Schaffer, 1996). While the human species may possess an innate need to compete for resources, environmental influences may lead some individuals to rely on coercive strategies to obtain social capital, where as others may be drawn to more prosocial methods to acquire such assets (Hawley, 1999).

Biological Theories

According to Freud's Instinct Theory, humans are born with a "death instinct", or an innate need to destroy (Freud, 1930, as cited in Schaffer, 1996). Freud explains that through the Hydraulic model, energy from this instinct increases and accumulates in the body over time, until it becomes too much and must be released. According to Freud (1930, as cited in Schaffer, 1996), through a process known as catharsis, individuals can

release their aggressive energy in socially acceptable ways such as by engaging in competitive sports. Without such methods, Freud believes individuals may become aggressive through violent acts. Today, Freud's Instinct Theory has been largely discredited by scholars and catharsis therapy has been shown to be ineffective (Schaffer, 1996). Similar to the Freudian Instinct Theory, Lorenz's Ethological Theory suggests that aggression is a natural, instinctual behavior (Lorenz, 1966, as cited in Schaffer 1996). According to Lorenz, overt forms of aggression have been genetically passed down through the human species due to its adaptive qualities.

Most aggression theories regarding biological influences such as genetics (DiLalla & Gottesman, 1989, as cited in Damon, 1998) and temperament (Plomin, 1983, as cited in Damon, 1998) have been used to explain aggression on the individual level. This approach differs from theorists who attempt to explain the widespread phenomenon of aggression as it occurs throughout the human species (Damon, 1998). According to Damon (1998):

Individual genetic differences likely play a role in physiological characteristics such as impulsivity and tendency to addiction, and through interaction with environmental characteristics these physiological features may lead to individual differences in behavioral tendencies such as negative emotionality and property crime; however, the link between genes and physical aggression has not been made (p. 807).

Social Theories

Bandura's Social Learning Theory has been used to explain many forms of social behavior (Bandura, 1973, as cited in Schaffer, 1996). Individuals adopt aggressive behaviors by learning them directly, or by observing those around them engaging in such

behaviors. Aggressiveness in children is reinforced when they receive attention or rewards after exhibiting such acts. In result, children are likely to repeat the behavior in the future in an effort to gain the same result. According to Social Learning Theory, children may observe others, particularly those whom they look up to, receiving rewards for aggressive behaviors. Consequently, children are likely to emulate such behaviors in the future in an attempt to earn the same desired effect (Schaffer, 1996).

From a Social Information Processing Perspective, humans are exposed to social stimuli (e.g., teasing), and in result, engage in a series of information-processing steps that provoke behavioral reactions (Damon, 1998). Individuals may encode a stimulus as threatening and contemplate the most favorable response. In result, people may select aggressive behaviors as the best reaction and then carry out their choice (Dodge, 1980 as cited by Damon, 1998).

Many researchers have identified parents as an environmental influence of aggressive behaviors in children and adolescents. According to Olweus (1980 as cited by Schaffer, 1996), adolescent boys with indifferent or rejecting mothers may exhibit greater rates of aggressive behaviors. In addition, the study found that maternal permissiveness was positively correlated with aggressiveness in adolescent males. Under Bandura's Social Learning Theory, parents may serve as an extremely powerful model of aggressive behavior for their children (Schaffer, 1996). Eron, Walder, and Lefkowitz (1971, as cited by Schaffer, 1996) found that physical punishment inflicted by parents at high or inconsistent frequencies may lead to increased rates of aggression in children. Similarly, Kaufman and Cicchetti (1989, as cited by Schaffer, 1996) found that children with a

history of parental maltreatment had significantly lower levels of self-esteem, were more withdrawn, and demonstrated more issues when interacting with peers compared to nonmaltreated children. Interestingly, Bandura and Walters (1959, as cited by Schaffer, 1996) discovered that while some aggressive adolescent boys were punished when directing hostile behaviors towards their parents, the same individuals were often rewarded by their parents for behaving aggressively towards their male peers. It is important to note that parents are not necessarily causing aggressive behaviors in their children. Children may be genetically predisposed to aggressive behaviors and in result, elicit different methods of parenting (Schaffer, 1996).

Aside from parents, other environmental factors may raise the accessibility of aggressive responses in children and adolescents. First, youth may display aggressive behavior due to a lack of other effective strategies available for solving social dilemmas (Rubin & Krasnor, 1986, as cited by Damon, 1998). Second, victims of aggression may receive direct reinforcement for hostile behaviors if they find success in engaging in aggressive counterattacks (Patterson, Littman, & Bricker, 1967 as cited by Damon, 1998). In contrast, those who avoid antagonistic peers altogether are unlikely to become aggressive over time. Third, social norms may drive children to believe that aggressive behaviors are both common and acceptable (Guerra, Huesmann, & Hanish, 1995, as cited in Damon, 1998). Fourth, youth may use moral disengagement to distance themselves from their otherwise typical self reactions to aggressive behaviors. Moral disengagement may be achieved through believing aggressive acts will lead to higher moral outcomes, rationalizing that someone or something else is actually responsible for the aggressive

behaviors (e.g., authorities), dehumanizing victims through name calling, and placing blame on victims (Damon, 1998). Finally, children may weigh the costs and benefits of their potential behavioral outcomes when confronted with a perceived threat (Crick & Dodge, 1994, as cited by Damon, 1998).

Along the same lines, the motivation behind nonphysical forms of aggression may be explained by the effect/danger ratio (Björkqvist, 1994). Aggressive perpetrators may weigh the effect or damage they can potentially inflict on their victim with the potential danger or consequences for the act. The overall goal of such aggressive behaviors is to gain the highest possible level of damage while still maintaining the lowest level of risk to oneself. Nonphysical forms of aggression may provide an optimal effect for perpetrators, as they do not pose a high risk of revenge or counterattack by victims. Given the effect/danger ratio, social forms of aggression may be perceived as the most effective option for harming another individual because the aggressor can remain unidentified (Björkqvist, 1994).

Social Dominance Theory

The majority of theories regarding the origin, development, and maintenance of aggressive behaviors typically apply more to physical, than to social, forms of aggression. Social Dominance Theory, proposed by Hawley (1999) may offer the best explanation for why adolescents engage in socially aggressive behaviors. Similar to many species, especially primates, social dominance occurs naturally when members of a society compete with one another to gain resources. In the case of animals, resources

often include basic physical necessities for survival. Dominance rank eventually forms, with the healthiest, most vigorous and productive individuals gaining the highest level of success in meeting their physical and social needs (Betzig, 1986; Silk, 1986, Hawley, 1999). In the instance of social aggression, individuals may compete for resources such as attention (Harlow & Zimmerman, 1959, as cited in Hawley, 1999), companions (Corsaro, 1985; Fagen, 1981, as cited by Hawley, 1999), and mental stimulation (White, 1959, as cited by Hawley, 1999).

Interestingly, preschool children using coercive strategies to obtain dominance are largely accepted by their peers; however, by third grade they are likely to be looked down upon by classmates for their hostile behavior (Pettit, Bakshi, Dodge, & Coie, 1990; Dodge, Coie, Pettit, & Price, 1990; Wright, Zakriski, & Fisher, 1996, as cited by Hawley, 1999). As children mature into adolescence, those with aggressive-coercive strategies become increasingly rejected by peers (Hawley, 1999).

So what differentiates individuals who choose coercive strategies from those who select prosocial approaches to gain attention, acceptance, and power in late childhood and beyond? It appears that a wide variety of biological and environmental factors may separate those who continue to use coercive strategies beyond early childhood and those who adopt more socially acceptable approaches. According to Hawley (1999), the ability to comprehend the viewpoints and emotions of others may lead children to take on prosocial tendencies; however, such skills may also enable individuals to engage in socially manipulative behaviors. Also, prosocial adolescents may be more likely to

possess qualities such as sociability and agreeableness, while coercive individuals may possess more hostile and impulsive characteristics (Hawley, 1999).

While Social Dominance Theory focuses on goal-oriented aggression (i.e., acquiring resources), most of the research on social aggression centers on reactive aggression, or responding to an apparent threat. Given this disparity, Hawley (1999) suggests that many of the sex differences found in social aggression research may disappear if examined from a social dominance perspective.

Theories of Sex Differences in Aggression

Many social theories exist regarding sex differences in aggression. According to Condry and Ross (1985, as cited by Schaffer, 1996), aggression may be tolerated more by society when perpetrated by males. The study asked adult participant observers to rate how much aggression they witnessed among pairs of children playing in the snow. Because the children were dressed in bulky snowsuits, the observers could not identify the true sex of the children. Instead, half were told the children were male, while the other half were told they were female. The adults who were told they were observing boys reported less aggression than those believing they were observing girls. Under Bandura's Social Learning Theory, children are more likely to observe same-sex individuals and be rewarded for imitating their sex-typed behaviors (Schaffer, 1996).

Early in development, infants and toddlers typically display few differences in aggression; however, significant disparities begin to emerge after children enter preschool (Loeber & Hay, 1993, as cited by Damon, 1998). By elementary school,

aggressive behaviors typically shift from overt and instrumental to covert and person-oriented form (Damon, 1998). According to Damon (1998), although biological factors are a likely influence of aggressive sex differences in the early stages of development, such factors may also be mediated by environmental factors such as social norms.

Emergence of Social Aggression in the Media

Coinciding with the increasing attention paid to social aggression by researchers over the last few decades, the media has also become fixated on the phenomenon, particularly among girls. Not only has the issue been discussed on popular talk shows such as Oprah and Dr. Phil (Merrell et al., 2006), but mainstream books such as *And Words Can Hurt Forever* (Garbarino & deLara, 2002), *Odd Girl Out* (Simmons, 2002), and *Queen Bees and Wannabes* (Wiseman, 2002), as well as popular films such as *Mean Girls* (Messick, Michaels, Fey & Waters, 2004), have addressed the topic of aggressive behaviors among female adolescent peer groups.

Odd Girl Out, an ethnographic book based on work by psychologists Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan, explains the issue of social aggression to parents (Simmons, 2002). Such explanations and parenting advice are guided by information obtained from interviews with females ranging from 10 to 14 years of age. Addressing parents of adolescent females, Simmons (2002) suggests:

Ask the guidance counselor or the teacher. Perhaps your daughter could improve her social skills; perhaps she's not responding to cues the right way and is drawing the ire of her peers. She's probably too young to tell you that herself. Visit her guidance counselor or teacher for an evaluation. See what resources are available to help your family. Helping your

daughter improve her social skills is another way to engage her in bettering her own situation (p. 243).

Queen Bees and Wannabes (Wiseman, 2002) inspired the popular film *Mean Girls* (Messick, Michaels, Fey & Waters, 2004) with an in-depth discussion on the role cliques play in fueling social aggression. Describing the issue of social dominance among middle school girls, Wiseman (2002) notes:

Cliques are the worst in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. Your daughter will also have a difficult time whenever she's new to a school or when she's in the youngest grade of a school because she's challenging the already existing social hierarchy (p. 19).

Perhaps entering the middle school context increases competition for social resources among girls.

Wiseman (2002) suggests that there are seven potential roles a girl may play on the inside or outside of a clique. First, there is the "Queen Bee" who uses appealing qualities to intimidate and control others. Second, the "Sidekick", largely under control of the Queen Bee, strives to mimic and please her friend. Third, the "Banker" uses information and secrecy to manipulate girls within the clique. Fourth, the "Floater" associates with more than one clique and avoids excluding others. Fifth, the "Torn Bystander" struggles to follow her own convictions and while going along with the norms of the clique. Sixth, the "Pleaser/Wannabe/Messenger" is on the outskirts of the clique and goes to great lengths to meet the demands of the Queen Bee and her Sidekick. Finally, the "Target" is the clique's primary victim of social aggression and is teased, excluded, and set up to be disgraced in front of others (Wiseman, 2002). While such strict roles may not generalize to all peer networks, they offer a unique perspective on the potentially harmful group dynamics that may take place within cliques.

Conclusions

Unlike some biological theories which have been largely discredited by scholars or focus heavily on the origins of physical aggression, social theories such as Björkqvist's (1994) effect/danger ratio as well as Hawley's (1999) Social Dominance Theory offer insight as to why adolescents may select social aggression as a means to obtain resources such as approval and high status within peer networks. In addition, the notion that males are more likely to engage in physical aggression, while females are more likely to engage in social aggression, may be largely perpetuated by social norms, according to Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Damon, 1999). Undoubtedly, such social norms surrounding sex differences in aggression have likely impacted the media's interpretation of social aggression, which focuses almost entirely on females.

Chapter 2 Measures of Social Aggression

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research on social aggression among adolescents generally includes interviews with students, teachers, and parents or ethnographic behavioral observations of peer interactions. Such studies gather information about students using structured, semi-structured, or unstructured techniques (Merrell et al., 2006). There are many benefits in relying on qualitative methods for examining social aggression. For example, they provide researchers with the opportunity to directly interact with or observe individual students, as well as draw on real life experiences of social aggression (Merrell et al., 2006). In addition, qualitative research offers a unique opportunity to learn about social aggression from the victims' perspective and can be used to classify students as perpetrators or targets. Unlike quantitative techniques, qualitative studies may provide researchers with the opportunity to directly examine the function of social aggression (Merrell et al., 2006). Consequently, such strategies may be crucial in generating implications for interventions (Merrell, 2001). Finally, observational assessments conducted by researchers may contain fewer biases than teacher or peer reports, which may be influenced by relationships and reputations (McNeilly-Choque, Hart, Robinson, Nelson, & Olsen, 1996).

Unfortunately, qualitative studies are limited in several ways. Similar to quantitative self report measures, it may be especially difficult to obtain information from the perspective of the perpetrator. Also, because qualitative research requires students to

retrospectively recall experiences of social aggression, it is possible that students' perspectives of such events may be skewed (Paquette & Underwood, 1999). Paquette and Underwood (1999) found that not all students in the study's sample were able to recall a personal experience of social aggression when interviewed. Individual interviews with students are both time consuming and restrict sample size. Behavioral assessments may also be limited because social aggression does not always occur in a context accessible to researchers (McNeilly-Choque et al., 1996), especially with increasing technology available to adolescents. Even when it is possible to observe students, they are likely to alter their behavior if they are aware of a researcher's presence (McNeilly-Choque et al., 1996). Lastly, because observing social aggression may require knowledge of specific peer networks and social standing, researchers may experience difficulty accurately assessing interactions (McNeilly-Choque et al., 1996).

Interviews

Pronk and Zimmer-Gembeck (2009) examined 33 adolescents who were known to have perpetrated or been the victim of mockery, exclusion, isolation, or gossip in the past. Through interviews, students were asked to describe how often and severe their experiences of social aggression were. In addition, participants were given hypothetical vignettes and were asked to provide their opinion about the intent behind such acts. Instances of social aggression among girls tended to be exclusive in nature and occurred within intimate friendships, while social aggression among boys tended to occur within larger peer networks and focused on masculinity, sexuality, and athletics. Despite such

gender differences, both girls and boys in general suggested that power, social standing, and a need for belonging motivated aggressive behavior (Pronk & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2009).

In a rather large longitudinal study of 475 seventh grade students relying on both qualitative and quantitative measures, Xie, Swift, Cairns, and Cairns (2002) conducted semistructured interviews annually through twelfth grade. The study's quantitative measures included the Interpersonal Competence Scale T (ICS-T; Cairns et al., 1989), which relies on teachers to determine social competence, conduct, and cognition. The interviews were conducted on an individual basis, through which students were asked to identify both male and female perpetrators and describe their interpersonal conflicts. The research team asked basic questions such as, “‘How did it start?’, ‘What happened?’, and ‘What did you do?’” (Xie et al., 2002, p. 209) to initiate discussion of personal experiences. Using peer nominations from all participants, Xie and colleagues (2002) were able to identify distinct social networks.

Findings suggest that the vast majority of students blamed their peers, rather than themselves, for their conflicts (Xie et al., 2002). Social aggression disputes most often included four or more individuals and in 9.3% of such cases the perpetrator could not be identified. Xie and colleagues (2002) describe such an incident stating:

Cara found a rumor was going around about her stealing money from her mom; when asked about the person who did it, Cara replied: ‘They never did find out,..they said that Jenny did it, and Jenny said that Diane said it, but then um then, Jenny said that Amy said it, then Amy said that Angie said, and Angie said that Amy said, and Amy said that Jenny said it, so we never did find out who said it...’ (p. 218).

Xie and colleagues (2002) also found that girls were more likely to engage in social aggression, while boys were more likely to engage in physical aggression. Interestingly, in only 23% of social aggression conflicts, school authorities intervened, while 42% of physical aggression conflicts resulted in intervention or penalties enforced by faculty members (Xie et al., 2002).

Although Xie and colleagues (2002) found that school faculty may have a lack of involvement in settling social aggression conflicts, Booth and Sheehan (2008) found that some students view adults at school as a valuable tool in settling disputes. In interviewing adolescents in the United Kingdom and the United States regarding their perception of their school climate, one girl stated, “Kids try to bully but the guidance counselor helps and things have gotten better” (Booth & Sheehan, 2008, p. 734). For this study, the term bullying was used to describe nonphysical forms of aggression. Despite finding school faculty members to be influential, interactions with teachers were found to be the second most significant force on students’ perception of school behind peer relationships (Booth & Sheehan, 2008).

Ethnographies and Behavioral Observations

In a longitudinal ethnography of over 700 middle school students, Eder (1985) examined the role of popularity in association with aggressive behavior. The study found that social networks grew progressively more stable with each grade, with a solid hierarchy in place by grade eight. Overall, girls expressed that popularity and being mean went hand in hand with one another. Girls identified as popular were often

physically attractive, possessed advanced social skills, and many participated in cheerleading. Eder (1985) identified a “cycle of popularity” in which girls with such attributes became popular and were pursued by other females attempting to increase their own status. Due to their superior social standing, popular girls were often held to high standards of prosocial behavior; however, were frequently unkind to lower status girls to maintain their rank. One seventh grade student said:

Well it makes us feel bad because, well, we really don't think that we're stuck-up. But like we have one big group, you know, that we're all good friends with. And then the others, I guess they just feel that the cheerleaders and the basketball and football players all just kind of hang around together. And then if you're not in something like that or you don't make it, then you just think that, you know, well that we're all stuck-ups (Eder, 1985, p. 162).

In a three year longitudinal ethnography, Merten (1997) suggested similar findings regarding popularity. The study focused on a clique of mean and popular girls referred to as “the dirty dozen” by their teachers. Merten (1997) implies that popular girls are unkind for two primary reasons. First, they feel that being nice conflicts with possessing a high social standing. Second, they feel they are held to such a high standard of being kind to peers, that they are likely to be labeled as mean regardless of their behavior. The dirty dozen clique was so aggressive towards their peers that many parents complained to the school. Many of the dirty dozen's victims' parents were angered, particularly regarding the attitude of the groups' parents. One father described a dirty dozen mother stating:

One mother's attitude that we talked to is ‘girls are going to be girls’. She said that this type of behavior in preadolescent girls is typical, and is nothing to be worried about. It is a phase that girls go through, and it will pass” (Merten 1997, p. 183).

School authorities seemed to intervene in terms of reprimanding socially aggressive students (Merten, 1997). One of the group members, 11th grader Sara, reflected back to the sixth grade stating:

We had a very bad reputation with the teachers. The teachers knew we always got into trouble and everything. The teachers didn't let us do a lot of things. We almost got our softball game canceled with the teachers, and we did get our basketball game canceled" (Merten, 1997, p. 181).

Even when social aggression is opposed by school authorities, such conflicts may not be challenged by students and therefore go unnoticed by adults. Eder and Enke (1991) examined 10 to 14 year old students in a middle school cafeteria during lunch. Through recording and analyzing 16 gossip episodes, the study concluded that students rarely expressed opposition to gossip initiated by their peers. When gossiping was challenged, disapproval had to occur after the initial statement or else the conversation was likely to continue (Eder & Enke, 1991). Certainly, such direct behavioral observations are beneficial in truly capturing the function of social aggression.

Qualitative Research: Conclusions

Overall, qualitative research is a beneficial method to directly capture the function of social aggression, while minimizing the potential of teacher and peer biases influenced by student reputations. Qualitative interviews suggest that boys may be less likely to engage in socially aggressive behaviors, and when they are involved in social aggression conflicts, they tend to take place in larger, less intimate peer networks than conflicts among females. Qualitative ethnographies indicate that popular girls may be held to an

unreasonable standard of prosocial behavior, and instead protect their high status by engaging in socially aggressive behaviors. Overall, qualitative work allows students to discuss their own personal experiences and opinions regarding social aggression conflicts.

Quantitative Research

Research on social aggression includes quantitative studies based on self, peer, and teacher reports. It is useful to review these measures and how social aggression differs across genders and at different developmental stages before considering the antecedents and consequences of social aggression and implications for intervention. However, quantitative research may contain biases influenced by students' reputations and relationships (McNeilly-Choque et al., 1996).

Self Report Measures

Self report measures typically provide students with a series of statements and ask them to rate how true each particular statement is to their own experiences (Merrell et al., 2006). Self reports may also provide students with a group of statements and ask them to select which is most true to their own experiences. There are many benefits to using self report measures when examining social aggression. Given the stressful consequences of victimization, self report measures can also access any mental health problems that may be correlated with social aggression. In addition, self report techniques may most

effectively capture the true perceptions of social aggression victims by directly evaluating their viewpoints. Lastly, self report measures are both practical and cost effective (Merrell et al., 2006).

There are also several shortcomings in using self report measures. Although self reports may be effective in evaluating the standpoint of the victim, it may be an unreliable tool in accessing the perspective of the perpetrator (Merrell et al., 2006). According to Björkqvist and colleagues (1992), self report strategies are unreliable in evaluating indirect aggression because individuals may be unlikely to admit or may be unaware that they are perpetrating aggressive acts.

The Social Experience Questionnaire (SEQ; Crick & Grotpeter, 1996) is 15-item scale designed to measure children's perceptions of overt aggression, relational aggression, and prosocial behaviors. In Crick & Grotpeter (1996), children were asked to rate how often they experience such behaviors from their peers on a scale from one (never) to five (all the time). Relational aggression items on the SEQ scale include questions such as "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?" and "How often does another kid say they won't like you unless you do what they want you to do?" (Paquette & Underwood, 1999, p.250).

Paquette and Underwood (1999) later adapted the SEQ and developed the Revised Social Experience Questionnaire (RSEQ) in a study of 76 seventh and eighth grade students. Paquette and Underwood (1999) included two additional items, "How often does another kid make mean faces at you to hurt your feelings?" and "How often

does another kid roll their eyes or snub their nose at you?” (p. 250). They also developed the Social and Physical Aggression Personal Experience Interview, which combined quantitative and qualitative techniques. The semistructured interview included 25 open ended questions, as well as 26 questions in which students could respond using a five point Likert scale. Participants were asked about their own experiences of being victimized by socially and physically aggressive peers. With regard to gender differences, Paquette and Underwood (1999) found that girls were more likely to be able to report a personal experience of social aggression victimization, were more likely to approach their perpetrator after being harmed, and discussed social aggression more frequently with peers and adults; however, no gender differences were found in rates of experiencing social aggression.

Peer and Sociometric Measures

Peer reports and sociometric assessments rely on students within particular social networks to obtain information regarding social standing, friendships, and popularity (Merrell et al., 2006). Students may nominate, rate, or rank peers through sociometric assessments (Merrell et al., 2006). Björkqvist (2001) emphasizes the difference between peer nominations, commonly used in social aggression studies, and peer estimations, preferred by many researchers in favor of the term indirect aggression. Through peer nominations, students are often provided with various statements and may name classmates who best fit each description. Through peer estimations, students are asked to rate to what extent their classmates engage in indirectly aggressive behaviors, often on a

Likert-type scale. According to Björkqvist (2001), peer estimation techniques are more sensitive in picking up on indirect aggression within peer networks.

Sociometric techniques are valuable in many ways. Because social aggression is challenging for teachers, counselors, and researchers to directly observe, peers may be the best source for examining social aggression in the natural setting (Merrell et al., 2006). In addition, relying on reports from many members of a peer network, as opposed to only one individual, increases the reliability of the ratings. Conversely, there are many downsides to using peer report measures. Informants' age may negatively impact the reliability of peer assessments, especially for younger samples (McNeilly-Choque et al., 1996). Also, peer reports of social aggression within social networks may be influenced by gender role stereotypes. Similarly, students may evaluate peers based on their reputation, rather than their actual behaviors (McNeilly-Choque et al., 1996). Finally, given the difficulty of obtaining informed consent, it may be extremely challenging to attain reports from every member of a peer network (Merrell et al., 2006).

The Direct and Indirect Aggression Scale (DIAS; Björkqvist et al., 1992) may be the most popular instrument for studies using peer reports to determine indirect, relational, and social aggression. Björkqvist and colleagues (1992) evaluated 8, 11, and 15 year old Finnish students, asking them what each student in their particular class does when he or she is angry with a peer. Results indicated gender differences only among the 11 and 15 year old groups, with higher rates among female students. With regard to age differences, indirect aggression was most prevalent among the 11 year old students (Björkqvist et al., 1992).

Owens (1996) used a modified DIAS, examining second, sixth, ninth, and eleventh grade Australian students. Participants were asked to rate how often boys and girls overall perpetrated different subtypes of aggression. Similar to Björkqvist and colleagues' (1992) findings, no gender differences were reported for indirect aggression among elementary school students; however, high school girls engaged in indirect aggression at higher rates than their male peers (Owens, 1996).

The peer nomination instrument developed by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) has also been widely used among researchers preferring the term relational aggression. In a study of 491 third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students from the Midwestern United States, the 19 item peer nomination instrument was used to examine social adjustment constructs. The instrument consisted of a peer sociometric, as well as relational aggression, overt aggression, prosocial behavior, and isolation subscales (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

The relational aggression subscale, originally contained five items that describe acts in which one threatens to harm another's social relationships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). One item, "Tells mean lies or rumors about a person to make other kids not like the person" (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995, p. 715) was removed because it loaded on both relational and overt aggression in the factor analysis. The remaining items included "when mad, gets even by keeping the person from being in their group of friends", "tells friends they will stop liking them unless friends do what they say", "when mad at a person, ignores them or stops talking to them", and "tries to keep certain people from being in their group during activity or play time" (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995, p. 713).

Children were asked to select a maximum of three peers for each item, while students were asked to nominate peers whom they liked and disliked for the two item peer sociometric (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Each child was then assigned a score based on the number of nominations they received for each item. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) found that relational aggression is a related, yet separate construct from overt aggression. Although relatively equal numbers of boys and girls were found to be aggressive (either overtly or relationally), 17.4% of the girls and only 2.0% of the boys were deemed relationally aggressive (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

The vast majority of relational aggression studies have relied on Crick and Grotpeter's (1995) peer nomination instrument; however, not all studies have produced similar findings (Underwood, 2003). For the most part, Crick and her colleagues have found higher rates of relational aggression among girls across studies, while other researchers relying on the same peer nomination instruments have found no differences (Phillipsen, Deptula, & Cohen, 1999; Fys & Bear, 1997, as cited in Underwood, 2003) or even higher rates among boys (David & Kistner, 2000; Henington, Hughes, Cavell, & Thompson, 1998; Tomada & Schneider, 1997, as cited in Underwood, 2003).

More recently, Coyne, Archer, and Eslea (2006) used the Indirect/Social/Relational Aggression Scale (ISRA) in a study of 422 adolescents ranging from 11 to 15 years of age. The scale includes items from popular peer report measures including the Direct and Indirect Aggression Scale (Björkqvist et al., 1992), the peer nomination instrument developed by Crick and Grotpeter (1995), as well as self report measures such as the Social Experience Questionnaire (Crick and Grotpeter, 1996), and

the Revised Social Experience Questionnaire (Galen and Underwood, 1997). For the peer report measures, participants were instructed to “Think about all the other members your year and the way they treated each other in the past week. Now circle the number of times that you either heard about or watched the following behaviors taking place in the past week” (Coyne et al., 2006, p. 297). Students were asked to respond on a scale ranging from zero to five times. For the self report measures, students were asked to rate on a Likert scale from one to four how hurtful they felt particular aggressive acts were (Coyne et al., 2006).

Results suggest that girls are more likely to view indirect as well as direct relational aggressive behaviors as more damaging than boys; however, no gender differences were found in perceptions of social aggression (Coyne et al., 2006). In addition, girls were more likely to report experiencing gossiping, while boys were more likely to report teasing to humiliate others. The most commonly reported indirectly aggressive behavior was “gossiping”; however, the behavior was rated as the least hurtful. “Breaking confidence” was rated as the most hurtful item for indirect aggression. The most frequently reported direct relationally aggressive behavior, “Making fun of someone to make them look stupid in front of the group. Finally, the most commonly socially aggressive behavior was “giving someone a dirty look” which was also rated as the most hurtful item for social aggression.

Teacher Report Measures

Teachers as well as other school faculty members can be an effective tool for measuring social aggression for several reasons. First, teachers interact directly with students on a daily basis (Merrell et al., 2006). Second, teacher reports are convenient, cost effective, and efficient for studies in the school setting. Third, teachers are largely considered one of the best resources for assessing students' social conduct (Merrell et al., 2006). With regards to school counseling, teachers may also serve as an effective and easily accessible resource for evaluating and managing incidents of social aggression within the school setting.

However, teacher report measures present several issues. Many socially aggressive behaviors cannot be directly viewed by teachers (Merrell et al., 2006). With the emerging "cyber bullying" phenomenon students may use "technologies such as e-mails, cell phones, or text messaging with the intent of causing harm to others" (Chibbaro, 2007, p. 65), making it increasingly difficult for school faculty to monitor social aggression among students. Similar to peers, teachers may be influenced by gender role stereotypes and students' reputations (Merrell et al., 2006). In addition, the response choices on teacher report scales may be restricted and biased (McNeilly-Choque et al., 1996). Lastly, teachers and peers may hold very different perceptions of socially aggressive perpetrators and their victims (McNeilly-Choque et al., 1996).

The Children's Social Behavior Scale- Teacher Form (CSBS-T) was designed by Crick (1996) for teachers to examine relational aggression, overt aggression, and prosocial behaviors among 245 third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students. The scale's

15 items were developed to correspond with the previously used peer nomination instrument (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995), which was also used in Crick (1996). The seven relational aggression items in the CSBS-T include statements such as “When this child is mad at a peer, she or he gets even by excluding the peer from his or her clique or peer group” and “This child threatens to stop being a peer’s friend to hurt the peer to get what she or he wants from the peer” (Crick, 1996, p. 2321).

Results indicate that teacher and peer reports were significantly associated with one another for relational and overt aggression, even more so than for prosocial behavior and peer status (Crick, 1996). In addition, both peers and teachers reported higher rates of relational aggression among third through sixth grade girls (Crick, 1996). Murray-Close & Crick (2007) also used the CSBS-T to examine 77 fifth grade students and found that teachers reported no gender differences in relationally aggressive behaviors. Overall, studies of social aggression have shown somewhat conflicting results with regard to associations between peer and teacher report measures.

Quantitative Research: Conclusions

Quantitative research on social aggression relies primarily on self, peer, and teacher reports. Self reports are useful to capture the true perceptions of social aggression victims. Although some self report measures indicate no gender differences in experiencing social aggression, girls may be more focused on the issue in their daily conversations with peers. Peer reports are beneficial in evaluating an entire peer network, which increases the reliability of the findings. Interestingly, one of the most

popular peer nomination instruments has yielded very different findings regarding gender differences in experiencing social aggression. Some studies using this instrument suggest higher rates among girls, some studies show no gender differences, and others show higher rates among boys. Overall, the conflicting findings surrounding gender differences in social aggression suggest that the issue may be prevalent among both male and female students.

Chapter 3 Developmental Trends and Gender Differences in Social Aggression

Amazingly, children as young as three years old have demonstrated socially aggressive behaviors (Crick et al., 1999). Crick and colleagues (1999) examined 129 preschool children ranging from three to five years of age, relying on teacher reports of both physical and social aggression. Social aggression was rated by the degree to which children both perpetrated and experienced exclusionary behaviors in the classroom. For example, teachers were asked to rate how true statements such as “This child gets left out of the group when someone is mad at them or wants to get back at them” (Crick et al., 1999, p. 379) for each student.

Although the majority of children were victims of physical aggression (53%), 34% of the preschoolers were victims of social aggression and 13% were victims of both forms of aggression (Crick et al., 1999). While boys experienced higher rates of physical victimization, girls were more likely to be targets of social aggression. Although this study suggests that young children are able to engage in exclusionary behaviors, social aggression becomes more complicated and covert in middle childhood and adolescence (e.g., spreading rumors to conceal the identity of the perpetrator; Yoon, Barton, & Taiariol, 2004).

After reading stories of both overt and social aggression to 99 preschool children, Goldstein, Tisak, and Boxer (2002) interviewed participants about their perceptions of such acts. Although students perceived boys as more likely to threaten classmates’ social

relationships, such behaviors were viewed as more acceptable for boys than for girls by both genders (Goldstein et al., 2002). Similarly, Henington and colleagues (1998) found that second and third grade students were more likely to rate boys as more socially and physically aggressive compared to girls.

Shifting later into childhood, Murray-Close, Ostrov, and Crick (2007) used Crick and Grotpeter's (1995) peer nomination instrument to examine 385 children at three time points between the fall of their fourth and fifth grade years. While both male and female students showed a linear increase in revengeful, manipulative, and exclusionary aggression over time, girls showed higher rates at the first assessment as well as a higher rate of increase across all three assessments. The findings indicating higher rates of social aggression among girls are consistent with the findings of other studies conducted by Crick and colleagues examining such behaviors in early childhood (Crick et al., 1999) and preadolescence (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick & Nelson, 2002).

Crick and colleagues (1996) examined perceptions of social aggression, asking third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students, "What do most boys do when they are mad at someone?" and "What do most girls do when they are mad at someone?" (p. 1005). Responses indicating exclusionary behaviors or rumor spreading were coded as socially aggressive behaviors. Crick and colleagues (1996) found that girls rated socially aggressive behaviors as more normative than girls in each preceding grade, suggesting an increased prevalence and acceptance of social aggression among girls over time.

Cairns and colleagues' (1989) longitudinal study suggests that social exclusion is more prevalent in early adolescence than in childhood. In grade four, only 10% of

conflicts among girls included socially manipulative behaviors, while such acts dominated nearly one-third of female conflicts by grade seven. In contrast to studies showing higher rates of social aggression among boys in preschool aged children (Goldstein et al., 2002; Henington et al., 1998), as well as those suggesting a greater prevalence among girls in middle childhood (Murray-Close et al., 2007), Ellis and Zaratany (2007) found no significant age differences in a study of fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. The study examined 665 students attending schools in and nearby a medium-sized Canadian city. After measuring social aggression through peer nominations of exclusionary behaviors, Ellis and Zaratany (2007) found no differences across the grades.

Studies of social aggression comparing middle and high school students largely indicate a higher prevalence of social aggression among middle school students. Goldstein and colleagues (2008) examined 1,335 adolescents in grades seven through twelve in a Detroit public school system. Students provided self report measures of their experiences as social and overt aggression targets and witnesses. Social victimization was measured by asking participants how many times in the past month a peer had lied to, excluded, or gossiped about them. Overt aggression was measured by asking students questions about their experiences of physical aggression (e.g., being hit by a peer) and verbal aggression (e.g., receiving threats of bodily harm). Goldstein and colleagues (2008) found that middle school girls experienced higher rates of both overt and social aggression than high school girls.

In a large longitudinal study of 5,151 adolescents, Karriker-Jaffe and colleagues (2008) followed sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students through their eighth, ninth, and tenth grade years. It is important to note the rarity of the study in that it examined students in three rural counties of North Carolina, which had higher rates of African American students than the national average. Karriker-Jaffe and colleagues (2008) examined the developmental trajectories of both physical and social aggression for males and females from ages 11 through 18. Social aggression was measured using the social aggression scale (Farrell, Kung, White, & Valois, 2000, as cited in Karriker-Jaffe et al., 2008). The scale asked students “how many times in the past 3 months [he or she] had excluded another student from his or her group of friends, spread a false rumor about someone, picked on someone, and started a fight between other people” (Karriker-Jaffe et al., 2008, p. 1230). This study is also unique in that it relied on self-report measures from the perspective of the perpetrator, rather than from the victim’s standpoint.

The social aggression trajectories for both males and females followed a curvilinear growth curve, with social aggression gradually increasing, peaking around age 14, and decreasing at a relatively rapid rate through age 18 (Karriker-Jaffe et al., 2008). While both males and females engaged in similar levels of social aggression at every age examined, boys consistently perpetrated higher levels of physical aggression over time. Overall, the findings of Karriker-Jaffe and colleagues (2008) suggest that boys and girls follow similar developmental patterns of social aggression throughout their secondary schooling, with the highest rates occurring in the middle school setting.

Mayeux and Cillessen (2008) focused on high school students ranging from grade 9 through 12 in a lower to lower middle class school district. Using a peer sociometric, students identified socially aggressive classmates based on whether he or she “ignores others when mad at them” (Mayeux & Cillessen, 2008, p. 877). Although males overall began high school with lower levels of social aggression, their rates progressively increased to match the rates of their female counterparts by grade 12. Interestingly, rates of social aggression among females remained relatively stable throughout high school, showing only a slight decrease across the grades (Mayeux & Cillessen, 2008).

Students’ perceptions of peer approval seemed to play a role in their rates of social aggression over time (Mayeux & Cillessen, 2008). Boys who believed they were liked by peers but were actually disliked showed the greatest increase in social aggression throughout high school, while those who were actually liked by peers showed only slight increases regardless of their perceptions of acceptance. In addition, girls who believed they were disliked but were actually liked by peers showed greater decreases in social aggression than girls who believe they were liked, regardless of their true peer acceptance (Mayeux & Cillessen, 2008). Perhaps self-perceptions of peer-disapproval are negatively related to social aggression over time.

Conclusions

Overall, current research on social aggression suggests such behaviors are most prevalent during middle school. While some studies indicate higher rates of social aggression among boys during early childhood, others show that children may perceive

such behaviors as more acceptable for males at this developmental stage. In addition, some studies suggest higher rates among girls in middle childhood. Interestingly, research also indicates that students, particularly girls, may view social aggression as increasingly normative during the transition into middle school.

Some findings suggest that adolescent girls peak in rates of social aggression earlier than boys, perhaps because females develop the social skills required to conduct more sophisticated forms of social manipulation earlier than their male peers. It also appears that males may “catch up” to females in rates of social aggression by the end of high school. Although one study in a rural setting indicated equal rates of social aggression for boys and girls throughout adolescence, rural environments may be less accepting of all forms of aggression among girls. Consequently, social norms may serve as a buffer for engaging in such behaviors within rural communities.

Chapter 4 Antecedents and Consequences of Social Aggression

Antecedents for Perpetrators

Without question, an understanding of what causes individuals to engage in socially aggressive behaviors is needed to implement effective prevention strategies. Unfortunately, cross-sectional studies can only indicate associations between social aggression and other characteristics; however, it is likely that there is a reciprocal relationship between social aggression and many factors. Longitudinal data may best identify the underlying antecedents of social aggression perpetration needed for prevention programs.

Social Factors

For many perpetrators, popularity and social aggression go hand in hand. While aggressive behavior and high social standing appear to be correlated, this association typically exists for students who are perceived as popular, rather than those who are sociometrically popular (Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998). In a study of 727 seventh and eighth grade students, Parkhurst and Hopmeyer (1998) categorized adolescents with the highest numbers of “like most” peer nominations (after subtracting “like least” nominations) as sociometrically popular. Students who were nominated as being popular at school were considered to have perceived popularity.

Interestingly, of the 11% of students high on perceived popularity, most were not well liked by other students (Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998). In addition, they were often perceived as domineering, aggressive, and snobbish. In contrast, students high on sociometric popularity were generally considered to be friendly and trustworthy. It is important to note, however, that 31% percent of students with high perceived popularity ratings were also considered to be sociometrically popular, suggesting that not all students deemed popular by their peers may be disliked or socially aggressive (Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998).

In a longitudinal study of high school students, Mayeux and Cillessen (2008) also found associations between popularity and social aggression. The study relied on peer nominations to determine perceived popularity, sociometric popularity, and social aggression. One item was used to classify socially aggressive students, “ignores others when mad at them” (Mayeux & Cillessen, 2008, p. 877). Self-report measures were also used to examine students’ own perceptions of their popularity, which appeared to moderate the relationship between perceived popularity by peers and social aggression perpetration. Girls who scored high on both self and peer perceived popularity showed the greatest increases in social aggression over time. The finding suggests that students with advanced social skills and, who are aware of their abilities, may be best equipped to engage in socially manipulative behaviors (Mayeux & Cillessen, 2008).

According to Merrell and colleagues (2006), a certain level of perceived popularity may be essential in effectively perpetrating socially aggressive behaviors. Returning to Eder’s (1985) cycle of popularity, students may use social aggression to maintain their social status. Also, girls may view social aggression as a way to protect

their friendships (Underwood, 2003). Although it is difficult to prove causality, the relationship between popularity and social aggression is likely reciprocal.

Grotmeter and Crick (1996) examined 315 12 year old students and found that students deemed manipulative and revengeful by their peers reported higher rates of exclusivity in their relationships compared to their nonaggressive classmates. Interestingly, adolescents identified as social aggression perpetrators reported higher levels of friendship intimacy than their non-aggressive peers (Grotmeter and Crick, 1996). According to Owens, Shute, and Slee (2000a), students may even view social aggression as a normal process that occurs within friendships.

According to Sutton and Smith (1999), social aggression may be most commonly perpetrated by students with advanced social cognition abilities. While popularity may moderate the relationship between advanced social skills and social aggression, social intelligence and a lack of empathy may also be directly related to social aggression (Björkqvist & Österman, 2000). Socially intelligent individuals are aware, analytical, and skilled in initiating strategic behaviors within a social context (Björkqvist & Österman, 2000). When faced with conflict, such individuals may use their advanced abilities to react in an either peaceful or aggressive manner. Empathy, or the ability to feel perceived emotions of others, is typically recognized as a characteristic of social intelligence. In the instance of socially aggressive individuals, Björkqvist and Österman (2000) suggest that although they may possess high levels of social intelligence, such individuals may lack the ability to empathize with others.

Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors

Several mental health issues have also been found to be associated with engaging in socially aggressive behaviors. For example, teacher reports utilized by Murray-Close and Crick (2007) suggest that students with high levels of anxiety and depression are more likely to engage in socially aggressive behaviors such as rumor spreading and gossiping. This finding is consistent with earlier research of teacher reported anxiety and depression among social aggression perpetrators (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996). In a study of 300 college students, Loudin, Loukas, and Robinson (2003) found that participants reporting high levels of social anxiety were more likely to engage in gossiping as well as revengeful, exclusionary, and manipulative behaviors. Although oftentimes difficult to detect, addressing students' internalizing behaviors may be a key component in preventing social aggression.

Externalizing behaviors also appear to be associated with engaging in socially aggressive acts. In a cross-sectional study of 185 urban, predominantly African American seventh grade students, Williams, Fredland, Han, Campbell, and Kub (2009) examined the relationship between social aggression and externalizing behaviors. Using peer reports, nearly 17% of participants were classified as perpetrators who ridiculed, isolated, and spread rumors about their classmates (Williams et al., 2009). The prevalence of social aggression was slightly higher among this urban minority sample than in studies examining predominately Caucasian participants (Crick et al., 1996; Crick & Grotmeter, 1995; Henington et al., 1998).

The self identified perpetrators examined by Williams and colleagues (2009) reported experiencing higher rates of externalizing behaviors than nonperpetrators. Interestingly, perpetrators who were also victims of social aggression showed nearly the same level of externalizing behaviors as nonvictimized perpetrators; however, victimized nonperpetrators showed much higher rates of externalizing behaviors than students who neither engaged in nor experienced social aggression (Williams et al., 2009). The findings also suggest a reciprocal relationship between social aggression perpetration and victimization, particularly among female students (Williams et al., 2009).

Family and Community Influences

Parents also appear to be a critical factor in predicting socially aggressive behaviors among children at an early age. Patterson, Crosby, and Vuchinich (1992) suggest coercive parenting may lead to coercive behavior in children, and coercive behavior in children may also elicit coercive parenting. In a study of preschool aged children, Hart, Nelson, Robinson, Olsen, and McNeilly-Choque (1998) found that parental modeling of aggressive behaviors may influence children's belief that social conflicts can successfully be settled through such behaviors.

According to Merrell and colleagues (2006), youth residing in households in which they receive inadequate nutrition, medical attention, and other basic necessities may possess parents who are overwhelmed by stressors. In result, a lack of positive parenting may influence children's abilities to appropriately resolve conflict (Merrell et

al., 2006). Students with low socioeconomic backgrounds may be at an elevated risk for engaging in socially aggressive behaviors (Merrell et al., 2006).

While studies of urban students such as Williams and colleagues (2009) tend to show elevated rates of social aggression, residing in a rural area may serve as a buffer for engaging in such behaviors. The lack of gender differences found in Karriker-Jaffe and colleagues (2008) suggest that girls in rural areas may be particularly sensitive to social norms that stigmatize aggressive behavior among females. Certainly, tolerance of social aggression may differ across geographic locations.

Biological Influences

Despite countless environmental influences, biological factors may indirectly influence students' rates of social aggression. Social difficulties may result from biological learning conditions such as ADHD (Merrell et al., 2006). For example, a student with ADHD may become frustrated while learning and interacting with peers in the classroom, and in result act out aggressively. Murray-Close and Crick (2007) studied 77 fifth grade students' blood pressure and heart rate levels after discussing stressful social situations. Rates of social aggression among students were evaluated using the previously described Children's Social Behavior Scale- Teacher Report (Crick, 1996). Although no gender differences were found in rates of social aggression, an association between systolic blood pressure reactivity and social aggression was found for girls only (Murray-Close & Crick, 2007). This finding suggests that girls with elevated

cardiovascular reactivity may be more likely to respond aggressively when provoked (Murray-Close & Crick, 2007).

Consequences for Perpetrators

Although many school faculty members may view social aggression as a normative part of development, a variety of negative outcomes appear to be associated with perpetrating social aggression (Yoon et al., 2004). Not surprisingly, Crick and Grotpeter (1995) found that perpetrators were much more disliked by peers than nonaggressive students. In addition, social aggression has been found to be associated with mental health issues such as depression and social consequences such as rejection and isolation (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

In a three year longitudinal study of 1,942 adolescents from Washington State, Herrenkohl, Catalano, Hemphill, and Toumbourou (2009) examined consequences of engaging in gossip and revengeful behaviors. After using self report measures, findings suggest that engaging in social aggression may increase one's likelihood of perpetrating physical aggression over time. Students who were identified as socially aggressive in seventh grade were 2.86 times more likely to engage in binge drinking and 2.44 times more likely to use tobacco by ninth grade (Herrenkohl et al., 2009). Perhaps partaking in social aggression serves as a slippery slope for additional issues later in adolescence.

Although social aggression among peers has been found to be associated with high rates of friendship intimacy (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996), manipulative and revengeful

behaviors within romantic relationships have been found to be a predictor of aggravation, distrust, and jealousy among couples (Linder et al., 2002).

Conclusions: Perpetrator Characteristics and Outcomes

Studies suggest many predictors of social aggression perpetration among adolescents. Students with high levels of perceived popularity, extremely intimate friendships, advanced social skills, a lack of empathy, elevated levels of anxiety and depression, externalizing behavioral problems, coercive parents, learning and behavioral issues, and those residing in low-income, urban areas may be more likely to engage in socially aggressive behaviors. In addition, social aggression perpetrators may face negative outcomes such as peer rejection and isolation as a result of their behavior. Unfortunately, such consequences likely perpetuate further socially aggressive behaviors among perpetrators.

Antecedents for Victims

Research suggests that there are distinct differences among social aggression victims. Owens and colleagues (2000b) interviewed 15 year old Australian females and identified two categories of girls who had fallen victim to exclusion and gossip. First, several victims had engaged in some sort of undesirable behavior to elicit conflict, thus provoking peers to respond aggressively. Second, other victims were simply vulnerable to social aggression through no “fault” of their own. For example, girls in this group

tended to possess different characteristics and interests than their peers, were new to their school, or interacted with few or no friends (Owens et al., 2000b).

Similarly, Pronk and Zimmer-Gembeck (2009) identified both positive and negative common characteristics of adolescents who had been ridiculed, excluded, isolated, and gossiped about by their peers. When interviewed, some students identified victims as being too emotional, physically and socially unattractive, uninteresting, and not athletic. Other victims were described as being high achieving in academics, athletics, art, or music, as well as physically attractive, or financially well-off. Perpetrators may perceive victims with less desirable attributes as “easy targets” if they are vulnerable and highly reactive to acts of social aggression (Pronk & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2009). In addition, perpetrators may also be jealous and socially threatened by those with positive characteristics (Pronk & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2009).

Along the same lines as Owens and colleagues’ (2000b) victims that provoked perpetrators, as well as Pronk and Zimmer-Gembeck’s (2009) targets with undesirable attributes, the findings of Crick and colleagues (1999) suggest that students with a low number of friends or those desiring extremely high levels of intimacy may be especially vulnerable to social aggression attacks. This suggests that new students or adolescents with limited social support may need the most assistance with regards to handling social aggression conflicts.

Consequences for Victims

Without question, victimization can result in many negative consequences both immediately and later in life (Crick et al., 1999). Owens and colleagues (2000b) identified three main stages that many social aggression victims experience. First, victims respond to initial acts of social aggression with confusion. In result, many students may attempt to conceal early conflicts from others. Second, as the reality of social aggression sets in, many victims experience psychological distress, a loss of self-esteem, and anxiety from being repeatedly victimized. Third, in instances of extreme or long-term victimization, many students may desire an escape from their situation via leaving school or even through suicide (Owens et al., 2000b).

Internalizing behaviors may be the most common outcome of social aggression victimization. After interviewing 26 seventh grade girls and evaluating social aggression victimization through the Social Experience Questionnaire (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996), Casey-Cannon, Hayward, and Gowen (2001) identified internalizing behaviors as a prevalent outcome for victims. Many participants reported feeling sad, angry, and hurt after experiencing victimization. Being manipulated and excluded by their peers seemed to have a significant influence on the way in which victims perceived themselves. This occurred most frequently when victims were tormented over uncontrollable characteristics (i.e., race), aspects of themselves they already disliked, and personal attributes that were false (i.e., being called “fat” despite having a healthy body weight). For example, one participant reported:

I've gotten in fights with girls, like verbal fights, where names were called and things were thrown at you... Like, if there were new kids that had

come into the group, if they'd find something they didn't like about them, they would pick on them with that specifically... If they found something that made that person insecure, they would focus on that. Find the weak spot, then just pick at it. Constantly. Until they broke that person down and the person would leave" (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001, p. 142).

It is important to note that not all victims of social aggression experience negative outcomes (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001), perhaps due to pre-existing high levels self-esteem.

Despite a greater amount of social victimization research among girls, boys may also experience negative outcomes after being targets of social aggression. Crick and Nelson (2002) examined gender differences in victim outcomes. Both male and female victims seemed to become psychologically distressed and exhibited externalizing problems; however, male victims were more likely to feel lonely, while female victims were more likely to feel stressed and avoid social interactions following victimization. In addition, victimization may be particularly troublesome for girls when initiated by a close companion (Crick & Nelson, 2002). Interestingly, Crick and Nelson (2002) suggest that many children maintain friendships with their perpetrators, potentially minimizing the social support students may otherwise receive from healthy friendships. While both boys and girls may experience negative outcomes of social aggression, the consequences may be especially harmful for girls. Paquette and Underwood (1999) found that adolescent girls thought about social aggression more frequently and were more negatively affected by victimization with regards to self-concept.

In terms of externalizing behaviors, Casey-Cannon and colleagues (2001) found that some victims utilized retaliation as a means to resolve social aggression conflicts, despite the fact that many recognized that this strategy was inapt and unproductive.

Unfortunately, seeking an adult for help was uncommonly cited as a way for coping with social aggression.

Social aggression victimization may have a particularly negative impact on students' perceptions of the school environment. According to Goldstein and colleagues (2008), victimization may result in students feeling less safe while at school. Even simply witnessing social aggression among peers may be associated with feeling insecure in the school environment. In addition, Goldstein and colleagues (2008) found that students may feel less positive about their social interactions within the school setting after falling victim to social aggression.

Conclusions: Victim Characteristics and Outcomes

Studies suggest two primary types of victims: some victims engage in some sort of undesirable behavior to provoke perpetrators; other victims possess unique characteristics, either desirable or undesirable, that set them apart from other students but that do not necessarily provoke perpetrators. Unfortunately, victims of social aggression may face negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, a loss of self-esteem, especially among girls, suicidal thoughts, and increasingly negative perceptions of the school environment. Fortunately, pre-existing high levels of self-confidence may serve as a protective factor against negative outcomes caused by social aggression victimization.

Chapter 5 Interventions targeting Social Aggression

There are very few intervention programs that exclusively target the issue of social aggression among adolescents (Yoon et al., 2004). Currently, many schools rely on broad anti-bullying programs in an attempt to reduce the prevalence of social aggression, among other goals. Although anti-bullying programs have increased in popularity, empirical evaluation of the efficacy of such prevention and intervention strategies is limited (Merrell & Isava, 2008). In addition, many of the current programs are designed for elementary, rather than secondary school students.

Merrell and Isava (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 16 studies from 1980 through 2004, which all evaluated the effectiveness of various anti-bullying school based programs. Collectively, the studies included 15,386 student participants ranging from Kindergarten through grade 12. Some studies also included teacher reports of bullying behaviors before and after program implementation. Merrell and Isava (2008) used 28 different measures to evaluate student outcomes following participation in anti-bullying programs. For example, self reports of engaging in bullying behaviors, experiencing bullying from peers, and witnessing acts of bullying were evaluated. In addition, teacher reports of social competence as well as internalizing and externalizing behaviors were examined. Cohen's (1998) minimum criteria of a .20 effect size was used to determine the clinical significance of each outcome measure (as cited in Merrell & Isava 2008).

Of the 107 effect sizes found in Merrell and Isava (2008), 39 were deemed significantly positive, eight were classified as significantly negative, and 60 were

considered insignificant. Overall, the findings of Merrell and Isava (2008) suggest that anti-bullying school based programs may produce improvements in many behaviors closely related to the issue of social aggression: for example, these programs may increase students' social abilities, self-confidence, and peer-approval; and they may improve teachers' understanding of efficient practices and interventions and ability to appropriately respond to bullying in the classroom. Although less commonly found across studies, such programs may also reduce the prevalence of bullying among students (Merrell & Isava, 2008). While there is a need for research to develop more effective programs that directly reduce bullying and social aggression among adolescents, school counselors should continue to use such prevention and intervention strategies given their positive, although somewhat weak, impact on related outcomes.

Research on the Second Step program for middle school and junior high school students illustrates these issues. The Second Step program aims to increase prosocial skills and decrease acceptance of physical, verbal, and social aggression among adolescents (Van Schoiack-Edstrom, Frey, & Beland, 2002). In the Second Step program, teachers are trained to implement lessons explaining key concepts of peer conflict through films of vignettes, current event articles, and class discussion. In addition, the program contains activities for parents to promote prosocial behavior in their children on a daily basis (Van Schoiack-Edstrom et al., 2002).

Van Schoiack-Edstrom and colleagues (2002) evaluated the effectiveness of the Second Step program among 714 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade middle and junior high school students residing in the United States and Canada. The sample was ethnically diverse, consisting of schools ranging from 4% to 89% Caucasian. In addition, the

percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunches across schools ranged from 0% to 83%. The sample was divided into intervention classrooms, which implemented the Second Step curriculum, and control classrooms, which did not. Both groups were similar with regards to ethnic diversity and household income. Intervention and control classrooms were evaluated prior to receiving the program as well as following the completion of the program (Van Schoiack-Edstrom et al., 2002).

Students were evaluated on their endorsement of physical, verbal, and social aggression, which was characterized by exclusionary behaviors (Van Schoiack-Edstrom et al., 2002). For example, for endorsement of social aggression, students were asked to rate on a four-point Likert scale the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements such as “If you’re really angry at someone, it’s okay to stop talking to them” (Van Schoiack-Edstrom et al., 2002, p. 206). Perceived social challenges were similarly evaluated through statements such as “When someone says or does something to you, how easy is it to keep your anger under control?” (Van Schoiack-Edstrom et al., 2002, p. 207).

Overall, the control classrooms examined in Van Schoiack-Edstrom and colleagues (2002) exhibited a significant increase in endorsement of social aggression, while the intervention classrooms did not. In addition, intervention classroom students rated positive social skills as easier to exercise than control classroom students. Finally, intervention classrooms receiving the Second Step program lessons at higher frequencies exhibited significant decreases in endorsement of social aggression over time compared to those receiving less concentrated lessons (Van Schoiack-Edstrom et al., 2002).

Overall, these results suggest that the Second Step program improved students’ perceived

social skills and norms regarding social aggression, but there was no direct evidence that rates of social aggression in the intervention classrooms actually decreased.

Rather than implementing a free-standing bullying prevention program, many schools attempt to integrate anti-bullying strategies within already established classroom curricula. For example, Hillsberg and Spak (2006) discuss the way in which one middle school in Northbrook, Illinois, Wood Oaks Junior High School, addressed the issue of bullying within its educational curricula. Sixth, seventh, and eighth grade classes were assigned different pieces of anti-bullying literature based on their developmental abilities. For example, seventh grade students were asked to read *Shortcut* (Werlin, 2001), which describes the way in which a group of victims gain self-esteem and control while forming an alliance to protect themselves against bullies (as cited in Hillsberg & Spak, 2006). The goals of the program are to comfort and alleviate isolation for victims, increase empathy among perpetrators, and increase awareness among passive witnesses (Hillsberg & Spak, 2006).

In addition to the assigned literature, Wood Oaks Junior High School also hosted several anti-bullying events for students, teachers, and parents, which included guest speakers such as Jodee Blanco, a victim of bullying and author of *Please Stop Laughing at me* (Blanco, 2003, as cited in Hillsberg & Spak, 2006). Finally, Wood Oaks implemented an anti-bullying code to be physically displayed and enforced in each classroom. The code states:

You have the right to be treated with respect, kindness, and trust. You have the right to be accepted and included in the Wood Oaks community. You have the right to say no when you are not comfortable with a situation. You have the right not to have your physical space violated. You have the right to know that your personal property will not be

damaged or taken by your peers. We solve problems by stopping, thinking, and discussing our actions (Hillsberg & Spak, 2006, p. 28).

A major limitation of this strategy of combining anti-bullying programs with existing educational curricula is the absence of rigorous empirical evaluations. Currently, there is no evidence that such approaches reduce rates of bullying or social aggression.

Nonetheless, this approach may be considered by school counselors and teachers experiencing difficulty finding additional time for universal anti-bullying intervention programs.

Conclusions

Overall current anti-bullying programs should be expanded and further evaluated to more effectively decrease the prevalence of social aggression; however, school counselors should carefully consider using empirically proven programs as they are one of the few formal options currently available in the school setting. Such programs have been shown to increase social abilities, self-confidence, peer-approval, and teachers' understanding of how to effectively manage social aggression conflicts in the classroom. In addition, although less widespread across programs, some designs have been shown to decrease the prevalence of bullying. In an empirical study of one anti-bullying program, the Second Step, students reported that they were less likely to endorse social aggression after completing the program, suggesting that similar interventions may be worth implementing.

Chapter 6 Implications for School Counselors

After becoming knowledgeable with empirical findings on social aggression among adolescents and anti-bullying programs, secondary school counselors should consider several factors before implementing interventions or social support services. The timing and spectrum of prevention and intervention programs may be crucial in effectively reducing the prevalence of social aggression conflicts. In addition, counselors should find ways to increase knowledge of other school faculty members, involve parents in decreasing instances of social aggression, and minimize risk factors for social aggression perpetration and victimization, while still maintaining autonomy among students.

Implications for Implementing Future Programs

Timing of Programs

Because social aggression appears to peak during the middle school years, it may be best to implement prevention programs during the transition out of elementary and into the secondary school setting (Karriker-Jafee et al., 2008; Goldstein et al., 2008). Programs implemented during this transition period may serve as a way for students to learn about positive peer interactions during a time when new social networks are formed. In addition, programs at the start of middle school may also be used as a tool for

students to establish friendships and avoid isolation, thus reducing their likelihood of becoming a victim of social aggression (Crick et al., 1999).

Spectrum of Programs

According to Merrell and colleagues (2006), narrowly-focused interventions seeking to help only students who have been victimized should be avoided. There is virtually no empirical evidence that such programs increase prosocial behavior and decrease socially aggressive behavior. Similar to current approaches, Merrell and colleagues (2006) also suggest designing programs that share the basic foundation of other successful anti-bullying intervention strategies. Future programs seeking to reduce the prevalence of social aggression should be designed on a broad spectrum and consider the way in which adolescents learn both socially and emotionally (Merrell et al., 2006).

Improving the Knowledge of Skills and School Faculty Members

Based on student interviews conducted by Casey-Cannon and colleagues (2001), adults' lack of awareness and attention to social aggression conflicts may result in an unwillingness and fear of asking for help among adolescent victims. Fortunately, findings also indicate that students may feel comforted and supported by school counselors after experiencing victimization (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001). School faculty members should openly condemn acts of social manipulation, gossiping, and attempts to damage peers' self esteem or social status, similar to the previously mentioned "anti-

bullying code” implemented at Wood Oaks Junior High School (Hillsberg & Spak, 2006). In addition, school policies should explicitly state the sanctions for such acts in both school and classroom rules (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001).

More importantly, faculty members should strictly enforce the consequences put in place for acts of social aggression so that both perpetrators and victims are aware that such behavior is not tolerated in the school setting (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001). When implementing programs that promote support for victims and sanctions for perpetrators of social aggression, consistency in the methods of response may be crucial. Although adult assistance should be equally available to all students, school counselors and other program administrators should never make such services mandatory for adolescents (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001).

Aside from programs targeting adolescents, schools should also consider educational programs to increase knowledge of social aggression among teachers. According to Yoon and colleagues (2004), such programs should aim to educate teachers about the harmful effects of social aggression victimization so that they view such behaviors as equally harmful as physical aggression. In addition, interventions should strive to improve teachers’ abilities to recognize more subtle forms of peer conflicts in the classroom (Yoon et al., 2004). Finally, programs for teachers should clarify any myths they may believe regarding social aggression (Merrell et al., 2006).

Maintaining Autonomy among Students

Returning to the issue of autonomy as a crucial developmental component of adolescence, Goldstein and colleagues (2008) recommend that future programs utilize creative means to encourage students to maintain independence in settling peer conflict. At the same time, programs should discourage the use of socially aggressive behaviors (Goldstein et al., 2008). Perhaps peer mediation programs may be a useful tool in minimizing an often undesired dependence on adult intervention (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001). Such programs may maintain autonomy among adolescents and potentially decrease the severity and harmful outcomes of social aggression conflicts.

Unfortunately, relying on students rather than school faculty members to offer support poses a potential threat to confidentiality, which may lead to additional acts of social aggression (i.e., rumor spreading, gossiping, etc.). According to Yoon and colleagues (2004), victims as well as perpetrators may gain from social support or skill groups through which adolescents learn coping and conflict-resolution strategies. Perhaps peer mediation programs for social aggression conflicts can be expanded to include social skill development.

Parental Involvement

According to Casey-Cannon and colleagues (2001), parents may play a constructive role in preventing social aggression among adolescents. There is some indication that programs which include parents may result in more long-term change than those which do not (Merrell et al., 2006). Parental involvement can take several forms.

First, schools can offer strategies for parents in teaching their children positive response techniques in social aggression conflicts. Second, schools can inform parents of school policies regarding peer issues and how such conflicts will be handled if parents report victimization to school counselors and administrators. Third, schools can encourage parents to join the effort in promoting positive peer interactions among their children and friends. Finally, as cyber-bullying becomes an increasingly prevalent issue among adolescents today, schools may encourage parents to monitor or limit their children's internet and cell phone access to prevent the most concealable acts of social aggression from adults.

Conclusions: Program Implications

Overall, research suggests that because social aggression is most prevalent in the middle school setting, school counselors should implement prevention programs as students transition into secondary schools. Counselors should carefully research empirically proven anti-bullying programs and seek out those which are broad, allow students to maintain an appropriate level of autonomy, and strive to educate adolescents as well as their teachers and parents about the issue of social aggression.

Barriers for School Counselors

According to Goldstein and Tisak (2006), it is common for adolescents to desire autonomy in making decisions regarding issues such as exclusion within peer groups. In

result, school administrators seeking to enforce sanctions for social aggression perpetrators may be met with student opposition (Goldstein & Tisak, 2006). The need for autonomy within peer relationships, which is often exercised through socially aggressive behaviors, should not be taken lightly by counselors. According to Paquette and Underwood (1999), social aggression may be a critical developmental component for adolescents and therefore school counselors should find alternative ways for students to independently gain social acceptance.

Another barrier is that students do not frequently report incidents of social manipulation to adults, especially compared to other forms of aggression (Goldstein, Tisak, Persson, & Boxer, 2006). School counselors offering support to students involved in social aggression conflicts may be met with mixed emotions. According to 18 year old Brooke interviewed in Wiseman (2002):

‘I have had both good and bad experiences with counselors, but for the most part I think they’re contrived. In seventh/eighth grade, going to the counselor with dilemmas was the cool thing to do. I was in there at least three times a week with problems—made up or blown out of proportion or real. It’s good to know there’s someone who will be there for you and make no judgments, but ultimately, finding real people like friends and family who support you unconditionally is far more satisfying’ (p. 311)

Assessing Social Aggression within Schools

Unfortunately, secondary schools currently have minimal access to generic models and packaged programs for school faculty members to use in an effort to reduce the prevalence of social aggression (Merrell et al., 2006). In result, school counselors should consider the unique needs of their staff and student body when contemplating how to address social aggression conflicts among middle and high school students. Even if

counselors feel there is a low prevalence of social aggression among their student body, they should still attempt to increase their fellow faculty members' knowledge of the issue to prevent future increases of peer conflict (Merrell et al., 2006).

According to Underwood, Galen, and Paquette (2001a), when assessing social aggression conflicts, both victim and perpetrator attributes should be thoroughly evaluated, as well as the context in which the conflict progressed and was sustained. Yoon and colleagues (2004) suggest administering anonymous student surveys to gain an increased understanding of peer network dynamics across classrooms. School counselors must first gain a thorough understanding of their school's climate before administering interventions or support services. Such assessments should evaluate how safe students feel it is to communicate with parents, teachers, and peers about the issue of social aggression and how fully students understand school policies and sanctions (Yoon et al., 2004).

Counselors may also benefit from directly observing student interactions in the classroom (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001) to determine if there are victimized students who are not reaching out for adult support within the school setting. Also, counselors should increase their own awareness of social aggression and its harmful effects, as well as spread knowledge of this issue among teachers and other administrators (Yoon et al., 2004). Not only is social aggression more concealable from teachers (Simmons, 2002) than other aggressive acts, but many instructors continue to believe that socially manipulative and exclusive behaviors are less damaging than physical aggression (Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000) and do not necessarily require intervention (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001).

Minimizing Risk Factors

Because many personal, familial, and cultural risk factors for social aggression perpetrators have been identified by empirical evidence, school counselors should implement strategies to minimize such risks. For example, some perpetrators seem to lack empathy (Björkqvist & Österman, 2000), experience heightened levels of anxiety and depression (Murray-Close & Crick, 2007), are raised by coercive parents (Patterson et al., 1992), or possess biological or learning disabilities (Merrell et al., 2006). In an effort to prevent social aggression, counselors may encourage school-wide community service projects to build empathy, identify students with internalizing and learning problems to offer appropriate support services, and increase nonintrusive communication of positive parenting techniques between schools and parents. It is important to note however, that many antecedents for social aggression perpetrators may be viewed as positive such as possessing advanced social skills (Björkqvist & Österman, 2000). In result, counselors should not discourage such attributes, but encourage students to utilize their abilities in more positive ways.

Not only does a lack of self-esteem appear to be a negative consequence for some social aggression victims (Owens et al., 2000b), but elevated levels of self-confidence seem to serve as a protective factor for victims against facing future damaging outcomes (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001). In result, students' self-perceptions should be considered an extremely crucial factor in developing prevention and intervention strategies. According to Mayeux and Cillessen (2008), students who believe they are liked but are actually not liked by their peers experience lower levels of interpersonal problems than those who

believe their peers dislike them. Perhaps school counselors can urge students to say encouraging words to their peers both within and between friendship groups. Victims may also benefit from teachers who encourage students to use positive language when communicating with peers in the classroom.

School counselors should be aware that certain aspects of the school environment may perpetuate social aggression conflicts among students. For example, class size, school discipline policies, and beliefs within the community may promote social exclusion (Paquette & Underwood, 1999). Perhaps counselors and teachers can try a variety of school and classroom structures to determine which works best for reducing social aggression and maintaining an appropriate level of autonomy among students. For example, school faculty members may need to determine if practices such as allowing students to select their own group members for collaborative assignments promotes social exclusion and isolation. At the same time, they must balance students' need to exercise autonomy within classroom projects. Again, distributing anonymous student surveys may be a useful tool in determining what elements of the school environment perpetuate socially aggressive behaviors (Yoon et al., 2004).

Working with a Need for Social Hierarchy

Unfortunately, school counselors should be aware that promoting prosocial behavior to increase peer approval is likely to be ineffective in preventing social aggression because many youth are motivated by a desire for popularity and status rather than a desire to be well liked (Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998). According to Parkhurst

and Hopmeyer (1998), counselors should instead focus on assisting students desiring popularity in developing gentler strategies for achieving social dominance. Perhaps school counselors can encourage socially aggressive or popularity seeking students to take on leadership roles within the school setting (i.e., class cabinet, student council, etc.), to earn power in a more socially appropriate manner. According to Yoon and colleagues (2004), programs should encourage students to embrace individual differences within their distinct and naturally exclusive social groups. Perhaps by promoting positive interactions between school-based extracurricular sports teams, clubs, and other activities, students may be able to maintain their own exclusivity in a healthy way while learning to respect those outside their own group.

Teaching Students How to Prevent Social Aggression within Peer Groups

Aside from implementing formal programs, school counselors and other administrators can take several steps to encourage positive social interactions within the school environment. Eder and Enke (1991) found that to stop lunchtime gossip, students needed to challenge the first negative statement made within their peer group. Perhaps school counselors can assist adolescents struggling to cope with social aggression within their circle of friends by teaching them strategies to appropriately confront gossipers. School counselors should not overlook passive witnesses when evaluating social aggression conflicts. Such students may play a crucial role in preventing and intervening in social aggression conflicts and should be included in anti-bullying efforts (Hillsberg & Spak, 2006).

Chapter 7 Conclusions and Future Directions

Social Aggression in the Media

The media suggests that school counselors may offer support for students and their parents in coping with social aggression conflicts (Simmons, 2002), and therefore school counselors should be aware of how social aggression is portrayed in popular books (Garbarino & deLara, 2002; Wiseman, 2002; Simmons, 2002) and films (Messick et al., 2004). In addition, counselors should be aware of any differences between the way in which social aggression is discussed in the media and empirical findings. For example, the media focuses largely on social aggression among girls; however, studies have found that both males and females engage in and are negatively affected by such behaviors (Pronk & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2009; Crick & Nelson, 2002). Counselors should make an effort to clarify such discrepancies and dispel any false beliefs regarding social aggression among teachers, parents, and students.

Social Aggression Research

Without question, counselors should also stay informed about social aggression through current research. Although the term social aggression was selected for the present literature review due to its broad nature and inclusion of nonverbal exclusionary behaviors, studies using the terms indirect and relational aggression should not be overlooked. Also, theories regarding the origins of aggressive behavior are sometimes

altered and even discredited by scholars and therefore, counselors should be knowledgeable about the theoretical origins of social aggression to implement appropriate interventions. Currently, Social Dominance Theory (Hawley, 1999), which suggests individuals rely on either aggressive or prosocial methods to gain social capital such as peer approval and high social standing, may best explain why adolescents engage in socially aggressive behaviors. Also, Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests that sex differences in aggression may be largely influenced by social norms (Damon, 1999).

Social aggression research centers on both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative research allows for the direct observation of the function of social aggression (Merrell et al., 2006). Qualitative interviews suggest social aggression among males occurs less frequently than females (Xie et al., 2002) and tends to take place within larger, less intimate peer networks (Pronk & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2009). Also, ethnographic works suggest a "cycle of popularity" through which females protect their elevated social standing by engaging in socially aggressive behaviors, despite being held to a high standard of prosocial behavior by peers (Merten 1997; Eder, 1985). Although the relationship between popularity and social aggression is likely reciprocal, future qualitative research should be conducted longitudinally across the elementary and secondary school years to further examine the dynamics of this association.

Quantitative research relies on self reports, which capture the true perceptions of victims, peer reports, which take into account peer networks at large, and teacher reports, which offer an adult perspective on daily student interactions (Merrell et al., 2006). Quantitative research has yielded conflicting findings regarding gender differences in experiencing social aggression (Paquette & Underwood, 1999; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995;

Murray-Close & Crick, 2007). Consequently, the issue of social aggression should not be overlooked among both male and female students. Future research should be conducted more extensively across schools varying in geographic location, income, and race to further examine what impact such factors may have on gender differences.

Research has produced conflicting findings regarding gender differences in social aggression across developmental trajectories. While some studies show higher rates of social aggression among females during preschool (Crick et al., 1999), others suggest higher rates among males in middle childhood (Henington et al., 1998). Interestingly, some research suggests children perceive social aggression as more acceptable among boys during middle childhood (Goldstein et al., 2002), while other studies indicate that social aggression becomes increasingly normative for girls during preadolescence (Crick et al., 1996). Despite these conflicting findings during the preschool and elementary school years, research is more consistent in showing higher rates in social aggression in middle school compared to high school (Goldstein et al., 2008; Karriker-Jaffe et al., 2008). While social norms may serve as a buffer for females perpetrating social aggression in rural areas (Karriker-Jaffe et al., 2008), adolescent girls may experience a peak in social aggression earlier than boys in non-rural communities (Mayeux & Cillessen, 2008). Again, longer-term longitudinal studies are needed to clarify how social aggression changes with age among individual students and what perceptions of such behaviors students may have at each developmental stage.

Studies have identified perceived popularity (Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998; Mayeux & Cillessen, 2008), high levels of friendship intimacy (Grotperter & Crick, 1996), advanced social skills (Sutton & Smith, 1999), a lack of empathy (Björkqvist &

Österman, 2000), internalizing and externalizing problems (Murray-Close & Crick, 2007; Williams et al., 2009), coercive parenting (Patterson et al., 1992), learning and behavioral issues (Merrell et al., 2006), and residing in low-income urban areas as risk factors for engaging in socially aggressive behaviors. Social aggression perpetrators may face peer disapproval (Yoon et al., 2004) and isolation (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) as a result of their actions, thus driving them to engage in more socially manipulative and exclusive behaviors. Future research should examine the effectiveness of social aggression prevention programs and efforts made by school counselors to reduce the risk factors for social aggression victimization to determine the most effective strategies.

With regards to targets, those who engage in aversive behaviors as well as those who possess either undesirable or desirable unique characteristics may be at risk for social aggression victimization (Owens et al., 2000b; Pronk & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2009). Although those with high pre-existing levels of self-esteem may be less affected by victimization (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001), targets of social aggression may be at risk for a loss of self-confidence (Paquette & Underwood, 1999), internalizing problems (Owens et al., 2000b), negative perceptions of the school environment (Goldstein et al., 2008), and even suicidal thoughts (Owens et al., 2000b). Future research should examine what secondary outcomes may stem from the immediate consequences of social aggression victimization beyond adolescence.

Social Aggression Programs

In an effort to decrease the prevalence of social aggression among adolescents, anti-bullying programs have been implemented in secondary schools. Although many programs have been shown to increase social abilities, self-confidence, peer-approval, and teachers' understanding of how to appropriately intervene in instances of social aggression, only a few have been shown to decrease the prevalence of bullying (Merrell & Isava, 2008). While more research should be conducted to expand and formulate new programs, school counselors should carefully consider implementing empirically proven programs, as they are one of the few options currently in place to minimize social aggression. For example, students who participated in the Second Step program reported that they were less likely to endorse social aggression after completing the classroom lessons (Van Schoiack-Edstrom et al., 2002).

Overall, counselors should select empirically-proven, broad programs that maintain student autonomy and strive to educate adolescents, teachers, and parents about managing and preventing social aggression conflicts. Unfortunately, while most anti-bullying programs have some positive outcomes, many do not directly decrease the prevalence of social aggression victimization. Future efforts should be made to improve current programs and find alternative methods which may more effectively decrease socially aggressive behaviors in schools.

Future Directions for School Counselors

After school counselors have become educated about the issue of social aggression among adolescents, they should first assess the problem among their own student body through surveys and behavioral observations in the classroom (Yoon et al., 2004). Next, they should strive to minimize risk factors for social aggression perpetration, such as by teaching and encouraging empathy among students (Björkqvist & Österman, 2000). In addition, making efforts to increase self-esteem among students may serve as a buffer for negative effects of social aggression victimization (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001).

Counselors should take extreme caution to avoid eliminating autonomy or social hierarchy among students, as these may be crucial developmental components of adolescence (Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998). Finding prosocial ways for students to achieve social status and popularity may be a better approach. Also, encouraging students to appropriately confront acts of social aggression, particularly gossip, may be effective in maintaining student autonomy and minimizing social aggression (Eder & Enke, 1991; Hillsberg & Spak, 2006). School counselors may want to consider conducting follow-up assessments among students and teachers to determine what impact such efforts have on reducing risk factors for social aggression and the overall prevalence of victimization in the school setting. Of course, each perpetrator, victim, and social aggression conflict is unique and secondary school counselors should carefully assess the individual needs of their students when implementing interventions and offering social support services; however, it is crucial to stay knowledgeable about the constantly

growing research of social aggression dynamics to decrease the prevalence and minimize the damaging effects of this issue among adolescents.

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Academic Vita for Tana L. Schywstell

Tana L. Schywstell
825 Robert Dean Drive Downingtown, PA 19335
(610)308-1744
tls5067@psu.edu

EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA (2006-2010)
Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Studies
Honors in Human Development and Family Studies, May 2010

- Undergraduate Honors Thesis: *A Review of Research on Social Aggression among Adolescents with Implications for Secondary School Counselors*
 - Scott D. Gest, Thesis Supervisor

AWARDS AND HONORS

- The Pennsylvania State University Dean's List (2006-2010)
- Schreyer Honors Scholar (2008-2010)
- Recipient of Hopewell United Methodist Church Scholarship Fund (2006)

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- The Alpha Phi International Fraternity (2006-2010)
- Phi Eta Sigma National Honors Society (2007)

WORK EXPERIENCE

Penn State Morgan Academic Support Center for Student Athletes (Fall 2009)
Peer Tutor

- Helped to increase both the comprehension of course material and the GPAs of undergraduates enrolled in Human Development, Psychology, and Sociology courses by improving their study skills, reviewing class notes, and providing further explanation and examples of developmental theories.

Chesterbrook Academy, West Chester, PA (Summer 2009)
Camp Counselor

- Ensured a safe and exciting summer experience for over thirty second and third grade students.
- Maintained daily communication with parents, while implementing new games and activities, leading field trips, organizing meals, and engaging in free time play with the children.

Chesterbrook Academy, Exton, PA (Summer 2008 – Spring 2009)

Teacher's Aide

- Facilitated learning and recreation for children six weeks to seven years of age by instructing an educational curriculum, providing a nurturing environment, and fulfilling daily needs.

LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Penn State University “The Helping Relationship” Course (Spring 2009)

Undergraduate Teaching Assistant

- Assisted over 20 undergraduates in becoming future counselors by educating students about counseling practices, providing constructive feedback on helping relationship skills, modeling counseling sessions, and scoring assignments.

Alpha Phi International Fraternity (2008)

Director of Community Service

- Led the Gamma Rho chapter to earn the most service hours of all 20 Penn State Panhellenic sororities in April 2008.
- Sought out service opportunities, maintained records of volunteers' hours, and collaborated with the Panhellenic Council, Alpha Phi International Headquarters, the American Red Cross, and the Ronald McDonald House.

The Penn State Panhellenic Council (2008 - 2009)

Judicial Board Member

- Enforced ethical procedures within 20 Panhellenic chapters by ensuring compliance with a strict code of conduct, reporting violations, and executing disciplinary actions during formal sorority recruitment.

Rules and Regulations Committee- The Penn State Dance Marathon (2007 - 2009)

Technology Chairperson

- Maintained a secure environment for over 15,000 student participants and contributed to the over \$61 million raised for families affected by pediatric cancer since THON's inception.

ACTIVITIES AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

- “Curing Autism Now” Walk, Alpha Phi Team Member (2009-2010)
- Alpha Phi Annual “Munchkin Munchoff” promoting cardiac care (2007-2010)
- The Food Bank of State College Thanksgiving Drive (2006-2009)
- The American Heart Association Annual Heart Walk Committee Member (2007-2008)
- The American Red Cross Blood Drive Planning Committee (2007-2008)
- THON 5K Run/Walk (2008)
- Career Days Volunteer (2007)
- The Humane Society of Penn State (2006)
- The Food Bank of State College Weekly Volunteer (2006)