

UCLA

UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Middle School Girls' Relational Aggression: An Intervention through Action Research

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4bx4s16m>

Author

Plant, Lauren Perrish

Publication Date

2014

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Middle School Girls' Relational Aggression:

An Intervention through Action Research

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

Requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Lauren Perrish Plant

2014

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Middle School Girls' Relational Aggression:
An Intervention through Action Research

by

Lauren Perrish Plant

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Diane Durkin, Co-Chair

Professor Wellford Wilms, Co-Chair

The teachers in this action research study examined the problem of relational aggression at Whirlwind Academy. Relational aggression can be defined as the purposeful manipulation of peer relationships with the intent to cause harm. Associated behaviors may include social exclusion, gossip, clique-forming, and cyber bullying. The nine teachers analyzed middle school girl behaviors to identify relational aggression, effective relational aggression intervention, and their own confidence to intervene. In addition to the teachers' collaboration, they met twice with a panel of seven middle school girls to better understand the students' first-hand experiences with the problem. This action research process enabled the teachers to self-reflect about their

own experiences with relational aggression and how their personal histories influenced their practices as teachers. By the conclusion of the study, the teachers had changed their identification of relational aggression among their girls at Whirlwind and preventative interventions. They reported that they needed additional support by the school administration to feel confident enough to change their reactive interventions in a sustainable way. This action research process may be duplicated with other teachers or schools to facilitate site-specific relational aggression intervention training.

The dissertation of Lauren Perrish Plant is approved.

Sandra Graham

James Stigler

Diane Durkin, Committee Co-Chair

Wellford Wilms, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to my two amazing children, Samson and Savannah. Sam and Savvy, your beautiful souls inspired and motivated me through this often tedious process. Thank you for giving up your Mama for countless weekends and evenings. Always know that I did this for you; at every turn, it was your smiling faces and bright futures that I envisioned. I cannot wait to cheer you on as you grow and thrive. Face every challenge knowing that you are strong, capable, and loved beyond words. I am so proud to be your mom.

To my family, each one of you enabled me to do this. I know how much you sacrificed to support me through this challenge of a lifetime. Thank you for letting me do this and seeing a future for me that was often dim in my own eyes. You have all set a high bar for achieving your goals.

Finally, Tim and Mom, please know that how grateful I am for surrounding Sam and Savvy with love and support when I wasn't around. Simply put, there was no way I could have done this without your tireless dedication and beautiful hearts. I know I haven't always chosen the paths of least resistance and I thank you for propping me up in my various stumbles. In every way you can conceive, you have made me the woman and mother I always aspired to be. I am, without reservation, forever thankful.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION	II
DEDICATION	V
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	VI
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	IX
VITA.....	X
CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM STATEMENT.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background-Relational Aggression	4
Background-Relational aggression and Gender Roles	5
Background-Relational aggression and Middle School.....	5
Background--Why teacher intervention training?	6
Background-Existing Bullying Intervention Strategies	7
Research Questions.....	8
Research Design-Methods	9
Research Site/Populations.....	11
Data Collection & Analysis	12
Significance of Research.....	13
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	14
Relational aggression: Definition & Research History.....	14
Relational aggression: Gender	17
Relational aggression in Middle School	19

Existent Intervention Strategies: History & Overview	22
Relational aggression: Teachers' Need for Training	28
Conclusion	32
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	34
Overview and Research Questions	34
Research Design & Methods	35
Site Selection & Access	38
Participants.....	40
Recruitment.....	41
Data Collection & Analysis	42
Role Considerations	45
Ethical Considerations	46
Validity & Reliability	47
Conclusion	50
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	52
Finding #1: Purposeful Blindness.....	52
Resistance	54
Finding #2: Rationale.....	55
Normalcy.....	55
Health.....	56
Finding #3: Teachers' Personal Identity & Resulting Assumptions.....	58
Finding #4: The Tipping Point--Teachers seeing through students' eyes	59
Finding #5: Cyber Relational aggression: What teachers <i>couldn't</i> see	61
Finding #6: Teachers' report of changes in their behaviors	64
Teachers' confidence in relation to intervention	67
An Examination of This Action Research Process.....	69

Summary of Findings.....	81
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	83
Discussion.....	84
Relational aggression Blindness	84
Self-reflection as a means of change	85
Teacher’s changes: what they learned and how they changed	87
Action Research as a means for change.....	88
The Challenges to Change	89
Recommendations.....	91
Collaboration & Professional Development	93
Student Collaboration: Dispute Resolution & Advisory	94
Building Consensus	96
Student Participation.....	97
Systemic & Cultural Change	98
Study Limitations.....	100
Implications for Further Study.....	101
Closing Remarks.....	102
Post-Script.....	104
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	106
Appendix A: Middle School Bullying Survey.....	106
Appendix B: Pre & Post Study Relational aggression Teacher Survey.....	111
Appendix C: Journal Prompts.....	118
Appendix D: Teacher Interview Protocol.....	119
Appendix E: Action Research Overview	121
Appendix F: Student Panel Questions #1-Relational aggression Identification.....	123
Appendix G: Student Panel Questions #2-Relational aggression Intervention	124
Appendix H: Action Research Meeting Agendas.....	125
REFERENCES	134

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Sandra Graham and Dr. James Stigler, for their support in this process. I would also like to thank my committee co-chairs, Dr. Diane Durkin and Dr. Buzz Wilms, for their tireless guidance and patience. I could not have asked for more committed chairs who somehow made meaning out of my excessive love of adjectives. You made me grow as both a writer and teacher of English. And to the insightful teachers and students who participated in this study, thank you for your time and dedication.

I would also like to thank my ELP friends and colleagues. There are very few in this world who can identify with the last three years of learning, suffering, and lots of laughter. To Leora, Jenny, and Liz, who are simply incredible women. Your beautiful strength and generous spirits inspire me in so many ways. And of course, to my “MGs.” My Regina & my Gretchen. None of this would have been nearly as amusing, tolerable, or fun without you.

To our Rando, I weirdly lack enough words to thank you for your kindness, generosity, and endless patience. More than many, you have borne witness to the insanity this entailed. I thank you for never wavering in your commitment to seeing us through this and your love of BBD.

Finally, to my other half, my soul sister, my twinsie, my best friend, Dr. Joanna Gerber. It's a short page and there's no way I can communicate the necessity of you in my life. Not just in the completion of this little dissertation thing, but in your practice every day of allowing me to be me while always inspiring me to be my best self. None of this was possible without you by my side. You've scooped me sobbing off the floor and made me laugh so hard I couldn't breathe. We know the downs, we know the ups, and we know without doubt or reservation, that we'll be together for it all. You know, the whole “Beaches” ending and all.

Vita

1997-2001	B.A. in English University of Washington Seattle, WA
2001–Present	English Teacher Windward School Los Angeles, CA
2003-2004	M.Ed. in Education Pepperdine University Los Angeles, CA
2009	Exeter Humanities Institute Phillips Exeter Academy Exeter, NH
2010-Present	Middle School Advisor Windward School Los Angeles, CA

Chapter One: The Problem Statement

Introduction

Over a third (33%) of middle school girls report having been a victim of relational aggression according to a city wide study of Austin Independent School District from 2009-2010 (Austin Independent School District: Department of Program Evaluation, 2010). Relational aggression is a specific type of bullying defined as “harm that occurs through injury or manipulation of a relationship” (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006, p. 297). This type of bullying is subtle and covert, consisting of such devious behaviors as social exclusion, spreading rumors, and purposeful ignoring (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

Relational aggression is the most prevalent type of bullying among middle school girls, with one study finding that students ages 11-15 reported being exposed to 33 acts of relational aggression during the course of one week (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006). Girls in middle school are especially vulnerable to this type of bullying because they place great value and importance on their intimate social relationships (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996; Murray-Close, Ostrov, & Crick, 2007). Because the wounds inflicted by relational aggression are not visible, the detrimental and harmful effects of this type of aggression are often not recognized. Research, however, contends, that relational aggression consequences, including depression, anxiety, absenteeism and suicidal ideation, are often much more injurious than physical wounds (Crick, Casas, & Nelson, 2002; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Hawker & Boulton, 2000). While students plead for teachers to intervene (Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowan, 2001; Crothers, Kolbert, & Barker, 2006; Olweus, 1993), their pleas are often ignored. Some teachers regard relational aggression as normative developmental behavior for girls, i.e. “girls will be girls” (Clarke, 1997;

Jeffrey, Miller, & Linn, 2001). Teachers also claim that they lack the knowledge and skills to reduce these acts of bullying (Olweus, 1993; Yoon, Barton, & Taiariol, 2004). Yet a meta-analysis of relational aggression research notes that teachers not only feel ill-prepared to deal with the bullying, but there also exists a dearth of research-based intervention strategies (Young et al., 2006). Because relational aggression, also known as “relational aggression” in the research literature, spikes in early adolescence (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001), middle school girls need advocates to address this often-subtle form of bullying. I conducted action research to design and implement a teacher training program to decrease relational aggression among middle school girls. During the course of this study, the term “relational aggression” will be used to discuss all the aggressive bullying behaviors that harmfully manipulate peer relationships.

As part of a pilot study, I surveyed teachers to gather some background data to substantiate the need for this research. A questionnaire was sent to approximately 200 K-12 teachers at both west coast and east coast public and private schools. The goal of the questionnaire was affirm studies’ findings that teachers report feeling undertrained to deal with relational aggression and would benefit from additional training (Bauman, Rigby, & Hoppa, 2008; Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000; O’Moore, 2000). I sent the questionnaire to 200 teachers, though just 64 (33%) responded. Of these 64 respondents, 70% teach in public schools, and 30% are in private or religiously affiliated schools. In terms of grade levels, 10% teach at the primary level, 70% at the middle school level, and 28.3% at the high school level. I selected teachers and administrators at four schools to send out the questionnaire via email to their fellow teachers. My goal with the survey was to gain additional background information on teachers’ perceptions of relational aggression and their own preparedness in addressing it. I asked teachers to report their experiences with relational aggression as well as their views regarding socially

manipulative behaviors as normative or as a type of bullying behavior. Additionally, the survey asked the respondents if they thought teachers needed training to help solve relational aggression, and if so, what kind.

The survey revealed that 84.1% of respondents reported that they witness peer-to-peer acts of relational aggression “sometimes,” “often,” or “frequently.” Additionally, a majority of respondents report that while they do not consider socially aggressive behaviors as a “normal” stage of adolescence for boys, almost 80% consider relationally aggressive behaviors “normal” for girls. This finding substantiated the need for additional teacher training regarding social aggression as a type of bullying among girls, rather than the commonly- perceived “normal” behavior. Additionally, over 70% of teachers reported that they either “somewhat agree” or agree” that additional knowledge, skills, and training would aid them in intervening in instances of relational aggression among their students.

These findings reaffirm the research that suggests that teachers both need and desire additional training to intervene in relational aggression, which one questionnaire respondent called “an epidemic in today’s school and in society at large.” Another respondent summed up the need for additional training by saying, “I would love additional training [as] I feel powerless to discuss it in my class.” The respondent then added, “I think any sound training program should also offer some listening time and reflection time so that the participants can effectively deal with their own emotional baggage that prevents them from being effective helpers of children. This is an emotionally laden topic...[for which] there is great need for help.” Since the majority of respondents were middle school teachers, this preliminary survey highlighted the fact that middle school teachers are confronted with issues pertaining to relational aggression among

their students and have conflicting experiences with intervention training and perceptions of how and when to intervene.

This action research study sought to conduct research in which the researcher (as facilitator) and nine middle school educators from a 7th-12th grade private school in an suburban area used existent research on relational aggression as a guide to examine their identifications of peer-to-peer relational aggression among their students, learn about intervention strategies, implement their strategies, and analyze practices for effectiveness, which led to further changes in practice.

Background-Relational Aggression

Crick & Grotpeter (1995) define relational aggression as a type of bullying that involves intentionally harming of someone through manipulation of a relationship rather than the more overt physical aggression. Though it is often subtle and difficult to recognize (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), this type of aggression is categorized as bullying within Olweus' (1993) three criteria for bullying: 1) It is aggressive and intentional "harmdoing" (p. 1173), 2) it is repeated over time, and 3) it involves an imbalance of power in an interpersonal relationship. Chapter Two will elaborate on this definition and provide further discussion of specific relational aggression behaviors.

Research has uncovered the long-lasting and harmful effects of relational aggression. These effects include social-psychological maladjustment including depression, loneliness, social isolation, social anxiety, and low-self-esteem (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996). Additionally, bullying victimization has repeatedly been associated with suicidal ideation and self-injurious behaviors (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Marttunen, Rimpela, & Rantanen, 1999).

Background-Relational aggression and Gender Roles

Extensive research regarding relational aggression and gender finds that girls are affected most frequently and most severely by this type of bullying (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Grotperter & Crick, 1996; Murray-Close et al., 2007; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009; Young et al., 2006). In particular, Crick & Grotperter (1995) find that while girls are more socially aggressive per bullying incidence than boys, boys are more physically aggressive per bullying incidence. This phenomena has been associated with young female students, as girls “tend to be involved in intimate relationships with a few close peers” (Murray-Close et al., 2007, p. 189). Studies indicate that girls base their social experiences on peer intimacy with a few meaningful friends rather than boys who often base their friendships on the gender goals of physical dominance (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006). Therefore, girls are significantly more susceptible to both the threat and harmful effects of experiences of relational aggression (Yoon et al., 2004). Most studies agree that the social and emotional effects of relational aggression are more severe for girls than boys (Crick, 1996; Paquette & Underwood, 1999).

Some studies however, find boys are as vulnerable to relational aggression as girls. While Merrell et al. (2006) note a few atypical studies suggesting that boys exhibit more relational aggression behaviors than girls, these studies focus on young preschool children rather than older children or adolescents.

Background-Relational aggression and Middle School

While socially aggressive acts have been reported in children as young as the age of three, relationally aggressive behaviors are thought to grow more sophisticated and covert as children enter into middle childhood and adolescence and grow more socially cognizant and

manipulative (Björkqvist, Österman, & Lagerspetz, 1994; Crick et al., 1996). Yoon et al. (2004) suggest that the years of middle school are a hot-bed period for relational aggression among girls because there are significant developmental changes that adolescents undergo in these years, including: seeking independence from parents and increasing interests in their peers, which results in increasing importance of social status and acceptance. As Savin-Williams & Berndt (1990) argue, because adolescent girls place great importance on emotional closeness within their peer relationships “a possible attempt to hurt an intimate friendship or social reputation would be perceived as an enormous threat and is most likely to have significant implications in peer relationships” (Yoon et al., 2004, p. 305).

As children grow from early childhood into middle childhood and adolescence, their increasing independence from their parents, social dependence on their peers, and sophisticated social cognition skills, make socially aggressive behaviors not only more hurtful, but also much more subtle, manipulative, and sophisticated (Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999; Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999). This heightened phenomena of sneaky, covert, and subtle bullying in middle school makes relational aggression difficult to see, hard to pinpoint, nearly impossible to tangibly prove, plus extremely difficult for teachers to address.

Background--Why teacher intervention training?

Despite such research, multiple studies confirm that relational aggression among girls is often considered by teachers to be normal developmental behavior (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Jeffrey et al., 2001; Yoon et al., 2004). Additionally, Boulton’s (1997) seminal study found that while teachers were quick to label physically aggressive behaviors as “bullying,” socially aggressive behaviors including name calling, social exclusion,

spreading rumors, gossip, and intentional ignoring were not regarded by teachers as a form of bullying. Other studies corroborate these findings and go on to suggest that teachers need and often want more training in how to recognize and address relational aggression (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Craig et al., 2000; Espelage & Swearer, 2004; O'Moore, 2000). Furthermore, studies have found that students who are both victimized by social aggression or involved in bullying situations would like for teachers to be proactive in addressing the behaviors. Students reported they believe that teacher intervention is one of the most productive means of curbing the bullying (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Crothers et al., 2006; Olweus, 1993).

Students' desire for their teachers to intervene in acts of bullying and social aggression is pivotal because it demonstrates the pivotal role of teachers in the students' lives and school climate. According to Olweus (1993) and Holt & Keyes (2004), teachers' attitudes and behaviors towards bullying significantly contribute to a school climate that either tolerates or discourages bullying. If teachers do not recognize and address instances of relational aggression (as they often are ill-prepared to do), they are passively creating a school climate that enables the destructive bullying behaviors.

Background-Existing Bullying Intervention Strategies

Young et al.'s (2006) meta-analysis of studies related to relational aggression and schools' responses found that "research-based intervention [strategies]...are not yet available," forcing educators to "apply the physical aggression literature to relationally aggressive children and their targets [or] consider relational aggression studies and extrapolate interventions" (p. 122). Given that there is a dearth of research-based intervention strategies specifically geared toward issues of relational aggression, this action research study aimed to use the teachers' first-

hand experiences with their relational aggression among their female middle school students to develop a research-based intervention program and simultaneously assess its efficacy.

This action research project involved a small group of nine middle school teachers working together to assess their experiences identifying and intervening in cases of relational aggression among their female students. Additionally, throughout this self-reflective process, the teachers began to put their findings into practice with their students and ultimately share their observations, understandings, and conclusions with other teachers and administrators at the school. The goals of this study included: 1) Increasing teachers' understandings of relational aggression through exposure to research so they recognize these behaviors among their students; 2) Facilitating teacher assessment of the interactions between their students so teachers can create and foster safe and healthy classroom environments; 3) Facilitating teachers' self-reflection regarding their perceptions of relational aggression and strategies for intervention so that the teachers felt invested in the research and had greater probability of implementing intervention strategies; 4) Facilitating teachers' innovation and discussion of best practices for addressing relational aggression behaviors so that they do not rely upon faulty or inappropriate intervention strategies; 5) Providing a forum for teachers' to reflect on the efficacy of their intervention strategies to further their personal investment in the research; and finally, (6) Enabling teachers to share their findings with the school community in order to educate other teachers and administrators, in turn creating a school climate that proactively dissuaded acts of relational aggression.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

1. To what extent does the action research process change teacher's identifications of relational aggression behaviors among middle school girls?
2. What do middle school teachers report as effective intervention strategies to decrease relational aggression among their students?
3. To what extent do the intervention strategies appear to increase teachers' confidence to recognize and decrease relational aggression among middle school girls?
4. What is the process by which teachers' change their identifications of relational aggression behaviors and effective intervention strategies?

Research Design-Methods

This study was a qualitative action research study. Qualitative methods were appropriate because a fundamental component of qualitative research is that “individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds” (Merriam, 2009, p. 22). This interpretive type of research could be aptly applied to the study of relational aggression and teacher training because acts of relational aggression are inherently open to interpretation and unquantifiable. Subtle acts of relational aggression, including eye-rolling, back turning, and social exclusion must be perceived and judged as having relational aggression qualities by the observer, in a way that quantitative analysis was not able to capture.

I chose an action research approach because the problem required self-reflection and a personal approach to understanding it. Because relationally aggressive behaviors are often hard to detect, subjective, and subtle, the teachers needed to reflect on their personal experiences and perspectives towards their identifications and intervention strategies. In addition, the teachers needed to implement their research and personally assess the efficacy of their findings when put

into practice. Kolb (1984) and Schön (1983) suggest that when educators participate in action research, they consciously learn from their experience. The systematic reflection in which practitioners participate in action research lent itself to both effective learning and the ability to apply one's learnings to his or her teaching practices. This research method was particularly valuable to deal with issues of relational aggression as the teachers were able to perceive relational aggression in new ways, apply interventions in real time, and then reflect upon and evaluate the efficacy of those interventions, all as a part of the cyclical action research process.

This was a qualitative study in which the teachers actively engaged in the action research process. They learned about relational aggression, assessed their own identifications of relational aggression, designed and implemented intervention strategies geared towards addressing and combatting relational aggression among their students, and evaluated both the interventions and the action research process itself.

The research methods included pre and post descriptive surveys, my observations of group meetings and field notes, teachers' personal reflection journals, audio recordings of teachers' meetings and discussions, and interviews. The pre and post descriptive survey asked teachers about their identifications of relational aggression, their perceptions of effective intervention strategies, and their confidence level in addressing relational aggression among their students. The surveys also set up a standard of comparison to measure change over time. The personal reflection journals prompted the teachers to reflect upon their experiences with relational aggression, the action research process, and also influenced the content of the group meetings. In addition to the reflection journals, my observations and field notes recorded teachers' body language, facial expressions, intonations, and general observations during the

group discussions and meetings. I also recorded themes and patterns in discussions and the topics upon which the research team focused.

This study's design and logic model was significantly guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological framework. This framework suggests that relational aggression, as a phenomenon, is influenced by the community around it, including the individual, teachers, family, and surrounding community (Swearer et al., 2006). This theory explains why bullying is more than a student problem; rather multiple stakeholders' roles are vital in addressing relational aggression.

Research Site/Populations

Private schools were appropriate sites to study the problem of relational aggression, as they often have highly competitive atmospheres that foster relational aggression behaviors among the students. The very nature of "exclusivity" that exists in the private school culture enables these behaviors. Whirlwind Academy (pseudonym) was chosen for the action research site because it is a co-ed 7th-12th grade middle and high school whose mission is to "challenge students to achieve excellence in a nurturing, inclusive community." Yet, this premise of inclusivity and nurturing belied the reality of relational aggression that was happening among the middle school girls, evidenced by the Whirlwind middle school bullying survey (Appendix A). The existent survey data revealed that while nearly 91% of middle schoolers reported they had "Never" been physically bullied during the course of a typical month, nearly 70% of them reported being victims of verbal or social bullying one to two times over the course of a month. An additional 11% of the middle schoolers reported that they had been victims of relational aggression, either once a week or several times a week. Though the middle school bullying

survey revealed the prevalence of verbal and social bullying on campus, Whirlwind Academy had no formal policies regarding relational aggression for either the students or the teachers. Because this private school has no existing intervention strategies in place, teachers were likely ill-prepared to recognize and address this type of bullying.

The action research study involved a small group of nine middle school educators who volunteered to be a part of the study. The teachers were both new and veteran teachers and all female. The educators were mainly teachers and advisers, with one middle school administrative dean. Additionally, the study involved seven middle school girls who were on the student leadership council. The students had been previously elected by their peers to act as voices for their peer counterparts and interface with the administration and faculty about important school issues. They volunteered to take part in this study.

Data Collection & Analysis

I collected data on teachers' initial perceptions and experiences with relational aggression through a pre-intervention descriptive survey. The survey results were coded for emerging themes and shared back with the action research (AR) team. After multiple sessions I distributed journal prompts via email and had the educators respond to me prior to the next group meeting. The journal reflections were coded for themes regarding the AR process, changing views regarding relational aggression, educators' confidence levels and other prevalent themes. These journal responses helped guide the AR process as well as substantiate findings from the pre-intervention survey.

I observed and audio-recorded the meetings, as well as wrote down my observations immediately after each meeting. In this way I acted as participant-as-observer and engaged in the

process, without being hindered by immediate note-taking. Throughout this action research cycle, I transcribed the audio-recordings of the discussions and coded for pervasive themes, perceptions, and observations. The post-survey acted as a follow-up to the pre-intervention survey and was analyzed as a standard of comparison to measure the educators' post-intervention change in their identifications of relational aggression, perceptions of effective intervention strategies for their middle school female students, and confidence levels in addressing relational aggression. The post-intervention one-on-one interview focused on all of the research questions, including probing more deeply into how the AR process influenced any change in their perceptions of relational aggression or confidence levels.

Significance of Research

At the conclusion of this study, the seven girls from the action research team designed and led a middle school advisory session. The eighth grade girls mentored the seventh grade girls about relational aggression. The teachers also invited the full faculty to participate in a similar relational aggression enquiry and have asked the administration to incorporate a date for faculty professional development into the 2014-2015 calendar.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter presents an analysis of the research on relational aggression among middle school girls and the need for training teachers how to reduce it. It presents key findings regarding the background of relational aggression, its intersection with gender and middle school, and teachers' experiences with this problem. Initially, I discuss the seminal research that defines relational aggression as a type of bullying; this research addresses the behaviors that manifest in acts of relational aggression as well as the negative consequences of relational aggression for both aggressor and victim. I then turn to the literature that shows an association between relationally aggressive behaviors and gender, specifically demonstrating the correlation between girls and acts of relational aggression. I next provide evidence regarding relational aggression and middle school. These studies show that relationally aggressive acts increase in frequency in middle school age children and also investigate possible causes for this phenomenon, especially in girls.

Finally, I address the need for teacher-intervention training to reduce bullying and existing bullying intervention strategies. The paucity of intervention strategies and teacher preparation to deal with this form of bullying combined with teachers' desire for additional training and students' desire for teachers to recognize and intervene, support the need for this study.

Relational aggression: Definition & Research History

Crick & Grotpeter (1995) define relational aggression as "harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships" (p.711). This type of non-

physical aggression is a form of bullying in which a student is repeatedly exposed to intentional injury or discomfort by another student over time, and usually involves a physical or psychological imbalance of power (Nansel TR, 2001).. While Olweus' (1993) widely-accepted definition of bullying has historically been applied by researchers to boys and overt physical bullying, Crick & Grotpeter's (1995) seminal study of relational aggression found that this is a type of bullying that is distinct from overt aggression and is related to gender and social-psychological adjustment. For the purposes of this study, the term "relational aggression" refers to all the behaviors that are sometimes categorized as "social bullying," "verbal indirect aggression" or "social aggression"; all these terms refer to behaviors that are socially focused and aimed at damaging one's relationships (Coyne et al., 2006; Espelage & Swearer, 2004).

Crick & Grotpeter's (1995) study, considered to have "opened the door" (Espelage & Swearer, 2004, p. 24) for subsequent studies, looked at 491 3rd-6th graders to measure and assess relational and overt aggression. A peer-nomination instrument was administered, as the researchers hypothesized that the peers would be the most reliable informants of often-subtle and indirect relationally aggressive behaviors. This study concluded that girls are more frequently involved in relationally aggressive bullying than boys (while boys are more overtly aggressive than girls). The researchers included behaviors such as social exclusion, withdrawal of friendship or acceptance, and spreading rumors as the relationally aggressive behaviors that are "intended to significantly damage another child's friendships or feelings of inclusion by the peer group" (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995, p.711). This study also found that relational aggression is related to maladjustment issues including depression, loneliness, and social isolation. Crick & Grotpeter (1995) also suggested that prior research had underestimated the degree of bullying among girls, as girls' peer-group aggression had not been evaluated.

Since Crick & Grotpeter's (1995) study, researchers have looked at relational aggression as a form of bullying and recognized its correlation with psychosocial maladjustment. Subsequent studies find the correlation between relational aggression victimization and internalizing problems include depression and anxiety and confirm the maladjustment associations first introduced by Crick & Grotpeter (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996; Murray-Close et al., 2007). In their meta-analytic review of the literature, Hawker & Boulton (2000) also review literature that finds relational aggression can lead to anxiety, loneliness, and depression. Other internalizing problems and behaviors that have been linked to relational aggression include bulimic behaviors, substance abuse, delinquency and low self-esteem (Crick et al., 2002; Galen & Underwood, 1997). Though the maladjustment consequences of relational aggression can be severe and perhaps more damaging than physical aggression (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996), research indicates that relationally aggressive behaviors may not be recognized as bullying: They are by definition covert, subtle, and manipulative (Young et al., 2006). While physical bullying is tangible, relational aggression "leaves little tangible evidence of harm" (Young et al., 2006, p.297). The research finds that it is hard to associate the consequences with the relationally aggressive behavior because there is no tangible evidence of either the behavior or the consequence. This is especially true of young children who may not understand or verbalize the connection between the bullying and the resulting maladjustment.

In examining relational aggression among children, Wang et al. (2009) found that of 7,508 adolescents in the 2005/2006 Health Behavior in School-aged Children (HBSC) study, 51.4% reported being relationally bullied, relationally aggressing others, or both. This study's findings were consistent with previous findings that boys were less involved in relational aggression than girls, and that while "boys engage more in physical or verbal bullying...girls use

spreading rumors and social exclusion as bullying tactics” (Wang et al., 2009, p.373). Yet, while research finds this to be true, girls’ behaviors are still often regarded as normal rather than bullying.

Interestingly, while relational aggression was once under-recognized all-together, it has now been popularized in mainstream media. Yet even as movies like *Mean Girls* has brought these aggressive behaviors to the forefront of people’s consciousness, relational aggression is still being portrayed as “girls being girls” rather than hurtful bullying. The media does, however, reflect the pervasiveness of the frequency of this type of bullying in our schools, with one study of 422 11-15 year olds finding that participants were exposed to 33 acts of relational aggression during a typical week, both on television and in school settings (Coyne et al., 2006). Though often portrayed in popular movies and books, Crick & Grotpeter (1995) found that the acceptance of girls as bullies and relational aggression’s detrimental psycho-social effects is still in its infancy in regards to empirically research-based intervention strategies.

Relational aggression: Gender

While significant research suggests that girls are more frequently and detrimentally affected by relational aggression, there are studies that find this type of bullying is pervasive and impactful for boys as well (Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997; R. L. Smith, Rose, & Schwartz-Mette, 2010; Young et al., 2006). Crick et al. (1997) found that relational aggression is significantly related to psycho-social maladjustment for both girls and boys. Most studies recognize though that while physical aggression has been commonly associated with boys and recognized as a form of bullying, girls were long considered nonaggressive because they did not display as many physically aggressive behaviors (Berstein, 1998). Research has now emerged

that recognizes overt aggression and victimization as prevalent behaviors for boys, while relational aggression is a more frequent common aggressive behavior among school-aged girls (Björkqvist et al., 1994; Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick & Nelson, 2002; Wang et al., 2009). Further research contends that relational aggression appears in girls' dynamics as early as preschool (Crick et al., 1999), but the correlation between gender differences favoring girls and relational aggression increases in adolescence (Murray-Close et al., 2007; R. L. Smith et al., 2010).

Research has examined this phenomena and found that the high-levels of intimacy involved in girls' friendships is associated with relationally aggressive behaviors; specifically relationally aggressive girls tend to experience relational aggression within their friendships whereas the overt aggression typically displayed by boys are acts displayed outside friendships (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996; Murray-Close et al., 2007) Crick & Grotpeter (1995) found that since “[r]elational aggression involves behaviors such as threatening to withdraw friendship in order to get one's own way or using social exclusion as a form of retaliation” (p.1003), these behaviors are particularly hurtful for girls who tend to place value on friendships and intimate relationships. Additionally, Murray-Close et al. (2007) found that girls' close and exclusive dyadic friendship structure may fuel relationally aggressive behaviors, especially as girls mature from early to middle childhood and their “social–cognitive capacities [develop] and they spend more time with close, intimate friends” (p.198). Crick, Bigbee, & Howes' (1996) study found that, when reported by children, “relational aggression and verbal insults were cited significantly more often by girls than any other behavior type as the norm for girls' mean behavior” (p.1009) as opposed to boys' report that overt acts and verbal insults were most typical.

Beyond the frequency of relational aggression among girls, research finds that girls perceive relational aggression as more harmful than boys and suffer significant psycho-social consequences from relational aggression victimization (Coyne et al., 2006; Crick et al., 1996, 1999; Crick & Nelson, 2002; Murray-Close et al., 2007). Specifically, Crick & Bigbee (1998) found through their multi-informant study, that girls were significantly more relationally victimized than boys and that “relational victimization was negatively related to peer acceptance...for girls and positively related to peer rejection, submissive behavior, feelings of loneliness, social anxiety, and emotional distress” (p.345). This study, along with Crick & Grotpeter (1995) and several other studies, confirm that girls who are relationally aggressed are susceptible to internalizing maladjustment issues including loneliness, anxiety, social anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Girls are particularly susceptible to these negative effects; they receive validation from close and intimate friendships. When frequently relationally aggressed, they are more likely to be rejected by their peer groups (Juvonen & Graham, 2001). If there is not proactive intervention to end the bullying, it becomes a painful and harmful cycle for many girls.

Relational aggression in Middle School

Adolescence is regarded by educators and researchers alike as a “critical time in the life course when issues of identity become central and a sense of self-worth must be established” (Lipka & Brinthaupt, 1992, p. 117). Yet, complicating this “critical time,” adolescents are facing social, developmental, physiological, and physical changes that effect their self-concept and their social behaviors, all of which can be manifested through relationally

aggressing or being victimized by relational aggression. Adolescents not only are more reliant on their peers as they grow more independent from their parents, their “social network” also changes to include both same-sex and opposite-sex peer groups (Yoon et al., 2004, p.305). As their sexual interests, parental relationships, and physical appearance all evolve as puberty hits, girls seek acceptance from their peers, and hence are more susceptible to maladjustment and internalizing problems when their peer acceptance is threatened or removed through relational aggression (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Lipka & Brinthaupt, 1992). Prinstein et al. (2001) substantiates this claim in their finding that adolescents who were relational aggression victims had higher levels of internalizing problems, including depression, loneliness, and lower self-worth, compared with other teenagers. In their study of an ethnically diverse sample of 6th grade students, Graham, Bellmore, & Mize (2006) also find that while bullying aggressors experience positive self-views, victims of peer harassment reported negative self-views. Notably, Graham et al. (2006) also found that while bullying victims presorted the most negative self-views, victims, aggressors, and aggressive victims all demonstrated more adjustment problems than the peer-nominated “socially adjusted” group. This finding demonstrates the negative impact of bullying on middle-schoolers regardless of their role in the aggressive act.

While much of Crick and colleagues’ seminal research regarding relational aggression focuses on preschool and primary school age children, research finds that relational aggression behaviors continue through middle and high school (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000; Nansel, 2001; Prinstein et al., 2001; Walcott, Upton, Bolen, & Brown, 2008). One study of over 2,000 students across three middle school grades found that 75% of students self-reported experiencing relationally aggressive bullying (Unnever & Cornell, 2004). Another frequently-cited study found that the frequency of socially aggressive acts

increases with age, and middle-schoolers identify relational aggression behaviors as more “dislike[d]” than primary school children (Galen & Underwood, 1997, p. 597).

While there is general consensus among researchers that relational aggression continues to be prevalent past early childhood and into adolescence, studies examining the motivations that underlie these behaviors identify social-cognitive changes and peer dynamics that accompany adolescence (Espelage & Holt, 2001; Prinstein et al., 2001; Sutton et al., 1999). Specifically, “as children acquire more social-cognitive capacities and spend more time with close, intimate friends...more sophisticated and frequent displays of relational aggression [occur]” (Murray-Close et al., 2007, p.198). Research continues to suggest that since girls are more likely to focus on fostering intimate connections with others, those peer relationships become an important part of their peer acceptance and social life. As a result, relational aggression may be used as a bullying tactic when social acceptance and perceived popularity are threatened (Grotperter & Crick, 1996; Rose, Swenson, & Waller, 2004; Yoon et al., 2004). In their studies examining youth and adolescents, Rose et al. (2004) found that subtle and covert relationally aggressive acts have a notable relation with perceived popularity. This finding may help to explain why relational aggression is prevalent and harmful for middle school girls. As Pelligrini & Bartini (2000) find in their longitudinal study of bullying and victimization during the transition to middle school, “[y]oungsters enter[] a new group with lower dominance status and use[] bullying as a way to establish dominance” (p.717). Middle school is a transition period for young adolescents who leave the social security of their primary school to have to renegotiate their social standing in a new school context; research finds that bully, especially bullying that is based in social exclusion and isolation, lends itself as a means to establish social dominance (Andreou, 2006; Pellegrini, 2002a, 2002b). Relational aggression is a type of bullying that is

connected to the peer context as the central focus of relational aggression is the manipulation of interpersonal relationships among peer groups (Yoon et al., 2004).

Beyond the battle for social superiority in their new middle school settings, adolescent girls are also undergoing significant developmental changes. As girls age from middle childhood into adolescence, they grow more socially cognizant and manipulative (Björkqvist et al., 1994; Crick et al., 1996). As they mature, girls are able to understand the effects of their actions and thus use relational aggression as a means of fitting in (Espelage & Holt, 2001).

Another challenge adding to the problem of bullying and relational aggression in middle school students is the middle-schoolers' reluctance to report the bullying. In their study of middle school students across three grades, Unnever & Cornell (2004) report that as students age, they have a tendency to report bullying behaviors and events less frequently. This may be because of students' developmental changes and newfound sense of independence, their fear of social exclusion, or a sense that reporting bullying behavior is an ineffective solution to the problem (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Unnever & Cornell, 2004; Young et al., 2006). This lack of student reporting reinforces the need for teachers to proactively recognize and address relationally aggressive acts of bullying.

Existent Intervention Strategies: History & Overview

The most widely utilized and researched of school bullying interventions stem from the seminal work of Norwegian researcher Dan Olweus, whose bully prevention/intervention programs became the prototype for many intervention programs implemented throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008). Olweus' definition of bullying as an "aggressive behavior," that is "carried out repeatedly over time," and characterized by "an

imbalance of power” (Olweus, 1994a). , underlays Olweus’ prevention/intervention program. The program is based on “awareness and involvement” by adults and includes practices such as supervision, class rules against bullying, and “talks” with bullies, victims, and parents of involved students (Olweus, 1994, p.1186). The Olweus’ program, while still widely utilized, focuses on “aggressive behavior” among students, and does little to prevent/intervene in covert or subtle behaviors that are not traditionally considered “aggressive;” social exclusion or gossip versus physical aggression (Olweus, 1994, p.1185). The Olweus’ prevention/intervention program is a pre-packaged prevention/intervention program that can be purchased and implemented by any school regardless of the school and bullying contexts. This program is a one-size-fits all formula. Additionally, another limitation of the Olweus Anti-Bullying Prevention Program is that their impact on relationally aggressive behaviors is unknown (Nixon & Werner, 2010).

But the need for intervention specifically-g geared toward relational aggression is well documented. Research suggests that intervention for relational aggression is important based on several rationale: (1) relational aggression is stable over the short and long term and will not “go away” if ignored, (2) the relationship between social prominence and relational aggression may cause the behaviors to increase over time for girls, and (3) girls may appear to thrive, but suffer maladjustment problems due to unaddressed relational aggression (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). Additionally, because relational aggression “has been shown to be conceptually and empirically distinct from overt forms of aggression...with a potentially different etiology and developmental course” (Nixon & Werner, 2010, p. 607), it demands a specific prevention/intervention program.

As research and awareness of relational aggression has advanced in the last decade, so have prevention/intervention programs emerged that address relationally aggressive bullying. The need for anti-bullying programs to address non-physical bullying has been well documented, with studies finding that programs that only acknowledge physically aggressive behaviors would fail to address over 60% of aggressive girls (Crick & Nelson, 2002; Henington, Hughes, Cavell, & Thompson, 1998). Researchers further contend that most school-based interventions still focus nearly exclusively on overt physical aggression (Leff et al., 2009). It is only recently that research-based programs that address relational aggression have emerged, and the studies examining the programs' validity are limited (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010; Ostrov et al., 2009).

Leff et al. (2010) presented a systematic review of nine published school-based prevention and intervention programs that address relational aggression. Most of the programs they discuss focus on young children from preschool to 5th grade, with only two of the prevention/intervention programs geared towards middle schoolers or early adolescents. While all of the programs have a prescribed curriculum for the students, five included teachers as part of the implementation process. Of those five, the I Can Problem Solve (ICPS) program included a teacher manual with training, the Walk Away, Ignore, Talk, Seek Help (WITS) included a two hour in-service training for teachers to administer the prevention/intervention curriculum, the Second Step program included a one day teacher training for implementation of the program, the Friend to Friend (F2F) program had graduate students partner with teacher for program implementation, and the Early Childhood Friendship Project had teachers meet regularly with the program facilitators to evaluate the program (Leff et al., 2010; Ostrov et al., 2009). All of these intervention programs prescribe the intervention methods to the teachers (if the teachers are

involved at all) rather than encouraging teacher feedback toward designing site-specific interventions.

After examining these programs, the researchers proposed that “given the extremely complex nature of relational aggression, it is also important that key individuals within the school and community are integrated into the intervention team” (Leff et al., 2010, p.530). While many of these programs rely on specialized interventionists to come in to administer the curriculum, Leff et al. (2009) contend that a prevention/intervention program’s sustainability and success may be predicated how well it is integrated within the school community. The researchers’ support of “whole-school” approach underpins the necessity of intervention/prevention programs that integrate all the stakeholders in a school-setting.

The Preventing Relational aggression In Schools Everyday (PRAISE) program was adapted from the F2F Prevention/Intervention program which is geared towards 3rd-5th grade high-risk girls in urban elementary schools. The PRAISE program involves 20 sessions co-facilitated by classroom teachers and therapists geared specifically towards young African-American boys and girls. PRAISE built upon the F2F program to offer a more comprehensive classroom-based intervention that did not specifically target at-risk girls (Leff et al., 2009; Leff & Crick, 2010). Yet this program, along with the others previously outlined, do little to take into account the particular school communities in which they are being implemented. Because many of the intervention programs are scripted and facilitated by “outsiders” coming into a school community, they do not take into account specific site and community issues that are particular to the individual school, students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community as a whole. Thus, as Leff et al. (2010) contend, the interventions are less likely to be successful and sustainable.

In fact, researchers have long since applied a whole-school model of analyzing bullying and prevention with a socio-ecological framework (Espelage & Swearer, 2004; Garbarino, 2002; Olweus, 1993; Swearer & Doll, 2001). Adapted from Bronfenner's (1979) classic ecological theory that supposes that a child is a centric and inseparable part of its social network, the socio-ecological theory suggests that bullying does not occur in isolation but rather "is encouraged or inhibited as a result of the complex relationships between the individual, family, peer group, school, community, and culture" (Espelage & Swearer, 2004, p. 3). Multiple studies have used this framework to consider bullying, teachers' attitudes towards bullying, and bullying intervention programs, though few of the aforementioned intervention programs utilize the theory in their programming (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). According to Susan Limber, the Associate Director of the Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life at Clemson University, "the entire school community [must be involved] to change the climate of the school and the norms of the [bullying] behavior" (Crawford, 2002, p. 33). This "whole-school" approach that the socio-ecological framework supports is vital to tackling the complex and varying factors that enable and/or help to prevent bullying behaviors; if an intervention does not account for any one group of stakeholders it is unlikely to be lasting and effective. While many of the previously mentioned interventions incorporate elements of the "complex relationships," including curricula addressing peer group dynamics and community, few interventions include and address teachers as an influencing factor towards bullying.

Two relational aggression prevention/intervention programs are notable for their whole-school approach by educating and training administrators, teachers, and staff to understand issues of relational aggression beyond implementing prescribed intervention curriculum. The Ophelia Project, a girls' advocacy organization, created the Creating A Safe School (CASS) program to

address physical, verbal, and relational aggression. The CASS program involved assigning CASS consultants (Ophelia Project staff members) to each school involved in the program to meet with school administrators to discuss setting up a “school-wide, systemic approach to creating a safe social environment” (Nixon & Werner, 2010, p.609). Secondly, at the outset of the program, all teachers, administrators, and staff complete a 7-hour in-service provided by the Ophelia project to educate the staff about relational aggression as well as prevention/intervention strategies. At the classroom level, adults in the school setting (including trained parents) are trained as facilitators who then train high-school mentors to the middle school students. Regular coaching for the facilitators was provided. High school mentors then conducted scripted student lessons with middle school students. When evaluated, researchers found that this program resulted in significant reductions of relational aggression along with decreasing approval of relationally aggressive behaviors among the 406 sixth grade students surveyed (Nixon & Werner, 2010). The Ophelia Project closed in December of 2012 due to lack of revenue and is no longer implementing CASS (<http://www.opheliaproject.org/>). This program was striking for its successful address of the socio-ecological factors involved in relational aggression, rather than focusing solely on the students and their peer dynamics.

Another notable prevention/intervention program was implemented in Quebec, Canada as a “development process of a program for raising awareness of...relational aggression in elementary school children and teachers” (Verlaan & Turmel, 2010, p. 552). This program involved 188 participants across eight 4th-6th grade classes and was developed using action research “to facilitate the translation of research into action and to ground the intervention in the needs and resources of educational settings” (p.552). This program was based on the premise that no “brief-packaged educational programs” (p.554) were found that simultaneously raised student

and adult awareness of the problem of relational aggression (Verlaan & Turmel, 2010). Therefore, his particular program's aim was to primarily raise student, teacher, and parent awareness of relational aggression. The program consisted of an initial 2 hour information session for all staff, followed up by additional 50 minutes of training for the targeted classroom teachers, before they conducted three workshops targeting administrators, other teachers, and students. The teachers and program facilitators met regularly once a month over a period of 18 months to conceptualize the program content and objectives based on empirically based knowledge and intervention strategies. The teachers were the program's primary interventionists. Researchers concluded that there was some degree of student knowledge acquisition regarding relational aggression. Additionally, the training of teachers for the workshops had a positive effect on raising their awareness of relational aggression and their ability to intervene. This program was implemented on such a small scale that all findings would need to be confirmed with further research (Verlaan & Turmel, 2010).

Most current-research based interventions for relational aggression, as evinced by the previous interventions described, are not geared toward site-specific challenges. They are predominantly implemented by outside consultants administering prepackaged formulas for reducing bullying without specific understanding of the school site's culture and unique challenges.

Relational aggression: Teachers' Need for Training

In contrast, while most "prepackaged" prevention/intervention programs focus on educating and informing the students about relational aggression and healthy alternative behaviors, these consultant-implemented programs do not address teacher training, beyond the

“how-to” of intervention program implementation protocol. The aforementioned interventions are created and implemented by outsiders coming on to the school campus, however, research suggests that the teachers, as the primary adults at the school, are not trained to identify relationally aggressive behaviors, and need training in order to effectively and consistently intervene (Yoon et al., 2004). Without training, research suggests that teachers often consider relational aggression as normative behaviors for middle school girls (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Boulton, 1997; Jeffrey et al., 2001). Clarke & Kiselica (1997) found that relationally aggressive acts often go unnoticed by adults or are “mistaken as ‘typical’ adolescent behavior” (p.139). Additionally, Boulton’s (1997) frequently cited study, found that less than 50% of teachers believed that social isolation was a form of bullying and that 25% of teachers believed that name calling, spreading nasty stories, and intimidating by staring should not be regarded as bullying. Because relational aggression is often not visible and its negative effects not tangible, teachers often do not recognize relationally aggressive behaviors as bullying (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Craig et al., 2000; Espelage & Swearer, 2004; O’Moore, 2000; Yoon et al., 2004). Relational aggression’s lack of recognition as bullying is in stark contrast to physical bullying, which is frequently cited as a bullying behavior (Craig et al., 2000). Craig et al.’s (2000) study of prospective teachers’ attitudes towards bullying found that “interactions involving physical aggression were labeled as bullying more often, viewed as more serious and considered more worthy of intervention than verbal aggression” (p.15). Bauman & Del Rio (2006) corroborate this finding and go on to suggest that pre-service teachers consider relational bullying to be less serious than other forms of bullying and have less empathy for victims of relational bullying. Additionally, pre-service teachers are less likely to intervene and would take less severe actions in instances of relational bullying than in situations of physical or bullying.

Research further contends that when teachers ignore or mishandle relational aggression behaviors, it can be perceived by their students as condoning the behaviors and thereby passively reinforcing the relational aggression (Yoon et al., 2004; Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Studies confirm that relational aggression teacher education and training programs should be included in any anti-bullying program (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Craig et al., 2000; Espelage & Swearer, 2004; Yoon et al., 2004).

Olweus (1994b) and Espelage & Swearer (2004) find that teachers play an integral role in creating a school climate that either tolerates or discourages any form of bullying. Researchers recognize that that the “whole-school approach” (Espelage & Swearer, 2004, p.133) relies on teachers’, parents’, students’ and communities’ involvement to address school issues. If teachers are not trained to identify acts of relational aggression and its “signs, effects, and causes” (Espelage & Swearer, 2004, p.133) they are ill-prepared to prevent/intervene with the behavior, and therefore passively condone it as normal and acceptable, enabling an environment in which relational aggression is allowed (Craig et al., 2000; Yoon et al., 2004). Teachers play a significant role in understanding and creating a school culture; their informed knowledge is vital to create a lasting intervention that does not just address the students’ immediate behaviors but also fundamentally changes the school culture in meaningful and stable ways.

Further research finds that teachers realize their deficit and desire additional education and training with issues of bullying and relational aggression. Byrne (1994) found that in his study of bullies, victims and teachers at seven Dublin schools, only five percent of the teachers surveyed felt they had adequate training to deal with bullying in their schools. Boulton’s (1997) frequently-cited study confirms this finding and found that while the majority of teachers in the sample indicated that they felt a responsibility to prevent bullying, they overwhelmingly

expressed a rather low level of confidence. The majority of respondents indicated that they wanted more training.

Relational aggression prevention/intervention training is relevant to the research that finds that students who are relationally aggressed infrequently self-report the bullying (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; O'Moore, 2000). According to a nation-wide study on bullying of Irish school children in primary and post-primary schools, 65% of primary students and 84% of post-primary students who reported being bullied had not told their teachers of their victimization (O'Moore, 2000). O'Moore (2000) suggests "if teachers were to learn to recognise the signs of [subtle] victimisation...they would be able to communicate incidents to the relevant parents...Strategies could then be developed to deal with the bullying" (p.103). According to Swearer & Cary's (2003) study of middle schoolers' perceptions and attitudes towards bullying, 80% of a sample of US middle school students believed that adults in the school were unaware of the bullying (Swearer & Cary, 2003). The researchers suggest that since students do not believe that the bullying was recognized by the teachers and staff, they may feel that the school staff does not care about the bullying and therefore the students have little hope that the behaviors can change. The researchers further recommend that "teacher and staff training programs should include training on the complexity behind bullying behaviors" (Swearer & Cary, 2003, p.76). Unnever & Cornell (2004) corroborated this finding with their study of 2,437 students in six middle schools; victims were less likely to come forward if they felt their school tolerated the bullying behavior. The researchers contend that according to their study, "if victims believe that their teachers overlook bullying or do little to stop it, they will have little incentive to seek help from school authorities" (Unnever & Cornell, 2004, p. 384). Casey-Cannon's (2001) probed more deeply into why middle school victims of relational aggression often do not report

the bullying, and found that adults' inattention to victimization "provokes negative feelings and fear of informing adults" (p. 145). This reflects the necessity of teachers being trained to proactively recognize and intervene with relational aggression, to avoid a culture of victimization and fear.

Casey-Cannon et al. (2001) also found that based on interviews with a small sample of 20 adolescent girls pulled from a larger sample of 157 7th grade girls, the students reported that they believe teachers are often hesitant or unwilling to get involved. Yet, the students also report their belief that teachers should intervene in instances of relational aggression. In addition, Crothers, Kolbert & Barker's (2006) study of 285 middle school students regarding the students' preferences for anti-bullying intervention found that students desired teachers to be proactive in helping them solve bullying situations. The researchers also found that the middle schoolers felt adverse to strategies that involved non-teaching staff. In this study, the two top-rated preferences for intervention strategies would both be employed by teachers. Crothers et al. (2006) contend that "this finding highlights the importance of training teachers in identifying and intervening in bullying situations" (p.482). This is especially important when the bullying behaviors are relationally aggressive and inherently subtle, covert, and difficult to recognize (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Young et al., 2006). This research reflects that students do not feel comfortable with outside consultants implementing programs; instead, students desire their teachers, who know them and the particular school's dynamics, to be central interventionists.

Conclusion

Relational aggression is a type of bullying that often goes unrecognized and is distinct from overt aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) . Characterized by covert and subtle social

aggression, research has demonstrated that it is a predominant form of bullying among girls and associated with social-psychological maladjustment (Coyne et al., 2006; Crick et al., 1996). Moreover, these bullying behaviors have been shown to increase in frequency and maladjustment severity as girls enter middle school (Galen & Underwood, 1997; Unnever & Cornell, 2004). Finally, research suggests that existing relational aggression prevention/intervention programs are most-often pre-packaged and formulaic, infrequently involving teachers in their creation and implementation (Leff et al., 2010). Simultaneously, students report their desire for teachers to be central interventionists while teachers admit they need additional education and training about relational aggression behaviors and interventions.

Based on the socio-ecological theory of bullying, relational aggression must not solely be considered a student problem, but as a symptom of an interplay of factors and stakeholders. Yet, most existing prevention/intervention programs significantly focus on the students rather than the school community as a whole. Thus, it is necessary for an intervention to address the teachers as pivotal element of relational aggression intervention and take the particular school community into account.

As of now, few intervention programs are designed from “the bottom up,” which take into account a particular school community’s influencing factors and dynamics. Of those that do exist, most are not empirically researched. Furthermore, there are no pre-packaged educational intervention programs that raise student and adult awareness of relational aggression (Verlaan & Turmel, 2010). Since little previous research exists regarding the implementation of a site-specific relational aggression intervention program for middle school girls, my study will fill that gap in the research by studying a prevention/intervention program that takes into account a specific school’s needs and influencing stakeholders.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Overview and Research Questions

In the preceding chapters, I suggested the need for teachers at Whirlwind Academy to identify the problem of relational aggression among their middle school girl students in order to work towards effective interventions. Existing interventions do not include teachers' self-reflection as a method towards creating sustainable change in the students' relational aggression behaviors. Relational aggression, or relational aggression (RA), is a type of bullying consisting of purposefully manipulating and damaging one's peer relationships and primarily affects middle school girls (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Prinstein et al., 2001; Unnever & Cornell, 2004). While research has documented the efficacy of bullying intervention programs, most existing bullying interventions focus predominantly on overt physical bullying (Leff et al., 2009). This action research study builds on previous intervention research and relational aggression studies.

Through this research, I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the action research process change teacher's identifications of relational aggression behaviors among middle school girls?
2. What do middle school teachers report as effective intervention strategies to decrease relational aggression among their students?
3. To what extent do the intervention strategies appear to increase teachers' confidence to recognize and decrease relational aggression among middle school girls?
4. What is the process by which teachers' change their identifications of relational aggression behaviors and effective intervention strategies?

Research Design & Methods

This study was conducted as qualitative action research in order to best answer my research questions through the teachers constructing the meaning behind the intervention processes. While quantitative analyses may allow for researchers to assess outcomes, this method does not allow for a qualitative analysis of the teachers' changing perceptions, motivations, and feelings regarding the interventions. Merriam indicates that a central component of qualitative methods is the ability for "individuals [to] construct reality in interaction with their social worlds" (2009, p. 22). Within my study, the participants continuously constructed their own realities as they implemented the interventions. Specifically, teachers considered their "realit[ies]" –the specific site challenges, the specific students, their dynamics with their students, as well as their personal pedagogical approaches—to inform their construction of the intervention. Because the research questions target how such programs may be created and implemented within a specific school context, we considered the qualities of the particular school community.

Additionally, qualitative methods were appropriate because bullying is subtle and the teachers must rely on their personal knowledge and confidence to address it. This study's research questions asked the practitioners to consider their perceptions, beyond simply the frequency of the behaviors they witness.

This study incorporated qualitative action research methods that have been used across educational settings (Stringer, 2004). The teacher-led research documented the iterative action research process, identified peer-to-peer socially aggressive behaviors, developed reflective intervention strategies, implemented their strategies, and analyzed practices for effectiveness. The goal of the study was to establish a research-based site-specific intervention program for

educators. Action research empowered the practitioners as researchers to study the qualities of relational aggression among middle school girls in their school setting. In order to understand how and why educators' identifications of relational aggression, perceptions of intervention efficacy, and confidence levels change (if at all), it was vital that they self-assess throughout the intervention process. Kolb (1984) and Schön (1983) suggest that when educators participate in action research, they consciously learn from their experience. This reflective practice asks the practitioners to apply their knowledge of the particular site and problem to their teaching practices, and simultaneously learn from their own research.

In order to probe deeply into the problem, I utilized multiple qualitative methods. Maxwell (2012) contends that utilizing "different methods is...valuable for providing *divergent* perspectives...thus creating a more complex understanding of the phenomena studied" (p.104). I needed to capture all the perspectives of the action researchers in order to understand the nuances of the problem. My study used a descriptive pre and post survey, journal responses, observational field notes, audio recordings, and one-on-one interviews. These methods resulted in data gleaned from direct participant perspectives as well participant-observer field notes. By relying on differing perspectives and data collection, I aimed to "gain a greater *depth* of understanding rather than simply greater breadth or confirmation of...a single method" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 104).

Observations and field notes were important methods to record and evaluate the practitioners' engagement with the process, since I measured and analyzed the practitioners' confidence levels. The practitioners' confidence was expressed not only through their words, but through their body language and tone of voice, which I observed and recorded during group meetings. Observations were appropriate to document and study research question four, because

my role as participant-as-observer allowed me to assess, observe, and document the team's behaviors and non-vocal cues without acting as an engaged and biased participant myself (Merriam, 2009).

For my research questions on changing views of relational aggression behaviors, effective intervention strategies, and confidence levels, I distributed and collected a pre and post study descriptive survey. The former assessed the relational aggression behaviors (if any) that the practitioners had previously witnessed, the intervention strategies (if any) that the practitioners had used and/or considered effective, and the practitioners' confidence levels with addressing relational aggression. The latter assessed the same identifications, behaviors, and attitudes after going through the action research study. Pre and post descriptive surveys allowed for a systematic comparison of data to document if any change took place. The findings from the initial descriptive surveys were discussed at the following group meetings as part of the action research cycle.

Additionally, I had the practitioners' self-assess through journal reflections. Journals allowed me to study the action research process as the participants "may use journals to refine ideas, beliefs, and their own responses to the research in progress" (Janesick, 1999, p. 505). Practitioners regularly recorded their personal reflections of the AR process, as well as their first-hand experiences identifying socially aggressive behaviors, their first-hand accounts of interventions, and their confidence levels dealing with relational aggression. The journals were used to shape the discussion topics and support data from the pre and post surveys. Journals helped me understand the teachers' ongoing development and changes. They were also used to shape the discussions and support the descriptive statistics from the pre and post surveys.

Lastly, I conducted post-intervention one-on-one quasi-structured interviews. I posed questions regarding each practitioner's post-intervention confidence levels regarding relational aggression intervention. I also asked follow-up questions that probed into what, if anything, facilitated a change in their confidence level. Quasi-structured interviews dug more deeply into the questionnaire responses and helped develop more robust understanding of the questionnaire responses. When assessing teachers' confidence levels, it was vital to capture each individual's introspective experience; quasi-structured interviews allowed for me to ask follow-up questions depending upon each individual's response (Merriam, 2009).

Site Selection & Access

I conducted this study at Whirlwind Academy, a 7th-12th grade private school located in a suburban setting. Because Whirlwind is a co-ed middle school, it was an appropriate school at which to study relational aggression intervention; research shows that relational aggression is a frequent behavior between middle school girls. Whirlwind Academy's mission is to "challenge students to achieve excellence in a nurturing, inclusive community." Because this site is a private school that competes for business in a competitive educational marketplace, the school has incentive to not subvert their mission statement by addressing relational aggression.

Though Whirlwind Academy's mission statement touts its inclusivity, an internal online survey conducted with all the middle school students (n=176) found that relational aggression is a notable problem at the school. The survey showed that at Whirlwind, 37.6% of middle schoolers reported being relationally victimized at least once or twice in a typical month. The same survey also found that nearly 60% of middle-schoolers at the school have witnessed acts of

relational aggression during the course of a typical month. (Whirlwind Academy, 2013). Yet, Whirlwind Academy had taken no action to address these behaviors.

Additionally, because this school campus contained both middle and high school students and begins in seventh grade, students were particularly at-risk for relational aggression. Research finds that upon entering middle school students often use socially aggressive tactics to establish a lasting social dominance and popularity. This research demonstrates that as students enter a new school setting and scramble to establish his/her social standing, they frequently employ relational aggression to assert and cement their social status (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996; Rose et al., 2004; Yoon et al., 2004), thus relational aggression is a prevalent tactic for students in middle school. Students also placed tremendous value on their social relationships and status. They therefore engage more frequently in relational aggression when they perceive their social status to be long-lasting. Since Whirlwind Academy caters to students in 7th-12th grade, middle schoolers at this site may use relational aggression behaviors more frequently than students at traditional middle schools. Students' friendships and social standing may be perceived to carry more weight, because they will be on *one* campus with each other through their senior year (a feature unique to private schools). Though students report problems, Whirlwind had no existing intervention strategies for either the students or the teachers.

Educators from this school were an appropriate population for this study as the school had a highly competitive atmosphere that fosters relationally aggressive behaviors among the students. The very nature of "exclusivity" that exists in the private school culture enables these behaviors. Therefore middle school teachers from this school were at the front-line of witnessing and intervening in acts of relational aggression. According to existent research, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological framework explains that relational aggression among

students is a phenomenon that is influenced by the community around it, including the individual, teachers, family, and society (Swearer et al., 2006). Thus, middle school educators play a pivotal role in affecting the relationally aggressive behaviors of their students. Teachers were ill-prepared to recognize and address this type of bullying at this site, because this private school had no existing intervention strategies in place. The data collected from this study was particularly impactful and reproducible in other grades and with other teachers at this site.

I gained access to this site by speaking with senior administrators at the school, the Director of the Middle School and the Middle School Dean of Students. They gave their permission for me to conduct the study and expressed interest in finding out more about the problem of relational aggression at the site. Additionally, the Middle School Dean of Students expressed interest in being a part of the action research team.

Participants

I conducted my study with a group of eight middle school teachers and a middle school dean. The participants were selected based on the premise that they taught a middle school course or mentored, coached, advised, or oversaw middle school students in an official capacity. Since this study examined relational aggression among middle school female students, middle school educators were the most likely to be familiar with those students, as well as have the most personal investment in creating a change for the middle school.

The participating teachers (n=9) volunteered to be part of the study group and included: the middle school dean of students (pseudonym of Amy), a first-year seventh and eighth grade English teacher (pseudonym of Dana), an eighth grade history teacher/special programs coordinator (pseudonym of Melissa), a second-year seventh and eighth grade visual arts

instructor (pseudonym of Tina), a second-year middle school math teacher (pseudonym of Dina), a fifth-year librarian who works closely with middle-schoolers (pseudonym of Cici), a ninth grade veteran (>5 years) English teacher (pseudonym of Jenny), the lead middle school science teacher (pseudonym of Peggy), and a third-year eighth grade history teacher/Director of Global Programs (pseudonym of Erika).

Additionally, seven middle school girls were included in this study to share their perspectives on relational aggression with the teachers. The student panel included one African-American eighth grade girl, a Persian-American eighth grade girl, a Chinese-American seventh grade girl, and four Caucasian eighth grade girls. This sample was representative of the predominant cultures within the middle school student body.

The girls were members of the Student Leadership Council and volunteered to participate in the study. They met twice with the research team to answer teachers' questions and share their experiences with relational aggression at Whirlwind. They additionally offered feedback to the educators regarding their perceptions of effective intervention strategies. These middle school girls were important to have in the study as they offered first-hand accounts of the problem as well as represent all the middle school girls' voices.

Recruitment

To gain participants, I sent an email to all the middle school teachers explaining the study, the commitment that the study involved, and asking teachers to respond if they wanted to participate. Their understanding of and commitment to the process was important as they were asked to actively engage in the three month-long action research process. The email outlined

possible benefits of participating in the study, including food provided at every meeting. It additionally expressed that the administration condoned the study.

To gain middle school girl student participation in the study, I sent an email to the Middle School Dean of Students to make an announcement at a Student Leadership Council meeting regarding the study. The announcement informed students to email me if they were interested in participating in a study of middle school relational aggression among girls. It also informed the Student Leadership Council members (middle school students who have been previously elected by their peers to work with faculty and administration) that they were expected to meet with a group of educators two to three times over the course of three months and would be asked to speak as voices for their peers, as well as offer personal experiences if they wished. I then emailed each of the students' parent(s) or guardian(s) to get their consent for their child to participate in the study. I included as many students as were interested in and committed to the study process. This purposeful selective sampling was appropriate as these students' experiences at Whirlwind offered a homogenous sampling that represented all the girls in middle school at Whirlwind.

Data Collection & Analysis

Data collection and analysis took place simultaneously because Action Research is an iterative process in which the practitioners-as-researchers engage in simultaneous learning and implementation. The practitioners' data influenced their practice, thus dictating the need for concurrent data collection and analysis.

Before the practitioners' first collective meeting as action researchers, I collected data on teachers' initial identifications of relational aggression. I used a pre-intervention descriptive

survey, which had been piloted with other teachers from another school (Appendix B). I coded the responses for emerging themes and then presented the themes to the practitioners during the second session.

I also took observation notes after each session to record the practitioners' responses and reflections on the survey findings. As action research differs from traditional models of research, in which the researcher remains objective and detached from the subjects in order to protect against "contaminat[ion]" (Merriam, 2009, p. 127), it was important to recognize my role as participant-as-observer in the action research process. My role as the action research facilitator took precedence over detached field note taking (Merriam, 1997). Because of my involvement and engagement in the discussions and process, each session was additionally audio recorded by an iPhone and an iPad, to ensure validity and protect against my memory fallibility. I hired a professional typist to transcribe each audio recording. Though I informed the teachers that I would turn off the recording devices at any point if they wished, at no point in the study did a teacher make that request. Nor did I need to turn off the audio recording device because it seemed to inhibit behavior or discussion.

During the initial group session, I also used existing data from the site to inform the practitioners regarding student perceptions about relational aggression. I present the statistical data garnered from a middle school student survey on bullying at the study site (Appendix A) and then prompted the practitioners to analyze the student responses in comparison to their own questionnaire responses.

Because action research involves an iterative reflective practice in which "individuals engage in critical reflection on their own action" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2009, p. 19), between several group meeting I asked the practitioners to write reflective journal responses in response

to specific prompts. I emailed the prompts directly to each practitioner after the sessions, and they emailed me their responses back before the next group meeting (Appendix C). Upon my receipt back of each journal response via email, I removed all identifying markers, printed out the responses, and attached an identifying number to the journal response. Each response was then coded for emerging themes. The emergent themes and ideas shaped the discussion topics for the following group meetings.

I then emailed a survey monkey descriptive survey to the teachers immediately following our final in-person session (Appendix B). The Survey Monkey link was embedded in an email that thanked them for their participation and requested that they complete the survey to gather post-intervention data. I coded the survey with a highlighter and Microsoft Excel using the same themes from the pre-intervention survey and made note of similarities and differences from the pre-intervention survey.

Lastly, I conducted an audio recorded post-intervention quasi-structured interview with each teacher (Appendix D). A professional typist transcribed the audio recordings, and I then used a highlighter and Microsoft Excel to code all prevalent themes that arose in the interviews. I hoped to uncover the educators' self-assessment of their experiences in the AR process: Specifically, which elements of the process were impactful (if any) and what elements (if any) detracted from the intervention. Additionally, I aimed to determine how the AR process influenced (if at all) the practitioners' identification of relational aggression, sense of effective relational aggression intervention strategies, and their personal confidence levels to identifying and intervene in relational aggression among their girls. I posed questions that asked them to reflect on those topics at the beginning of the study, how they regarded the topics at the conclusion of the study, and what the influencing factors were that facilitated any change. The

one-on-one interviews took place in empty classrooms on the school campus and were 20-30 minutes long with ten questions, posed by me. I asked follow-up questions as necessary to tie back to my research questions. I piloted my interview questions before the actual interviews with other teachers at the school who did not teach middle school and were not part of the action research team. The final interview also allowed me to present each participant with an overview of my findings and elicit their response or corroboration of these findings. This allowed for both validation of the data as well as completing the final action of the action research cycle: “Diagnosing/Planning action/Taking action/Evaluating action” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2009, p. 24)

Role Considerations

As mentioned previously, it was vital to consider my dual roles as researcher and group facilitator as action research dictated. These two roles required special accommodations that ensured my impartiality towards the practitioners and the data they provided. This was done through recording devices and multiple research methods, so I both engaged in and facilitated the group meetings, without being an outside researcher and observer. Rather, by taking post-meeting field notes and audio recording the meetings, I contributed to the discussions and actively listened to the teachers. I then analyzed the data at a later point. Additionally, as facilitator/researcher I employed the four elements of rigor put forth by Coghlan & Brannick (2009): 1) Engaging and recording the multiple action research cycles including how diagnosing, planning, taking action, and evaluating were done, 2) recording (through my own journal reflections) how I challenged my own assumptions and interpretations of what happened continuously through the project (so that I meta-analyze myself to help avoid bias or leading the

practitioners), 3) Accessing as many different point of views regarding the intervention to produce “confirming and contradictory interpretations” (p.28), 4) Making sure my interpretations and diagnoses are “grounded in scholarly theory” (p.28). I continuously meta-analyzed myself to ensure that I adhered to these principles. Additionally, I aimed not to unintentionally lead the practitioners towards any preferences or thoughts I had unless it was information that was intentional.

Ethical Considerations

Because the school administration had signed off on the study, I considered that the administrators may have wanted to be kept abreast of the study as it was in process. This may have interfered in the safe and confidential environment of the action research team. I addressed this concern by having a pre-study meeting with the school administrators and explicitly told them they were unable to access the study process until the action research concluded and the findings were presented to middle school community. I made sure that the Director of the Middle School signed a Memorandum of Understanding that acknowledged this. Additionally, I told the administration that the study was confidential and that neither I, nor any of the action research researchers, would share any information from the study and/or the participants with them.

Another ethical concern was that the teachers may have wanted to retroactively change data. I considered the possibility that if a teacher felt the study portrayed her in an unflattering light, she may want me to change a transcription or delete an element of the audio recording, thus interfering with the authentic data. I planned to address this concern by making sure that their request for a change was noted in the data. I additionally reviewed the “ground rules” for the study with them at our initial gathering, and made sure to get informed consent from each

teacher before the study began. Throughout the process I stressed their anonymity as participants in the study, and that I replaced each of their names with identifying numbers to obscure both the school and practitioners' identities.

A significant ethical consideration involved students' participation in the study. Students may have felt that they had to filter what they said because they were speaking with educators who hold positional power over them. Students may have also worried that the teachers would tell others what the students had reported in the sessions. I combatted both of these ethical concerns by having preemptive meetings with both the teachers and the students, at which I affirmed the "ground rules" of the study; assured confidentiality, and reinforced that no information would be used except for the research itself. I also assured the students that all participants' names and identifying markers would be coded and removed from all reports. Additionally, because the students were minors, I obtained informed consent by both the students and their parents or guardians.

Because analyzing data regarding relational aggression stirred emotional discussions to which the action researchers or students may have negatively responded, I made sure to note the teachers' and students' body language and other cues that may have indicated they were upset. If a participant had negatively reacted to any of the study content, I planned to privately consult with them, and ask how they want to proceed.

Validity & Reliability

Validity was a concern. Because this intervention asked teachers to analyze their own practices, teachers may have been reticent to honestly admit fallibility or lack of knowledge. They may have been afraid that I would report back to the administration. In order to establish

trust and foster an open and honest group setting, I held an informal meeting with the teachers to discuss the action research cycle, the confidentiality of the process, their role as participants, and my role as researcher.

Because research demonstrates that action research that is grounded in “a heightened awareness of purpose, strategies, and practices” has a greater chance of producing valid data (Reason & Bradbury, 2006, pp. 344–345), I stressed that action research is a process of inquiry and action, and the value of the research was not whether a change was successful but the practice of the learning process itself. While I ensured their anonymity, I initially asked them to share their personal motivations and goals for volunteering for the study. In this way, we had an initial frank discussion that illuminated each teacher’s personal agendas.

Additionally, at this same meeting I discussed with them the vitality of being honest throughout the process. Along this line, I repeatedly stressed that this study was not looking for a “right” or “wrong” conception of relational aggression intervention; any honest reflection they offered was valuable to the study.

Reactivity was also a central validity issue that I confronted within this study. Because I am a fellow middle school teacher who the other practitioners may perceive as an “expert,” they may have tried to tell me the answer they think I wanted to hear, i.e. suggest that *all* mean behaviors between girls or boys were bullying. Because this was be a long-term project over several months, I continuously reiterated that I had no prescribed agenda beyond discovering how a teacher intervention may impact t change towards relational aggression.

I also triangulated as much of the data as possible through several collection methods to capture multiple perspectives of the data. Including nine teachers across several disciplines

ensured that each practitioner has a unique perspective, so they may generate data from each other instead of solely reacting to me.

I anticipated that my personal bias would be a central validity issue. Because I was involved in the action research process as a facilitator, it could have been argued that my participation and bias “tainted” the data. I had biases regarding the prevalence of relational aggression among the site’s middle school girls, as well as the behaviors that constitute relational aggression. I avoided communicating these biases by administering a pre-intervention questionnaire to gather their unadulterated initial perspectives. I also piloted the journal prompts and interview questions to a colleague who knew little about the topic, to ensure that the prompts and questions I posed did not communicate my bias. I also relied on data from an existing middle school bullying survey.

Generalizability was also a concern with regards to reliability. Because of limited resources and time, I had a limited sample size. The findings from the study may not be applicable to a larger population of middle school teachers. Also, because I conducted my study at a suburban private school, the findings may not be generalized to public middle schools nor rural middle schools. Action research, and the socio-ecological framework which I used, acknowledge that the teachers are vital stakeholders in their school. To this end, the findings of this action research study suggested the need for other suburban middle school teachers to conduct their own enquiry into relational aggression. Each particular school’s problems and stakeholders are unique and no one intervention is universally applicable.

Conclusion

I conducted this study in conjunction with a team of middle school teachers who were interested in analyzing relational aggression between middle school girls at Whirlwind Academy. The site-specific nature of this study is the defining and unique characteristic of this research; only one study had been previously done (concerning a different age-level) that examined a site-specific intervention process for teachers (rather than a pre-packaged, outsider-created intervention program). The fact that this study was site-specific, however, did not make it applicable solely to Whirlwind Academy. Rather, the goal of this study was to both inform Whirlwind Academy teachers of methodology that works *at Whirlwind with Whirlwind* students and teachers, as well as document a process that may be employed at other schools. Rather than prescribing an intervention program, this qualitative action research process was designed for replication at other sites whose teachers want to intervene in this type of bullying.

After I collected and analyzed the data, I shared the initial findings with the action research team, so they could decide how to best disseminate the information to the Whirlwind administration and faculty as a whole. Upon initially meeting with the administration, they had wanted the researchers to conduct an in-service to share information about relational aggression and intervention strategies with the entire faculty, including the high school teachers and coaches. At the conclusion of the study, they had requested a date be set in the 2014-2015 academic year to lead an in-service dedicated to relational aggression.

Finally, the students who participated in the study have led a peer-advisory group to discuss relational aggression with their younger peers. Whirlwind may maintain this peer mediated advisory to continue the campus-wide examination of relational aggression. In these

ways, Whirlwind teachers and students may continue promoting relational aggression intervention.

Chapter Four: Findings

The teachers in this action research study examined the problem of relational aggression at Whirlwind Academy. The nine teachers read research on relational aggression (also referred to as relational aggression), questioned middle school girls, and discussed ways to identify the behaviors. They also analyzed interventions and examined the effectiveness of different strategies. The teachers and held nine weekly meetings, two of which were devoted to student panels (Appendix E). While this study did not seek to examine students' change, the students' feedback provided data and served as a catalyst for the teachers' change.

Finding #1: Purposeful Blindness

I started the initial meeting by providing the teachers with a definition of relational aggression (relational aggression) from Grotperter and Crick's (1995) study. This definition also provided the teachers with a list of behaviors to help them examine their own perceptions and identify bullying when they saw it. I assumed that the teachers had witnessed relational aggression but perhaps did not know what to call it. Their pre-study survey revealed their ambiguity concerning identifying relationally aggressive behaviors with 20 percent of the respondents reporting the gossiping was "just normal behavior for girls," and another 37 percent reporting that it "may be bullying." Additionally, nearly half the teachers also reported that social exclusion and eye-rolling "may be bullying," while 91 percent of the teachers labeled physical intimidation as definitely "bullying." The teachers responses on the survey illuminated the stark contrast between their labeling off social bullying behaviors versus physical bullying behaviors. Based on their initial survey reports, I assumed that the teachers would be eager to

learn about and recognize relational aggression to become more effective teachers and mentors. By the end of the first meeting, none of my assumptions had proven true.

While the teachers initially entered the meeting with enthusiasm, when I presented the definition of relational aggression, their mood quickly changed from that of positive to a defensive tone. The teachers made it clear that even after they were shown a definition of relational aggression with eye-rolling, gossiping, and social exclusion, they remained convinced that relational aggression was not a problem at Whirlwind. As we discovered, teachers simply did not recognize that *their* students' behaviors were forms of relational aggression. Put another way, even though the teachers recognized that in general adolescent girls engaged in manipulating friendships to cause harm, they did not recognize that when it happened *in front* of them it was relational aggression. One teacher leaned across the table as if to directly address and convince me, and asserted:

For the most part, girls don't intentionally bully each other at this school. There's something about the girls here...they might do the normal mean girl stuff that is part of growing up, but...the girls here *do not* really bully each other.

This teacher's belief was echoed by the other eight teachers who claimed the same thing when it came to their own students. Even after they read definitions and behaviors of relational aggression, read and discussed the research, and observed their own students, they still refused to label the behaviors as "relational aggression."

What began to emerge was that teachers were "purposefully blind" to relational aggression among their own girls as a way of protecting "their girls." Eight out of nine teachers echoed the conviction that Whirlwind girls "were different", they were "really nice girls," who were generally "nice," "caring," and "not bullies to each other." Once again, while the teachers recognized that their students engaged in the behavior that defines relational aggression *in front*

of them, they would *not* classify it as malicious nor bullying. Dina, the middle school math teacher, reported her own and other teachers' intentional blindness:

I definitely saw a lot of the mean girl stuff that [the girls] would do to each other. I just never thought of them as bullies or the way they treated each other would ever really be thought of as bullying.

The teachers' faith in their middle schoolers' inherent goodness made them choose not to judge them as bullies. Therefore, they did not associate the behaviors they *admitted* seeing with relational aggression.

Resistance

The teachers also initially resisted new information that threatened their adamant belief in their students' altruism. When one teacher began to outline behaviors that she *may* classify as bullying, three other teachers leaned forward and raised their voices at her and resisted any possible change in her perspective of relational aggression. This resistance was evident in Amy's assertion:

That's not bullying though! There is a difference between bullying and what your girls are doing. Was it repetitive? Do you know if it was intentional? Had other teachers seen it too or was it an isolated moment? I don't think you should consider it bullying unless you can answer a lot of those questions. Bullying *must* fit all of these very specific definitions, qualifications. I don't think we should jump to calling it bullying when it's probably not.

This statement represented *all* the teachers' resistance to identifying relational aggression. The tone of the first few meetings was often antagonistic because the teachers questioned and frequently doubted the studies. They were also quick to traduce any challenge to their relational aggression blindness that either I, or any other teacher, expressed.

Finding #2: Rationale

Normalcy

The teachers' resistance to recognizing relational aggression begged the question of *why* they were so purposefully opposed. While their denial came off as defensive, over-protective, or naïve, the rationale that emerged for their resistance was the teachers' firm belief in the normalcy of the students' behaviors. The teachers believed their students were "normal girls being girls," which led them to dismiss the behaviors as inconsequential. Initially, every teacher agreed with Amy's (the middle school dean) conviction that "A lot of it is developmentally appropriate behavior...[which] isn't bullying." Melissa expressed this ambiguity between normal "girl" behavior and bullying, when she asked in a journal response,

What I am struggling with is where is the line drawn between normal socialization and bullying. What really is 'normal' anyway? Anytime a student feels left out or unwanted, to me, is not right, but...that doesn't have to be considered relational aggression.

The teachers reported the disparity between witnessing bullying acts happening in front of them and judging them to be bullying rather than normal. This rationale for their blindness to bullying explained their resistance to change: the teachers firmly believed that the girls' behaviors were developmentally appropriate and practiced by the majority of the middle school girls. Dana, the middle school math teacher, reported:

I'd like to believe that *all* the girls aren't bullying each other...Because they *all* engage in these kinds of things throughout the course of the year. It's particularly this age...they're figuring out who to be, how to be, and how to deal with one another. It's not bullying because it's not malicious. It's just normal behavior for growing up.

Her analysis represented all the teachers' report that they witnessed relational aggression acts so prevalently during girls' adolescence in middle school, that they associated them with a "normal" part of growing up. This was also demonstrated by the pre-survey responses in which fewer than

half the respondents said they witnessed gossiping among their girl students sometimes to frequently, but did not consider it to be a possible bullying behavior.

Health

The teachers' initial assumption that the girls' behaviors were a normal part of growing up led to the teachers' secondary assumption that the relational aggression behaviors were a healthy and vital part of adolescence. The teachers expressed that since relational aggression (though they did not label it as such) was so widespread they believed it to be a fundamental part the development of important social skills for the girls. Erika, the eighth grade history teacher highlighted this finding when she said in the second action research meeting:

I don't know...I guess I feel some of [the girls social behaviors] are developmental...it's not appropriate but it's mentally normal. That's what people of all ages do and I think being a teenager you're particularly sensitive and you're still trying to figure out who you are and so it hurts more maybe. I'm not trying to say that it's okay that people purposefully exclude you, but that's life. You pick up these cues. You see someone ignoring someone so you think to yourself, 'I need social skills so I'm not the one ignored....or she must be lower than I am, so I'm going to ignore her in order to improve my own status.

Erika voiced the sentiment that each member of the research group had voiced: the teachers regarded harmful social behaviors not just as normal, but as a fundamental learning experience for their girl students. This perspective not only caused the teachers to condone relational aggression through their lack of identification, but also mislabel it in such a way that they, in fact, endorsed it as an important rite of passage. Dana, the middle school English teacher, vocalized this endorsement:

Girls need to be able to figure themselves out and how to deal with each other. Shouldn't the poor girl who monopolizes class time and quotes Shakespeare at the drop of a hat know her impact on the other girls...that they roll their eyes whenever she opens her mouth or raises her hand....I mean, developing coping mechanisms and the knowledge of

social survival skills is a pretty important part of growing up. In a sense, they have to go through [relational aggression] to become likable well-functioning adults.

The teachers did not dismiss relational aggression to defend their stance or out of naiveté, but rather because they fundamentally believed the relational aggression was a healthy and vital part of girls growing up; the teachers did not want to stigmatize nor punish what they considered a healthy coming-of-age part of development.

In addition, the teachers reported that the middle school girls' sensitivity contributed to their belief in the normalcy of the behaviors. Six of the nine teachers used words including "dramatic," "insecure," and "very sensitive," to describe middle school girls' reactions to their peers. Amy, the middle school dean, reflected:

They are transitioning and trying to figure out 'how do I choose who am I going to sit with, or who am I going to invite to my party. And then the kids who didn't get invited are trying to figure out was I not invited because there really weren't that many spots, or was I not invited because they don't like me. It's at a time when they are so insanely insecure.

Amy asserted the teachers' consensus that the social dynamics did not warrant cause for alarm. While they stopped short of *blaming* the girls, the teachers felt the girls' reaction was over-sensitive and thus did not demand their attention. This belief acted as a barrier to teachers' cognizance of relational aggression. Because the teachers believed "mean girl behavior" to be a normal and healthy part of growing up as well as dismissed girls' reactions as melodramatic, the teachers were predisposed to regard the behaviors as unremarkable. Instead, they considered relational aggression as the baseline for *normal* behavior. As a result of this, the teachers were resistant to accepting relational aggression as aberrant.

Finding #3: Teachers' Personal Identity & Resulting Assumptions

As the teachers' belief in the normalcy and health of relational aggression behaviors emerged, the underlying reason became increasingly evident: Each teacher identified with their girls' social experiences and the relational aggression itself. Cici's story represented the personal connection that all the teachers experienced:

I hated middle school so much that I used to cry every day when I got home. I was never the cool kid, and always wanted to be one of those pretty little mean girls who I thought were so cool. I was always the one person that they wouldn't invite to parties. When I talked or raised my hand in class, they'd giggle. You know...general mean girl stuff. My mom always told me to be strong and girls were just being girls. But to me, it was like, something was wrong with me.

All teachers shared their first-hand middle school experiences with relational aggression, which they also justified as normal. But though they contended that the relational aggression they endured was mundane, their emotions while telling their narratives spoke to enduring pain. Five of the teachers teared up when they recalled their memories of their "socialization" processes (both as victims of relational aggression and as bullies). Though their reflections did not bring them to tears, the other four teachers still recounted emotional and jarring experiences of middle school relational aggression (though they did call them "relational aggression"). Another teacher, Dana, recognized the connection between the teachers' personal experiences and how they viewed their students' behaviors:

I know what I went through...god, it was awful...it was a huge part of shaping me into who I am today...I see the same things going on in front of me. The same popularity contest and kind of cruel, cutting ways the girls establish dominance or ostracize another girl, or make a girl feel shitty about herself or less than. I was a cheerleader but I wasn't immune. I kind of had it from all sides...The game now hasn't changed, just the players.

Dana's quotation represented the teachers' transference of their own experiences to their students' reality. The teachers' identified with the girls' behavior so significantly that they

labeled the behaviors as “normal” and “healthy.” Because their parents and teacher had told them that their experiences were “just” a part of growing up, the teachers applied that misconception to their students. In the exit interview, Jennifer, the veteran English teacher who had experienced relational aggression nearly 30 years previous to the study, reflected:

It never occurred to me that middle school girls acting the way they do was “bullying” (making air quotes). I mean it’s a *thing* right...”mean girls?” (making air quotes again) It’s timeless....I guess I made the assumption, without ever really thinking about it, that if it happened to me and to you and to ALL our friends, it’s just a normal part of growing up. I didn’t consider lines being crossed or the bullying component AT ALL.

The socio-cultural perspective explains this relationship between the teachers’ experiences and their practice as teachers. The relational aggression that helped shape their personal identity contributed to their agency with their current students (Lasky, 2005). The teachers’ personal experiences of relational aggression as students themselves influenced both their personal and professional identity. In other words, the teachers’ own experiences enduring relational aggression shaped their assumptions, judgments and lack of relational aggression identification.

Finding #4: The Tipping Point--Teachers seeing through students’ eyes

Though the teachers’ blindness and resistance originally seemed impervious to change, their opposition softened in the fourth meeting when they held a question and answer session with seven middle school girls. While the teachers had prepared for their meeting with student panel by forming a list of questions for the girls, the teachers (and I) were unprepared for the dramatic effect of the students’ revelations. Tina, the middle school art teacher summed up the students’ impact:

It is one thing for us to sit around and read experts’ opinions of relational aggression or what we, as teachers, see or don’t see. But I never thought I’d be so touched by their stories. So much goes on in such a pointed mean way that I didn’t know....I never knew

the depth of it. Or how much of their time and attention this [relational aggression] stuff occupies. It's like their whole world.

The students' emotional revelations about their reality of relational aggression weakened the teachers' sense of normalcy and health of relational aggression behaviors. Emmy, an eighth grade girl, shared her perception of relational aggression's pervasiveness in her and her peers' lives:

There's no way to like, shake it off, or pretend that it doesn't bother you. It's totally all we can think about or deal with sometimes. When your friends aren't your friends like all of a sudden, or you *know* that girls are saying shit about you and you can't do anything about it, it's like the worst feeling in the world. I mean, I know this is horrible to admit, but I begged not to go to school. Like, I just think it's so much worse than just getting in a fight with someone or getting a bad grade. I didn't want to deal with anything or anyone. You don't know how to like pretend that everything's okay, and pretend to care about school, or sports or anything, when *nothing* is okay anymore. And no one, like, really talks about it.

As Emmy shared her heart-ache and feelings of isolation in dealing with relational aggression, the teachers were moved to tears and confronted with the students' reality to which they had been blind.

I had prepared the students for their Q & A with the teachers by providing them the same definition of relational aggression as the teachers and a list of the teachers' questions. But it was only when the girls "went off script" and began revealing personal anecdotes of relational aggression, that their authentic testimonies no longer fell on deaf ears. As Izzy, looking assertively into the teachers' eyes, said:

It's like something every day. I feel like you guys (speaking to the teachers) don't see when it's [the relational aggression] all going on sometimes. You know, like when girls decide, like, they're not going to invite you to things anymore. And then they talk about it in front of you with other friends. And none of it really is ever talked about. But it's hard when, like, you still have to be in classes and work in groups with those friends. But the teachers don't see it. Unless, you're like crying.

Though Emmy, Izzy and the other girls fell short of accusing the teachers of intentional blindness, their emotionality while telling their stories deteriorated years-long held assumptions. In her concluding interview, Jennifer, the veteran English teacher, revealed *why* hearing the girls' personal experiences and accusations was so influential for all the teachers:

I think hearing from the students kind of forced us to look at them and ourselves differently...in a way it was like holding up a mirror to how painful that own time in my life was, and how much I think I would have loved to have an ally, or a teacher to tell me that that kind of behavior is unacceptable. I think that stepping outside of my little role as "teacher" and really hearing about their whole world was a unique experience...I got to, in a way, see myself through their eyes.

Jennifer's meta-analysis of her experience expressed the connection the teachers made with the middle school girls, which softened their resistance to identifying relational aggression behaviors *as* relational aggression.

Finding #5: Cyber Relational aggression: What teachers *couldn't* see

While the teachers self-reflected about their *own* experiences through listening to the girls' anecdotes, social media bullying was a novel aspect of discussion content with which the teachers could *not* identify. The middle school girls identified cyber relational aggression, i.e. peer manipulation of the girls' public perception and relationships through social media/networking websites and apps. This type of relational aggression behavior included posting unflattering pictures, "commenting" about peers in mean ways, and posing mean-spirited anonymous questions about their peers to sites like ask.fm. These activities were entirely unfamiliar to the teachers, and thus invisible. Though I had not intended to include "cyberbullying" as part of this study, the use of social media as a means of relationally aggressing peers emerged as the prevalent medium for relational aggression at Whirlwind Academy.

The students' personal storytelling in the Q & A meeting enlightened the teachers of *where* and *how* most of the relational aggression took place. While the students still engaged in physical and verbal acts of relational aggression on campus (like changing seats or in-person rumor-spreading), the most prevalent relational aggression happened in their online worlds: on their iPads in the classrooms, their laptops in the library, and their smartphones which were seemingly glued to their hands at *all* times. Anna, an eighth grade girl, revealed this reality with cyber relational aggression:

It's like you never know what you're going to see or find out when go online or look at your phone. I have friends that invite everyone but me to their parties and then post pics on Instagram about it, knowing I'll see it. And then everyone the next day at school is talking about it and specifically knows that I wasn't invited, cuz [sic] I wasn't tagged in the pics. And then it's there and everyone is talking about it. And they know you're going to see it. But it's worse cuz *everyone* sees it and then knows what's going on.

Anna's admission, her voice cracking and eyes welling as she told it, metaphorically opened the teachers' eyes; they were shocked that this malicious and manipulative behavior had been going on in front of them and they had never witnessed nor sensed it. One of the girls, Ali, shared her perception of the prevalence of relational aggression through social media and the teachers' unawareness of it:

I know a huge thing is like commenting on each other's pics and saying really mean things about who was there or who wasn't, or what a bad pic it is, or sharing bad pics with boys you like. My "friend" did that to me...And then she did it again, and posted it again and shared it with everybody. We had this whole drama and even though it happened over the weekend, everyone was talking about it at school the next week. The girls then sat in different seats in class and the teacher had no clue why I was so upset.

The only teacher who knew the prevalence of cyber relational aggression was Amy, as numerous parents had come to her to discuss their daughters' misery caused by the online activity. For the other eight teachers, hearing the girls' first-hand accounts opened their eyes to the pervasiveness

and harmful impact of cyber relational aggression. Dina, the middle school math teacher, related this “a-ha moment,” in her final interview when she reflected:

What can start off as girls being kind of mean to each other crosses over into bullying when a kid is pointedly ignored or excluded or badgered on the internet. What I don't think I see anymore, that used to happen in front of me, is because of the internet. I used to confiscate so many notes during class that were passed, and that's where I knew everything that was going on. Well, now they're no notes, no paper trail. And I'm not “friends” with them, so I'm not privy to their wall or their posts, or anything like that, so on my end, things look so clean. But I really think that... the same social meanness and exclusion and gossiping is still going on, it's just happening outside my classroom where I don't see it at all...And it's worse. I wouldn't have even known that a lot of these sites exist or are used by the students. Let alone what the girls are doing to each other!

The students' revelations about their painful experiences with cyber relational aggression also allowed the teachers an explanation for *why* they had not previously considered relational aggression to be a problem for their students. Because cyber relational aggression was *not* a behavior with which they could personally identify, along with the invisibility of the behaviors, the teachers reasoned that there was no way *could have* been cognizant of it as relational aggression. In other words, before the students shared their stories, the teachers did not know cyber relational aggression existed, let alone its breadth and depth, therefore it allowed the teachers a rationale as to why they did not identify the *most prevalent* relational aggression behavior. Cyber relational aggression was in neither their experiential or learned knowledge base. Melissa, the eighth grade history teacher's comment revealed this:

It all made sense to me after that first meeting with the [seven middle school] girls. I don't think it was *just* that I had seen a lot of mean girl behaviors so considered them normal and commonplace. I truly didn't *know* that was out there and they [the middle school girls] were doing that online. If I had known, I'd like to believe that I...would have done something or gone to someone to stop it.

After hearing the students' heart-wrenching personal anecdotes (especially about cyber relational aggression), the teachers' resistance to recognizing relational aggression softened and their personal sense of self-efficacy remained intact.

Finding #6: Teachers' report of changes in their behaviors

After the teachers' initial Q & A session with the seven middle school girls, they were more receptive to recognizing relational aggression as a possible problem among their students. Though they did not forsake *all* their beliefs that some relational aggression behaviors may be "normal" for girls, they were no longer resistant to observing their students' social behaviors and identifying some as relational aggression. As the study progressed, the teachers recounted past experiences and observed (and documented through journaling) new relational aggression situations between their middle-schoolers. The teachers were able to identify specific prevalent relational aggression behaviors: Specifically, they all agreed that they had witnessed social exclusion of students, but had not correlated social exclusion with relational aggression. The math teacher, Dina, explained:

I have a girl come in to see me to talk at least once a month because of exclusion or 'someone was being mean to me.' I get tears all the time. I never really thought about it in terms of relational aggression, but that makes sense [now]. The dominant girls are using their social powers to make other girls feel awful and insecure. Yeah, I guess that's relational aggression.

Dina's admission reflected all the teachers' changed perception regarding social exclusion in particular. They found that social exclusion had been the predominant relational aggression in their classrooms and on campus, but had never previously associated it with relational aggression. Additionally, all nine teachers agreed that gossip and clique-forming were behaviors that they frequently had witnessed among their girl students but had not considered to be bullying.

Tina, the middle school art teacher, reported the teachers' change of their relational aggression identifications:

It's not like I didn't see girls being cruel to other girls in class before. Or that I didn't see social exclusion or eye-rolling, and the sighing or groaning when they had to work with someone they didn't want to, I just hadn't really considered it [as relational aggression]. It was kind of easy to dismiss... Now I am über conscious of it. Once you kind of know what to look for and realize the...[impact] of it, it's kind of hard not to be super aware of it.

The teachers found that once they had the information (including a specific definition and associated behaviors) about relational aggression *and* had recognized their own biases, the prevalence of the relational aggression became impossible to dismiss. This change was reaffirmed in the teachers' post-study survey responses in which zero respondents reported that gossip was "just normal behavior for girls," while 86 percent reported that it "may be bullying." Additionally, 86 percent of the teachers also reported that eye-rolling "may be bullying," while 100 percent of the teachers labeled social exclusion as "may be bullying" or definitely "bullying." When compared to the responses on the pre-survey, the teachers' reports on the post-survey reinforced their change in identifications of relationally aggressive behaviors as bullying.

The teachers also reported a change in their behaviors regarding relational aggression. Though the teachers predicted the second Q & A session with the students (this one focused on intervention strategies) would be an equally transformative experience, this did not turn out to be the case. Though the teachers asked pointed questions about what the girls wanted their teachers *to do* about the problem, and the students continued to reveal personal anecdotes about interventions, the student meeting did *not* drastically spurn the teachers to intervene in relational aggression. One student, Joanna (pseudonym), revealed:

A lot of my guy teachers don't even see anything going on. I can walk in crying and [Mr. Williams] doesn't even notice that I'm like sitting alone and miserable. Most of my guy teachers have no idea about the drama. Not that all the women teachers do, but even if like one teacher notices what's going on or asks if I'm okay or how she can help, it definitely helps. Just knowing like, someone cares.

The girls reported that teachers proactively recognizing their distress from relational aggression interactions made them feel stronger and less isolated. Yet, while the teachers conveyed that this student assertion significantly enhanced their belief in the necessity of intervention, it was *not* enough to make an actual change in their reactive behavior. While the practice of academic reading, annotating, and discussion of intervention studies combined with getting students' feedback augmented their *knowledge* about intervention preferences, their reactive *behavior* to relational aggression did not change.

Though the teachers *did* report changing their behaviors, the changes were in their preventative, rather than reactive, intervention actions. Through their journal responses, discussions, and final interviews, the teachers reported that, while they recognized the importance of teacher intervention in relational aggression or suspected relational aggression instances, their practices with intervention had been more focused on prevention than intervention. The teachers created situations to prevent relational aggression rather than reacting to relational aggression more frequently or differently. Melissa, the eighth grade history teacher, wrote in her journal response:

I know that it's not about me drawing attention to [the relational aggression behaviors], but instead modeling and clarifying expectations about the kind of behavior I expect in the classroom. I now avoid letting students pick their own working groups in class because of the dreaded "leaving out" that can often happen. Nevertheless, there are times where I have students work informally with the people at their table or next to them. I know that I will be much more careful about ensuring that it is clear who is working with whom, so that the one person on the end isn't left out or the one person sitting herself doesn't end up by default working by herself.

Melissa's report was representative of all the teachers' comments that their relational aggression prevention strategies changed, while their reactions to relational aggression situations had not evolved. While the teachers recognized that they *ought* to proactively intervene, preventative intervention was a more comfortable and non-confrontational approach. They identified

productive preventative intervention strategies including assigning particular groups for group work, setting up and discussing with the students behavioral expectations, and having assigned seating. By the conclusion of the action research, the teachers' practice had changed as they implemented these preventative measures. Dana, the novice middle school English teacher, reported:

I still don't feel comfortable for some reason actually addressing bullying in real time, so to speak. I just don't know how to best deal with each situation if I see it. I am definitely more comfortable setting up ways to stop it before it happens. Not that that's always possible, but I think that's the beginning. Like talking with them about morality and empathy *before* they become mean girls, or reading magazine or online articles or literature about bullying and its effects. It's more than just dealing with [social] bullying when it happens; it's about facilitating a school or classroom where it's not encouraged. Like even with the social media stuff...shouldn't we have some preventative rules or meetings or discussions in place to tackle this *before* they're doing it?

Dana both reinforced all the teachers' reports that they changed their preventative rather than reactive interventions and also recognized the teachers' finding that intervention/prevention had to happen at a systemic level as well.

Teachers' confidence in relation to intervention

The teachers' dramatic enhancement of relational aggression identification juxtaposed to their reticence to proactively intervene in relational aggression that happened *in front* of them spoke to the issue of their confidence. The teachers reported that though they knew *how* to intervene and which behaviors warranted their intervention, they still felt paralyzed by their lack of confidence. The final exit interviews illuminated that the teachers' lack of confidence stemmed from their fear of doing something "wrong" or doubting their own perceptions (of a specific situation). Dana, the first-year English teacher, elaborated:

I didn't feel confident seeing relational aggression or intervening because I would never even have known...what exactly to do. A lot of relational aggression is so subtle, so I

would've doubted what I was seeing...if it was really like, a bullying kind of a thing...It's such a scary thing when you're dealing with kids.

Dana's comment was in line with other teachers' initial lack of confidence. The motivations behind their low confidence levels included self-doubt and concern for harming the students by doing or saying the *wrong* thing. Though the teachers' confidence levels grew slightly as the action research cycle progressed, there was never a definitive moment during which the teachers reported full confidence in intervening in relational aggression.

Instead, a disparity emerged between teachers' confidence levels to *identify* relational aggression as opposed to teachers' confidence to *intervene* in relational aggression. This appears to be rooted in contextual differences between each bully situation and the teachers' not feeling prepared with *enough* knowledge. The exit interviews further revealed motivations behind teachers' higher confidence in *identifying* relational aggression, as compared to their lack of confidence with *intervening*. Dana, the first-year English teacher, elaborated:

After this process and discussions and readings, I feel pretty confident that I know what relational aggression is and what it looks like. And plus, even if I'm not sure, I think I've realized that *suspecting* relational aggression is enough sometimes. But when it comes to intervening, I think that because every context is different and all my relationships with different students are different, I don't think I know that what will work with one girl will work with another. I feel like I have a lot of the tools now to intervene in relational aggression, but in the moment, still don't feel comfortable.

Dana's interview response highlighted the consensus that the action researchers' confidence levels with identifying relational aggression behaviors had increased, yet their confidence with personal intervention had not.

When pressed for the reasons in their concluding interviews why this disparity existed, the teachers exposed their underlying reasons for this gap. Melissa, the eighth grade history teacher and CTL coordinator aptly related the teachers' perspective:

I feel pretty confident now in knowing what to look for in terms of [social] bullying. But when it comes to me actually *doing* something and feeling sure that I know what I'm doing and why I'm doing it, I feel like I need more training and discussion. It's almost like we need a year-long study or focus group to do analyze *our* school and write up, like in the handbook, what they suggest we do. I want some real guidelines on this.

Melissa's response reflected the consensus that they personally wanted continued education regarding relational aggression, and they wanted other teachers to undergo the same action research process. The action research teachers expressed that they would feel more confident in actively intervening in relational aggression if it was a goal embraced by the whole school community. They wanted further training, other members of the school community to recognize the problem, and most importantly, direction from the school regarding intervention strategies. I will explain the significance of this finding further in Chapter Five.

An Examination of This Action Research Process

The initial lunch meeting set the tone for all the follow-up action research meetings. The homemade food and seminar-table at the center of the room made for an environment that Erika revealed felt more "like an intimate gathering of friends around a kitchen table...than one of our usual meetings." Peggy affirmed that it was a nice change and that the homemade food and meeting of ten women made the gathering feel more "authentic." These off-the-cuff comments suggest that from the onset of the initial meeting, the teachers sensed a difference in atmosphere within these action research meetings. The teachers recognized the tone of the meeting was one of communal participation rather than a structured and formal procedure. This was an important part of the process, as it encouraged the teachers to be honest, receptive, and vulnerable in a safe environment.

The first meeting provided an opportunity for the action researchers to report their personal goals and motivations for taking part in the action research study. By sharing their goals

and motivations, they built trust with each other and simultaneously began the self-reflective process that is integral to action research. It was important that I reinforce that these meetings were a safe and collaborative environment that encouraged each teacher to push boundaries with their comfort levels (such as being the first to speak).

Additionally, because I was not asserting myself as the meeting “leader,” there existed a discomfort of not knowing the “right” thing to say. Finally, when one of the teachers broke the awkward silence, the general reticence to speak was alleviated, as each of the educators systematically took turns going around the table speaking about their personal motivations for joining the action research study group. Once Dina spoke, I (as a facilitator) no longer had to facilitate the discussion or call on the teachers.

Two themes became apparent as each educator revealed their reasons for being there: the educators’ personal histories with bullying were tied to her presence in the action research group, and each educator had joined the group with questions they wanted addressed. Eight of the nine educators first told their personal history of whether they were the “bully,” “victim,” or “bystander” when they were young. As each of the eight educators shared their personal stories, everyone else at the conference table sat quietly and nodded in understanding. When a teacher told a particularly emotional or personal story, the other teachers would gasp, or wince, sigh, or shake their head. Though I had not prompted the teachers to share their personal histories with relational aggression, the personal storytelling became a vital part of the trust-building process of the group. Over half of the teachers began their personal reflection with the sentiment of “I haven’t really ever talked about my [social experience in middle school] before.” By opening up to the group, the eight teachers established trust, confidentiality, empathy, collaboration, and an interpersonal connection to the study topic. It is important to note though, that though they

established this tone at the first meeting, as the study progressed the contentiousness between them increased as well.

Another theme that emerged in the initial meeting was that *every* educator posed at least one question as part of their motivation for joining the action research team. Questions including, “I know I’ve seen mean-spirited relational aggression, at least I think I have, but what do I do?”

Also asked by another teacher (Erika), was:

I like the idea of a research group to examine relational aggression, but aren’t we going to be looking at something that is pretty normal for girls? I mean, this has been going on forever—yes, it’s good to see what we can do, but how are we going to change something that is part of girls growing up?

Teachers posed these questions as part of their examination of their personal motivations for joining the group. The fact that *each* teacher included a question within their personal motivation suggests that were motivated to join an action research group to actively answer questions and doubts that had. The questions, represented by the examples above, ranged in topic—from the role of an educator to the motivations of girls to socially bully. The question-asking by all the teachers is notable.

Teachers’ initial sharing of motivations for joining the action research group preceded the discussion of *any* relational aggression content; therefore, the teachers’ questions stemmed from true curiosity and/or unawareness of the answers. The questions that motivated them to join the group were so significant that, without prodding by me, *all* the teachers identified their questions as significant motivations for dedicating their time to the relational aggression study group. The teachers’ body language frequently reinforced the significance of their motivating questions: six out of the nine teachers shrugged their shoulders as they rhetorically posed the question that had driven them to the meeting, while three of the nine teachers actually put their hands in the air in a

questioning motion to demonstrate that they did not have the answer. Their body language reflected true curiosity and unawareness.

The group then reflected on the results of the Relational aggression questionnaire to which each teacher has previously replied. Distributing the questionnaire before the initial meeting allowed me to share the data with the teachers as a topic of discussion, as well as a means of self-reflection and assessment. Discussion of these findings allowed the group to develop a baseline understanding of participants' initial perspectives of relational aggression. By reviewing the questionnaire data as a group, the teachers constructed a basis of understanding off of which they could build their future discussions and knowledge. This meeting served as a touchstone for comparison against much of the teacher's data from follow-up meetings.

Additionally, the survey data reflection led to a discussion among the teachers about their perceptions of relational aggression at Whirlwind Academy in particular. The segue from the questionnaire reflection to discussion of the particulars of relational aggression at Whirlwind is reflected in one teacher's comment: "I think that a lot of the behaviors listed on the survey could *definitely* be relational aggression, but I don't know if a lot of those happen here [at Whirlwind]." This type of authentic and undirected transition in discussion happened throughout all the meetings and is an important aspect of learning through reflection; as the teachers reflected upon their responses to the relational aggression questionnaire, they transferred and applied those reflections to their own experience at Whirlwind. In this way, they left the meeting and immediately applied their knowledge to their practice.

I requested for each teacher to complete "homework" in between each meeting to prepare for the next meeting. The "homework" after the first meeting was to read four studies regarding relational aggression behaviors, and make notes regarding what stood out to each teacher. This

“assignment” both prepared the teachers for the next meeting and also exposed them to seminal relational aggression research. The reading assignments included Crick and Grotpeters’ (1995) “Relational aggression, gender, and social-psychological adjustment,” Yoon et al.’s (2004) “Relational aggression in middle school: Educational implications of developmental research,” Wang et al.’s (2009) “School bullying among adolescents in the United States: Physical, verbal, relational, and cyber,” and Young et al.’s (2006) “Relational aggression: Understanding, identifying and responding in schools.” The annotation required them to distill important and relevant information from the rest of the text.

The second action research meeting revolved around discussion of the studies that each teacher had to read for “homework.” The teachers constructed their own definition of the term “relational aggression” based on an amalgamation of the studies’ various definitions. One teacher (Erika) asked, “Is there *one* definition that we should know to be able to define relational aggression?” To which another teacher (Amy) responded, “I think we need to use the important ideas from the study definitions and define it for *us* so it is clear and easy to understand.” The teachers decided on several factors: the relational aggression definition should be published in the Whirlwind Academy Handbook and utilize clear language that would be accessible to administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Additionally, “relational aggression” should be identified as a *type* of bullying and therefore incorporate elements of the definition of general bullying. The teachers defined relational aggression as doing purposeful harm to others through manipulation of one’s relationships, social acceptance, and friendships. Though based predominantly on Crick & Grotpeter’s (1995) seminal definition of relational aggression (which was one of the studies the action research team had read), the action research team found it important to insert the word “purposeful” to their definition. The teachers acknowledged that

middle school girls may often unintentionally harm each other's friendships and social stability, which should *not* be considered bullying.

For "homework," I asked the teachers to respond to a journal prompt to write about how reading and discussing the seminal relational aggression studies affected their perceptions of relational aggression among their middle school girl students. In this way, the teachers applied their research to their practice with their students. I asked the teachers to observe the interactions between their students and reflect on the girls' behaviors with regards to the relational aggression studies. This practice reinforces Kolb (1984) and Schön's finding (1983) that as educators participate in action research, they consciously learn from their experience. The systematic reflection in which practitioners participate in action research lent itself to the teachers' ability to apply their learning to their teaching. Dana, the new English teacher reflected, "I don't think there is anything we discussed that is brand new to me, but I think that our ongoing conversation has made me pay more attention to the more subtle aspects of the girls' classroom behaviors." The action research team members verified Dana's sentiment of "pay[ing]" more attention based on the discussions and seeing behaviors differently, thus altering their teaching practices. This cyclical process of action research led the teachers to learn through the meetings and readings, and immediately apply their knowledge to their teaching practices. The journal prompt provided an initial reflection opportunity on the process, and the third action research meeting also facilitated continued reflection.

The third group meeting began with a reflection of the past week and the teachers' changes {if at all} of their perceptions of relational aggression. This discussion provided an opportunity to validate the journal response data, as well as give the teachers an opportunity to learn from each other. At this point in the study, the teachers' purposeful blindness still

intensified the meetings. Though I posed questions to the teachers to force them to question their assumptions (such as having them juxtapose their classroom observations with the list of relational aggression behaviors from an academic study), the teachers' resistance to altering their relational aggression identifications was still intact.

The third meeting also served as an opportunity for the teachers to develop questions to pose to a middle school girl student panel with whom they would be meeting at the next meeting. Some of the questions the teachers created to ask the students included: What do *you* consider the definition of relational aggression to be, specific to your experiences at [Whirlwind]? What behaviors do you regard as relational aggression behaviors? Do you sense that the behaviors you identified are *normal* middle school girl behaviors or that the behaviors shouldn't be accepted as normal (Appendix F)?

At the fourth action research meeting, the teachers met with the middle school girl students. The panel of seven middle school girls from Whirlwind were members of the Student Leadership Committee and volunteered to participate in the research group. Their input and feedback were vital, as the information allowed the teachers to validate their own perceptions and findings regarding relational aggression. The students' first-hand accounts regarding relational aggression validated and refuted the teachers' suppositions.

The students were not asked to sit in front of the teachers, but rather join the teachers at the table. This seating arrangement purposefully minimized their nervousness and any sense of propriety or formality. It was important to set a tone disparate from a classroom setting so that the middle school girls did not feel that they had to have "right" answers for the teachers. Additionally, having an intimate, non-classroom tone to the meeting reinforced to the students that they could speak freely without fear of punishment, judgment, or expectation. The students

were eager for the traditional teacher/student roles to be reversed and the teachers to pose questions.

The ninth grade English teacher, Jennifer, posed the question: “Do you gals [sic] think that relational aggression happens here? I mean, do you see it, or feel it, in a real way at school?” This question ended up as both the first and last question posed directly from the list of questions the teachers had in front of them. As the girls answered, interrupting each other multiple times, they brought up new topics and issues. In this way, the meeting became a dynamic conversation rather than a question and answer session. The students inadvertently addressed seven of the ten listed questions during the conversation, though no teacher asked the questions verbatim.

After meeting with the students, I emailed each teacher a journal prompt which asked them to reflect on their meeting with the middle school girls. I asked them if they had any “preconceived notions or biases” going into the student panel meeting as well as what aspect of the discussion “impact[ed]” them or “inform[ed]” them in a meaningful way.

The fifth session with the action research team focused on reflecting on the student meeting as well as beginning to discuss relational aggression intervention strategies. Once again, the in-person reflection was designed to validate the journal data and for the teachers to learn from each other’s perceptions of the student meeting. Peggy, the middle school science teacher, asserted that hearing from the middle-schoolers, “truly changed how I saw my practices and assumptions about what the girls were doing and feeling. I thought I had a pretty good feel for it, but god, was I humbled.” Five of the nine teachers echoed the finding that the student-meeting had reassured the worth of the action research group. Another teacher, Dana, reinforced Peggy’s statement by writing in her journal response,

I can't imagine discussing this topic now without having met with the students. They brought up so many things that had never actually occurred to me. I look forward to hearing from them about what they think we should do about it.

The second half of the fifth meeting focused on introducing the topic of teacher intervention strategies. I posed the question, "Have you ever "intervened" (making air quotes) in acts of relational aggression? Even if you're not sure, do you think you might have? If so, how?" Immediately following my segue, there was a brief (about 45 seconds) period of silence while the teachers leaned back in their chairs, as if to physically disengage from the conversation. Four teachers glanced down at their plates, while the remaining four teachers (Erika, the eighth grade history teacher and Global Programs Director, was not present at the meeting) looked at each other, waiting for someone else to respond first. Peggy was the first to respond, leaned forward, and began by saying, "I don't know if it's intervening, but, I have definitely tried to set up situations that prevent this mean social dynamics and exclusion."

The passive posture and silence that ensued after I posed the intervention question, along with Peggy's response of, "I don't know if it's intervening," suggests that the teachers were uncomfortable talking about intervention when they had not been given any information on the topic. They exhibited behavior that suggested their reticence to be "wrong" in the face of their fellow teachers. Once Peggy shared her experience, the conversation haltingly began again with another teacher affirming Peggy's response, and then offering up her own experience with what she "may consider intervention." The teachers continued to use qualifiers including, "I don't know but," and "I think I kind of intervened when...". These qualifiers suggested the teachers' discomfort and doubt about asserting their classroom actions/interventions with relational aggression. For "homework," I asked the teachers to "read, review & highlight (or make notes)" regarding intervention literature that I would distribute to them. These studies included: Merrell et al.'s (2006) "Relational aggression in children and adolescents: A review with implications for

school settings,” Casey-Cannon et al.’s (2001) “Middle school girls’ reports of peer victimization: Concerns, consequences, and implications,” Bauman & Del Rio’s (2006) “Preservice teachers’ responses to bullying scenarios: Comparing physical, verbal, and relational bullying,” Yoon et al.’s (2004) “Relational aggression in middle school: Educational implications of developmental research,” and Crothers et al.’s (2006) “Middle school students’ preferences for anti-bullying interventions.” I also asked them to be prepared to discuss the studies at the next meeting and how they pertained to their experiences at Whirlwind.

In the sixth meeting, the teachers focused on examining the literature they had read over the previous week. While most of them had not annotated the studies, they each had highlighted sections that stood out to them as either relevant to Whirlwind Academy, or passages on which they had questions. A central topic they raised was the definition of “intervention.” The visual arts teacher, Tina, asked the question, “Is prevention the same as intervention?” The math teacher, Dina, followed up with the comment,

When I can’t handle it, and they are disrupting my little nest of a classroom, Get out!...I am not dealing with that right now...I definitely do handle some of it, but if it’s during a time when I can’t handle it, or out of my pay grade, I just send them to Tallie (pseudonym for the school counselor. That’s a little hands off, but I don’t know if that is still considered intervention.

The conversation began to shift focus from what the literature said about interventions, to what the teachers thought worked, or would work, at Whirlwind to curb “the drama,” between girls (A term the middle school girls coined to describe relational aggression.) While the specific intervention strategies with which the teachers came up will be discussed later in the chapter, it is important to note that the AR group never reached a consensus on the definition of relational aggression intervention.

The latter half of the meeting focused on creating questions for the next student-panel meeting (Appendix G). Some of the questions the teachers proposed included: “What would be some good things for teachers to keep in mind about girl social dynamics when they assign group work or even arrange the seats in class? (Does being able to choose your own groups enhance or alleviate drama)?” Another question was, “Do you think teachers/faculty recognize when relational aggression is taking place? If so, how do you think they should handle it? If not, would you want them to recognize and address it?” The teachers’ questions focused solely on the teacher’s role in intervention. The central tenet of each question was students’ perception of the teacher’s role in middle school relational aggression and what the students’ perspective on effective vs. ineffective teacher intervention strategies.

The seventh and eighth meetings mirrored the previous student panel meeting and follow-up discussion. Two of the middle school girls expressed gratitude to me for being included in the study and one student said, “I’ve been looking forward to this meeting for weeks. There is so much drama right now.” Another student built upon this and reinforced the vitality of the action research group and student involvement: “We need to do this, like, weekly. But with all the girls. They should know about what we’ve talked about.” The question and answer session quickly evolved into an animated discussion. While none of the teachers took notes during the meeting, there were six moments during which teachers said, “Wow,” or nodded in agreement to what the students were saying. One teacher, Dana, noted at the end of the meeting that she liked this meeting more than any of the others because it offered some tangible ideas of what she, herself, could do, rather than being a solely theoretical discussion.

At the eighth and penultimate meeting, the teachers formed a list of findings from listening to the students. This occupied most of hour-long meeting time, as the teachers struggled

to distill everything the middle school girls had said into a list of six central findings. At the close of the meeting, I introduced their final journal prompt (which I emailed to them later as well). The final journal prompt asked the teachers:

Understanding yourself and the culture of [Whirlwind] and your students, how have you either changed the way you intervene/address acts of relational aggression/relational aggression among your students or anticipate changing your intervention strategies (if at all)? How do you think that the discussions about relational aggression behaviors and/or reading literature impacted your perspectives on these issues (if at all)? Please expand and explain.

I geared the final meeting towards reviewing the journal responses and having the teachers evaluate the action research process. The teachers reached two conclusions based upon their journal responses:

1. They found that reading the seminal studies on the topics of relational aggression and intervention helpful, but wished that sections had been pre-marked so that they knew what aspects of the articles were important to read and understand.
2. They *all* agreed that hearing the students' personal narratives had been the most impactful to them in motivating change.

The findings expressed by the teachers regarding the action research process included the consensus that:

I was doubtful at first that our meeting would ever go beyond talking about talking about [sic] ideas. But I think why action research is different from some of the other committees we've done here is that you actually change how you see things and do things during the meeting process.

Each teacher expressed the sentiment that they found the action research process helpful because it altered the way they perceived and reacted to their students during the course of the study. The teachers also agreed that they enjoyed learning from each other; both getting to know other teacher's personal experiences in and out of the school, and other teachers' practices with their

students. Additionally, most of the nine teachers expressed their belief in the value of the action research study for every middle school faculty member. I will discuss this finding further in Chapter Five. Detailed meeting agendas are attached in Appendix H.

Summary of Findings

All teachers expressed value in the action research process to study middle school relational aggression among girls. The teachers recognized that they began the action research with limited knowledge of relational aggression and specifically, relational aggression at Whirlwind Academy. Additionally, the teachers reported that their own experiences with relational aggression influenced their ability to distinguish bullying among their students. Also, while their identifications of relational aggression expanded, their reactionary intervention strategies did not. The teachers unanimously agreed that two aspects of the action research impacted them the most: 1) hearing from the middle school girl panel and 2) hearing and learning from their colleague's perceptions and experiences.

The teachers' identification of relational aggression behaviors expanded from assuming the middle school girls' behavior was normative and healthy to recognizing that many of the behaviors they witnessed were in fact, relational aggression (as reported also by the students). Additionally, the teachers identified cyber relational aggression, social exclusion, gossip, as the primary (though not the only) relational aggression behaviors that affected Whirlwind middle school girls.

The action researchers' perceptions of and practices in regards to intervention strategies also evolved. The teachers reported that they recognized the need for proactive intervention in

relational aggression but found they were more comfortable setting up situations to prevent relational aggression, rather than reactively intervening in relational aggression situations.

The teachers' findings in regards to identifying and intervening in relational aggression led to their revelations about their confidence. While the teachers reported an increase in their confidence to identify relational aggression among their middle school girls, their confidence to actually intervene in those situations did not increase. While they recognized the need for the whole school culture to change in order to meaningfully prevent and intervene in relational aggression, self-doubt and feeling underprepared still hindered the teachers' own responsive interventions. Related to this finding, they recommended further teacher training and activities or study groups dedicated to changing Whirlwind's school culture.

In the next chapter I examine the implications of these findings, make recommendations, identify study limitations, and discuss future research possibilities at Whirlwind Academy and the educational community.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

This study examined changes in teachers' abilities to identify relational aggression among middle school girls and to come up with effective strategies to intervene when needed. The study also assessed teachers' confidence levels that might help them to address relational aggression. Five central findings emerged:

- 1) Teachers were "purposefully blind" to relational aggression behaviors among their middle school girls, which prevented them from recognizing social behaviors happening *in front* of them as bullying. This blindness was so ingrained in their perspectives that they resisted any information that threatened to change how they identified relational aggression.
- 2) The impetus to teachers' blindness to relational aggression was their own personal histories with it. The teachers' own experience with bullying led them to understand the phenomenon as only a normal and healthy part of girls' maturation.
- 3) Conversations between the teachers and the middle school girls seemed to produce the most change in the teachers. Through hearing the students' first-hand accounts being bullied, the teachers were able to recall their own middle school experiences. Then they could make the connection between their own identity and the judgments they imposed on their students. Above all other methodology, the teachers reported that it was the collaboration with the students that stimulated the most significant change for the teachers.
- 4) I found in today's technological world that the girls felt that Cyber Bullying was the most prevalent and the most hurtful type of bullying. Before being confronted with the

students' reality, the teachers had been unaware that online bullying even existed.

Because none of the teachers had personally experienced it, the teachers rightfully said there was no way they *could* have known about it.

- 5) After three months, at the end of the study, the teachers were able to identify relational aggression, but they still did not actively intervene in reaction to it. They still did not trust there would be administrative support for them to intervene, thus they increasingly worked towards *preventing* relational aggression, but did not increase their *reactive* interventions.

What follows synthesizes the findings and discusses their implications for improving school culture and needed research.

Discussion

Relational aggression Blindness

The first significant finding that emerged was the teachers' purposeful blindness to relational aggression among their middle school girls. This finding emerged from the teachers' denial that relational aggression happened among their middle school girls. Instead, the teachers considered their girls' social behaviors as a normal and healthy part of growing up and developing important socialization skills. As Jenny reported,

Girls will be girls will be girls. This is how they learn the rules of the game. In fact, it's just the beginning of the process. Look at the "Real Housewives." Same shit forty years later. If the girls don't learn how to deal with each other and navigate it in middle school, it'll just hit them later in life.

Jenny pointed out that the teachers' blindness was not motivated by apathy or malice. Instead, they were blind to relational aggression because they saw the social behaviors as a means for the

girls to develop useful life skills. Unfortunately, because the teachers wanted the best for their girls, they were unable to identify when normal social behaviors crossed the line into bullying.

This blindness led the teachers to resist identifying relational aggression among their middle-schoolers. Despite being provided with the definition of relational aggression and its associated behaviors, they refused to recognize it happening *in front* of them. Though the teachers read studies and observed their girls' social behaviors, they still did not identify any of the girls' behaviors as bullying. In fact, the resistance to change incited contention among the teachers. Some teachers struggled to redefine the behaviors they observed in their classrooms, other teachers were quick to defend the students and challenge their colleagues.

It was important to understand the blindness because teachers resisted change. Their blindness was so entrenched that they believed their girls' were the exception to the rules; the girls were too "nice" and "kind" to bully each other. Though the teachers had no intention of enabling the girls' harmful behaviors, they lacked knowledge of bullying and defended their girls' intentions, making them actively resist identifying these behaviors as relational aggression.

Self-reflection as a means of change

This blindness and resistance to change seemed impenetrable until the teachers met with a panel of seven middle school girls. In two meetings with the girls, the teachers posed questions and documented the girls' first-hand accounts of the reality of relational aggression. These personal narratives, marked by emotion and introspection, sparked a self-reflective process among the teachers. The girls' personal anecdotes of victimization and the pain of relational aggression caused the teachers to reflect on their *own* experiences of relational aggression in middle school. The teachers reported that hearing about the girls' experiences made them

viscerally recall their own social experiences and how those experiences impacted them. Tina, a middle school art teacher, reported that,

Hearing from the girls brought me right back to being thirteen again. God, I lived that. I remembered how awful it was. I say now that you couldn't pay me enough to go back to middle school, but it wasn't really until [the girls] started talking about how awful some of them are to each other, that I remembered why [I'd never go back].

This self-reflection process extended to teachers' self-analyses of how their own personal experiences translated into their practices as teachers. Specifically, the teachers recognized that a fundamental reason why they had considered relational aggression as normal and healthy was because they themselves had experienced it and was told it was "normal."

The teachers' self-reflection process inspired by their meeting with the girls made change possible. Because teachers understood the role that relational aggression played in shaping them as individuals and practitioners, they began to comprehend that their personal identity influenced their judgments about their girls. Stated another way, the teachers identified with their girls' relational aggression which led them to impose their *own* identity onto the girls: the teachers themselves had been told bullying was an important rite of passage, therefore they automatically considered it a healthy rite of passage for their students as well. In her final interview, Amy, the middle school dean, reported:

I don't know if this [study] would have been as effective, or even worthwhile at all, if we hadn't had a chance to consider our own biases, assumptions...and where they come from. I know for me, it was hard to identify with why all the girls I see make such a big deal out of all their "drama," (as the middle school girls call it)... I realized it was because I was always an athlete, always kind of socially oblivious, and had no problem confronting or dealing with other girls. But then I also kind of realized that maybe I was considered the mean popular girl. I don't know if I would have ever seen things differently or changed what I do or how I do it, if I hadn't made that connection.

Amy recognized that the student narratives enabled her to reflect on her own experience. She (and the other teachers) subsequently made the connection between her self-identity and the underlying assumptions that clouded her identification of relational aggression.

This self-reflective process, as a catalyst for change, was most evident with Cyber Relational aggression. Once the students reported that cyber bullying was the most prevalent and hurtful type of bullying, the teachers realized that their lack of exposure to it. Because they had been unfamiliar with cyber relational aggression, it had been nearly impossible for them to bare witness to it, let alone identify it as relational aggression. Cyber bullying was not a behavior that these teachers had experienced as children, nor could they see it in the classroom. They had no personal history to reference this type of bullying, which meant cyber relational aggression had never been “on their radar.” Teachers recognized that they had not done something *wrong* by not identifying cyber bullying, they then became open to changing their approach to assistance.

The teachers had always wanted the best for their students and had made judgments based on their knowledge at the time. This new self-awareness helped unchain their past practices from the potential to intervene.

Teacher’s changes: what they learned and how they changed

After their collaborations with the middle school girls, the teachers began to identify relational aggression happening in front of them. Certain behaviors the teachers previously assessed as “normal,” were now identified as relational aggression that required intervention. Specifically, they recognized cliques, social exclusion, gossip and cyber relational aggression as the problematic behaviors the girls exhibited. These new assessment skills emerged from the students’ feedback in the meetings as well as from teachers redefining relational aggression.

The teachers also acted differently as a result of identifying bullying. They reported augmenting their relational aggression prevention practices, which included assigned seating and choosing small group members for class work. These steps helped address relational aggression in a way that felt comfortable and productive, by *preventing* it instead of *reacting* to it. The teachers reported that their reactive interventions to relational aggression, in the form of triage, had not changed. The teachers did not change their reactive interventions due to a lack of confidence in their own ability to respond to the situation correctly, as well as fear that they would not be supported by the administration. As Dana, the novice English teacher, revealed:

I don't think I'm ready to intervene in the act [of bullying]. I'm not sure that I'll do the right thing and not actually just make things worse....[Also] I don't really know what the policy is. What are we supposed to do? I don't really know where the school [administration] stands on this. I mean, we kind of don't usually call students on things unless we can prove them. But is there even a process for intervention that the admin has signed on to?

By the end of the three month study, the teachers still lacked confidence in their own abilities and administrative support; these insecurities caused their reticence to actively intervene in relational aggression, even when they knew they *should*.

Action Research as a means for change

The action research process, in and of itself, emerged as a factor towards change. This process enabled the teachers to collaborate towards a common goal. In the course of this three month study, the teachers met with each other nine times, read and discussed relational aggression studies, observed their students, reflected on their observations through discussion and journaling, collaborated with students, and put their knowledge into practice in their classroom. This reflective and iterative practice enabled the teachers to work together towards

reaching clarity about relational aggression among their girls and learn from each other's points of view and differing practices. As Melissa, an eighth grade history teacher recognized:

I think one of the things that I'll take away with me...is how much this whole process has affected me. I never got to talk to half the teachers who were in our group before [the study]. I couldn't have told you what they taught or how they taught it. Definitely not their thoughts on relational aggression or how they deal with student issues. But I kind of feel like I know everyone much better...[and] actually learned a lot from teachers I had never talked to before. It's important to learn from our colleagues and see yourself through their eyes. We definitely got a bigger picture of the problem.

Action research facilitated collaboration between the teachers through which they were able to learn, implement their findings, and have an opportunity to reflect on their changes in practice. Because the teachers went through this process as a team, their changes stemmed from both the new information presented to them as well as their colleagues' various relational aggression beliefs and practices. The action research enabled the teachers to disagree with each other and the relational aggression literature in a productive way that stimulated learning.

Beyond teamwork, self-reflection is vital to action research. This study method created opportunities for the teachers to explain their own practices, recognize the underlying reasons for their practices, put change into effect and then self-assess the impact of those changes. This transition from self-analysis, to change, and the subsequent reflection was novel to the teachers and, as they admitted, stimulated meaningful change. According to the teachers, because they personally invested in the study process, they felt connected to the findings and thus invested in making changes.

The Challenges to Change

In order to affect change at any school or organization, educators can recognize the challenges that impede meaningful and lasting progress. This teacher-led action research enquiry

illuminated teachers' personal obstacles to change as well as exposed several challenges that Whirlwind, and any organization, faces in stimulating organizational growth.

Research upholds the teachers' finding that many factors inhibit their ability to affect sustainable change. Studies identify four important premises underlying the challenges to organizational change: 1) There exists an inherent tension between "assimilating new learning...and what has [already] been learned;" 2) Organizational learning involves many levels of an organization including individuals, groups, and the organizational culture itself; 3) Organizational learning involves social and psychological processes of "intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing," and; 4) "Cognition affects action (and vice versa)" (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999, p. 523). These influencing factors in change allude to the challenges that may arise when any organization attempts to evolve.

The teachers in this study recognized these factors: 1) The teachers felt unprepared to challenge the existent "learning" with new perspectives; 2) They felt isolated in their attempt to change the relational aggression norm of the school community without buy-in from the school's other stakeholders; 3) While they (and the select student panel) had gone through psychological processes of change, the rest of the school's stakeholders had not; and finally, 4) Because most of the teachers and administrators lacked cognizance of relational aggression, they could not effectively act towards change.

Schools and organizations often embrace a failing status quo rather than face the obstacles that oppose progress: Leaders end up managing existent practices rather than inspiring growth, staff feels unsupported by their leadership and distrustful that their leaders will "back" any innovation, and stakeholders resist change because they lack confidence that their change will be supported and effective (Fink & Brayman, 2006). It is only when a whole school

community approaches change together working towards a communal goal, that a school or organization may overcome these challenges and implement meaningful and sustainable change.

Recommendations

The teachers' self-reflective processes are important across professional development/teacher training programs. Based on the impact of self-reflection, all professional development/teacher training could include exercises that foster self-reflection. This is especially true for programs geared towards teacher interventions in bullying, as bullying is an emotionally-charged problem that is inherently subjective. However, designers of professional development programs in any setting could use self-reflection as a tool for meaningful change. According to existing research,

[There is a] connection between agency and psychological constructs of self-efficacy and self-concept...[and] cannot be ignored in a discussion of identity. [There exists an] inextricable link between the two—identity and agency....What may result from a teacher's realization of his or her identity, in performance...is a sense of agency, of empowerment to move ideas forward, to reach goals or even to transform the context. It is apparent that a heightened awareness of one's identity may lead to a strong sense of agency" (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 183).

This connection between one's self-identity and their actions is vital for teacher training/professional development program creators to consider: because identity plays such a significant role in an individual's practice and performance, it can be incorporated into any teacher training/professional development program.

Whirlwind Academy, or any school that considers altering its professional development programs to include teachers' self-reflection processes, can create "safe" spaces that enable trust and authentic self-analyses. *Humanizing* teacher training programs and professional development is vital to reach institutional goals. This study was relatively small, involving nine teachers and

seven students. While this small size nurtured intimacy and trust, I acknowledge that many teacher training and professional development programs cater to greater numbers of participants. Therefore, the programs can incorporate elements of individual reflection time, small-group opportunities for collaboration, and large group “share-outs” to communicate findings to the participant group as a whole. In this model, the teacher training/professional development encourages the value of the individual’s identity towards a communal goal.

In the case of Whirlwind Academy, the school can now develop professional development programs that include self-reflective exercises. Teachers at this small school are expected to “nurture...responsible, caring, well informed, ethical, prepared, and well balanced young adults,” in accordance with their mission statement. However, as the teachers in this study suggested, they had never self-reflected regarding their interpretation of that mission statement. No administrator at the school had inquired about the teachers’ understanding of the school’s mission, nor asked how they incorporated the mission of the school into their pedagogy.

The teachers felt they had not been recognized as stakeholders in working towards the school’s mission. By incorporating teacher reflection in all their professional development programs, rather than holding top-down professional development, the teachers will feel valued, self-reflect about their own biases, and thus emotionally invest in the school’s goals. Whirlwind Academy could promote this self-reflective practice to *all* the faculty and administrators; each stakeholder within the school community can understand his/her unique role in working towards the school’s mission statement. While relational aggression is an important topic for the school community to examine, it is just a starting point.

Collaboration & Professional Development

Based on the efficacy of this study's collaborative learning process, Whirlwind's administration and teachers can use collaborative learning across the classroom curriculum and campus-wide problems. Research shows that when individuals collaborate on a common goal, they innovate and address nuanced problems (Lawson, 2004). As Peggy, the middle school science teacher reflected:

We never really talk with each other as a means of learning [at Whirlwind]. We have in-services a lot, but I feel like this was really the first time I ever talked about the mission statement of the school, and heard other teachers' ideas about it too. Not only that, but we have such different ways we do things and see things. But we really don't learn from each other normally...telling us what we should do and think just isn't as valuable as coming up with ideas together.

Though the teachers believed in the value of collaborative learning, they felt that Whirlwind did not foster collaboration as a means for professional development. They wanted more opportunities to learn from each other, both in their own departments and across disciplines. While they have their students practice collaborative learning all the time in their own classrooms, they realized that their own learning did not model the same process.

This finding provides an opportunity for Whirlwind's administration to revamp their traditional model of professional development. Instead of being told what to learn and how to learn it, Whirlwind faculty can hear each other's ideas and decipher a topic together. This collaborative-learning model enables teachers to invest in whatever topic they study. Research also endorses collaborative learning as effective for creating lasting and meaningful change (Butler, Lauscher, Jarvis-Selinger, & Beckingham, 2004).

Student Collaboration: Dispute Resolution & Advisory

The girls on the student panel agreed that they relished the opportunity to work with each other and their teachers to solve a problem that affected so many girls. The girls expressed that working with the teachers and each other empowered them, added to their knowledge, and made them more empathetic. Izzy, an eighth grade girl, revealed:

I was so excited for [this second] meeting!...I've never done anything like this before. It's like they're all these things and issues and problems going on with us, but no one ever asks us about them. Or to help. Or even, like, what we think is going on and what the school should do. It seems like this [collaborative process] is what we should be doing with a lot of things.

Izzy's statement reflected that working with teachers and each other made them feel like a contributing member of their school community. Whirlwind may want to apply the girls' success collaborating in this study to the areas of dispute resolution and advisory. These are two fields that Whirlwind has approached in a traditional "top-down" method, with little success. Currently, Whirlwind Academy has no conflict resolution program in place. Like most schools, when a student "gets in trouble," she is sent to the dean who decides the appropriate punishment. Advisory at Whirlwind is also practiced in a traditional "top-down" approach: students meet with a teacher once-a-week who leads an administratively prescribed activity.

One form of student collaboration that Whirlwind can embrace is peer mediation of student disputes. Peer mediation, which emerged in the 1960's, "focused on teaching all students in a school the nature of conflict, how to use an integrative negotiation procedure, and how to mediate peer conflicts" (Johnson & Johnson, 1996, p. 460). Peer mediation trains students in conflict resolution and effective mediation; through this mediation program, students work together to resolve their peers' disputes. Research reinforces the value of "a cooperative context"

for mediating conflict, that helps to “chang[e] the school structure from a mass-manufacturing to a team-based, high-performance organizational structure” (Johnson & Johnson, 1996, p. 461).

This type of conflict resolution appears tailor-made for Whirlwind students who are well-practiced in classroom small group work. By failing to use cooperation, a practice with which students are already familiar in the classroom, Whirlwind may miss a tremendous skill-building opportunity. The students are the primary stakeholders in conflict resolution, yet have little influence. Whirlwind has the chance to use students’ skills to resolve conflicts and allow them to model positive behaviors and be accountable to their peers. This modeling and conflict resolution may additionally develop valuable leadership skills.

Students can also mediate bullying through advisory programs. At the conclusion of this study, the girls asked if they could lead advisory sessions to facilitate middle-school wide examination of relational aggression. The girls wanted to lead discussions with their peers so that fellow girls had an opportunity to discuss the problem. Emmy, an eighth grade girl noted, “We (the middle school girls) should definitely lead an advisory about [relational aggression]. It’s, like, drama that affects all of us every day. But we never talk about it together. That would be so great.” The implications of Emmy’s comments are significant: currently, the middle school girls feel they have no safe place to mediate their problems with each other. They viewed advisory as a structured time during the normal school week to mentor other girls.

After the study concluded the eighth grade girls planned an advisory session with the seventh grade girls. In small groups, the girls from the study led discussions about relational aggression with their younger peers. Upon completion of these advisory sessions, the eighth and seventh grade girls expressed their enthusiasm for collaborative session. All the girls reported the dialogue as “informative,” “helpful,” and “honest,” which led them to feel empowered and

valued. This student-led advisory demonstrated that peer advisory sessions, if maintained, can become a productive part of the school.

Building Consensus

One of the ways that teachers changed during the course of the study was realizing the importance of “getting things out on the table.” As the study progressed, the teachers became more comfortable with necessary argumentation. Though they frequently disagreed with each other’s opinions, these disagreements helped build relational aggression consensus. By discussing doubts that they otherwise would not have vocalized, the teachers built consensual identifications of relational aggression. In order for the teachers to build agreement about the problem they had to contend with each other’s differing points of views. As one teacher reflected,

We definitely didn’t always agree with each other or the articles we initially read. But I actually think that, by the end, we’d all gotten on the same page together. Not that we agree on everything, but...it was nice to get to a place that we understood each other and kind of establish how we each can play our own role in dealing with relational aggression.

The teacher acknowledged that though they vocalized their doubts, the argumentation never dissuaded them from working towards their common goal. The teachers found that several of the initial discussions were uncomfortable, but the contentious tone enabled them to be authentic with each other and build their identifications of relational aggression together.

Whirlwind currently offers professional development in which the teachers passively learn the information and are discouraged from voicing doubt. Whirlwind may want to recognize the teachers’ success working through their doubts and offer professional development programs that encourage teachers to vocalize their concerns. The more teachers express their authentic points of view, the better the chance they will change their practice in a lasting way

(Butler et al., 2004). This may be an uncomfortable process, but teachers' disagreement with each other often leads to genuine consensus and change.

Student Participation

The girls involved in the teachers' action research study instigated the teachers' change. As a progressive institution, Whirlwind can now recognize students' ability to incite change through inviting them to participate in all teacher training/professional development programs. In order for the teachers to understand the students' problems, it is important that the students vocalize their experience. Just as with relational aggression, teachers cannot identify a problem they do not see in front of them. By including students in teacher training, the students define the problems and instigate teacher change. The students' academic and personal success is the goal of any teacher education, therefore it is vital that the teachers hear the students' needs, so they can better understand their realities (Guskey, 2002). Students may collaborate with teachers on issues including teacher hiring, curriculum design, and on-going course evaluation. Regardless of the professional development focus, the students are the school's primary stakeholders, thus their voices add dimension to any problem the teachers study. Without students' involvement in teacher training, the teachers may not recognize what is happening right before them.

Through student inclusion in teacher training, Whirlwind Academy can also enhance students' sense of self-efficacy and worth. Student collaboration in teacher training develops students' skills beyond their academic performance. In an email after the initial student-teacher meeting, one middle school girl sent an email saying, "I can't wait for the next meeting! [Relational aggression] is such a problem and I feel like I can make a difference. Thank you for listening to us!" This email affirmed the validation she felt working with the teachers to solve a problem. By encouraging students to vocalize their thoughts, manage their time, and work side-

by-side with the teachers, Whirlwind can develop students' interpersonal and leadership skills. So often students' abilities are measured by their classroom performance, but by enabling them to thrive in other ways, a student may achieve personal success beyond academics. Izzy related the impact of her participation:

I didn't actually think that I had anything to say [to the teachers]. But I think that I'd never really had a chance to tell what I think...I was surprised that I was asked to join...but I realized that the teachers were actually listening to what we were saying...It's easy to kind of not talk in class, but here [in this study] I felt kind of like the expert and the teachers were the students. I'm usually really quiet. But I kind of surprised myself by having a lot to say.

Izzy's self-analysis exposed the potential for Whirlwind to build students' skills beyond the classroom. If student academic and personal success is the goal of Whirlwind (as the mission statement professes) and *all* schools, involving them in teacher training/professional development is a means to facilitate their personal fulfillment and achievement.

Systemic & Cultural Change

The teachers recognized the need for systemic and cultural change at the school. They reported that they longed for the whole school to "get on the same page" regarding student relational aggression. Their feelings of isolation and lack of support by the school community made them doubt their ability to change the culture of bullying. Whirlwind may address the teachers' need for support by involving all the stakeholders in the school community. Parents have a role to play by actively supporting training for all of the school staff and students in how to recognize and handle bullying. Smith (2004) shows us that organizational cultures change very slowly and these changes last only with consistent support. In the case of Whirlwind, the school leadership and parent advocates have the opportunity to embark on this process of change together through creating an anti-bullying policy to be published in the administrative and

parent/student handbook. Additionally, parents, students, teachers, and administrators could collaborate to examine the problem of relational aggression at Whirlwind and develop strategies to prevent and intervene in relational aggression—not just on the school campus, but when the students are online, at home, or at off-campus events.

The teachers' confidence to intervene in relational aggression is dependent upon feeling supported by the administration. Amy, the middle school dean, pointed out the role that Whirlwind administrators could play in the whole-school approach to problem-solving:

We need to develop a program for the teachers to hear directly from their administrators about expectations around classroom behavior, culture, and intervention...Relational aggression doesn't just happen in their world, everyone in their world and our school can condone it or stop it.

Whirlwind administrators can support the teachers by establishing a school-wide policy on bullying. This is an opportunity for the school to take an explicit stance on the problem that encourages teachers to intervene. When the teachers feel confident that the Whirlwind administration endorses their endeavor to change relational aggression, they will actively change their interventions.

The whole-school approach to bullying suggests that administrators, teachers, and parents recognize students as a part of an interdependent system. This approach challenges the efficacy of “pre-packaged, “ready-made” intervention programs. These bullying intervention programs are externally created and then delivered for implementation at a school site. Due to the complexity of each school's culture, individuals, and challenges, “pre-packaged” intervention programs do not consider a particular school's unique needs. Instead, effective intervention programs (geared towards any problem) could be home-grown by all relevant stake-holders. Intervention programs, such as action research or other collaborative enquiries, can incorporate the unique needs and nuances of the particular school culture. Intervention cannot be a one-size-

fits-all model. Because Whirlwind's students, teachers, parents and administrators can create an intervention program that is tailor-made, they will invest in making it work.

Study Limitations

There are three limitations in this study that may be considered. This action research study was conducted at one school with a small number of teachers and students. It may be a reach to assume that the findings from this sample are representative of the majority of middle school teachers and girls. This small group of teachers and students enabled significant participation by each member of the study and a robust understanding of each teacher and student's personal changes. However, the conclusion that they are indicative of the middle school faculty and students as a whole is tentative.

Additionally, all the teachers in this study were female. Neither their gender breakdown nor their perspectives as female teachers were representative of the middle school faculty as a whole (which included 25 male teachers). The all-female participant group may also be seen as problematic because it is doubtful that male teachers would have experienced the same memories of and identifications with relational aggression as the women did. The findings that suggest that teachers assume relational aggression is "normal" because they experienced it themselves as adolescents may not be applicable to male teachers. The inability to apply the female teachers' findings to male teachers suggests a need for further research.

Lastly, the duration of this study was a brief three month period. While the study was intensive and employed a variety of methods, a three month period of time may not have been indicative of the teachers' true changes. Since the data collection ended at the conclusion of the study (in early April), any change in the teachers' intervention practices *after* that period of time

were not recorded. It may have been beneficial to implement this action research study over the course of a whole academic year to assess whether, with more time to practice interventions, the teachers would have changed their reactive intervention behaviors.

Implications for Further Study

Nevertheless, the evidence from this study is strong and implies the need for additional research. While this action research examined teachers' change and used student involvement as a means to educate the teachers, the benefits of the collaborative process need further analysis. In so far as research exists regarding peer collaboration and teacher collaboration, few studies examine the efficacy of teacher/student collaboration as part of teacher training or professional development.

Further research can be done regarding how teachers make assumptions and judgments based on their own experiences and identities. While the existent literature is vast regarding teachers' pedagogical approaches to teaching, little is known about how teachers' personal histories affect their assumptions and judgments regarding their students. In other words, we know little about how teachers' own experiences as children and adolescents influence how they perceive and make decisions about their students' realities.

Lastly, the role of teachers' gender in relational aggression identification and intervention can be further examined. While this study aimed to assess teachers' changing interventions for relational aggression among middle school girls, the lack of male teachers who volunteered to take part in the study was striking. Compounding this phenomenon, the girls in the student panel frequently alluded to how their male teachers reacted to relational aggression and girls' emotions in general, as opposed to how they perceived their female teachers' reactions. This theme

suggests the need for continued examination of the role of gender in teacher bullying intervention.

Closing Remarks

In 2011 approximately 28% of 12-18 year old students reported being bullied at school. Another 9% of 12-18 year-olds reported experiencing online bullying (<http://www.meganmeierfoundation.org/statistics.html>). The organization that cites these statistics was founded by Tina Meier to honor her daughter, Megan. Megan's story has unfortunately become representative of a familiar narrative in the past decade: In 2007, the 13 year-old committed suicide by hanging herself after being socially bullied on the website MySpace. BuzzFeed.com, a topical online news source, further illustrated this societal epidemic. As of September 11th, 2013, nine teenagers had committed suicide in the course of that year. Their deaths were attributed to cyber relational aggression on ask.fm, a social networking site (“9 Teenage Suicides In The Last Year Were Linked To Cyber-Bullying On Social Network Ask.fm,” n.d.).

Until recently, academic research had largely ignored intervention strategies for this type of bullying (Merrell et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2009). And at the time of this study, no research had been conducted on how teachers may play a role in stemming cyber relational aggression.

This study found several psychological processes at work that act as obstacles to effective teacher intervention in their students' relational aggression. The teachers' reticence to identify the problem was rooted in their own experiences with it. They had to recognize how their personal histories impacted their practices as teachers before they were able to change. As a

result of this self-assessment process, the teachers worked towards being a proactive solution to relational aggression.

Relational aggression is growing more pervasive, covert, and hurtful as the primary venue for it moves online. Teachers, administrators, parents, and students may examine and intervene in this burgeoning problem together. As one student reflected,

The thing about this [relational aggression], especially when girls do it online, is that you feel so alone. Like no one in the world is your friend anymore. And no one gets how awful it is. And if your friends aren't talking to you, than there's no one to talk about it with. And it's not like in school, if you're stressed out about not doing well in a class, you can see a tutor. There's no way to solve it, cuz no one either knows that it's going on or they just don't know what to do about it.

The girls' hopelessness while facing relational aggression necessitates teacher intervention. They battle it alone and believe that no one cares enough to come to their aid. But the teachers cannot change what they cannot see. The students need their whole-school community to unify in their goal to eliminate relational aggression and them feel protected.

Post-Script

The teachers' action research study yielded several changes at Whirlwind Academy by the end of the 2013-2014 academic year, and planned changes for the 2014-2015 school year. By the conclusion of the study, the seven middle school girls had taken it upon themselves to plan and implement an advisory period for the eighth grade girls to mentor the seventh grade girls on the topic of friendships and relational aggression. They also successfully petitioned the middle school dean of students to plan a similar student-led advisory session in the 2014-2015 school year. The eighth-grade girls (who will be ninth graders during 2014-2015) plan to meet with and train the new eighth grade girls in how to lead the relational aggression-focused advisory sessions.

Additionally, the teachers who took part in this action research have asked the administration to schedule a full-faculty in-service day dedicated to the topic of inclusivity. As part of that in-service/professional development, the teachers plan to lead a session focused on the topic of relational aggression on campus. They hope to follow the same model of the action research they conducted and have their colleagues read relational aggression studies, self-reflect on their own experiences with relational aggression (both as individuals and practitioners), and hear from the students regarding the students' perceptions of relational aggression. The teachers hope to then facilitate another action research study over the course of the 2014-2015 academic year, dedicated to assessing relational aggression among all the students and teachers at Whirlwind, not solely middle school girls. The teachers also anticipate including male teachers in their study. The teachers' fundamental aim is to discuss the "undiscussables," with their

colleagues and shed light on relational aggression and other school-culture problems that otherwise remain shrouded.

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Middle School Bullying Survey

Bullying Survey				
Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey on bullying. Your responses will help us to understand the issues of bullying at Windward and how we can best meet the needs of our Middle School students. Your responses are 100% anonymous and can in no way be linked back to you, nor will anyone get in trouble for a response. Please try to be as honest and thoughtful as possible.				
Bullying Survey				
1. Bullying is defined as the use of one's strength or popularity to injure, threaten, isolate, or embarrass another person on purpose. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or social. It is not bullying when two students who are about the same in strength or popularity have a fight or argument.				
Using the above definition of Bullying, please read and answer the following questions:				
	Never	Once or Twice	About once per week	Several times a week
During the course of a typical month (30 days), I myself have in some way been bullied at school:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
During the course of a typical month (30 days), I have in some way bullied another student at school:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical Bullying				
2. Physical Bullying involves hitting, kicking, shoving, or otherwise aggressively touching someone weaker on purpose.				
Using the above definition of Physical Bullying, please read and answer the following questions:				
	Never	Once or Twice	About once per week	Several times a week
During the course of a typical month (30 days), I myself have been physically bullied or threatened with physical bullying at school:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
During the course of a typical month (30 days), I have physically bullied or threatened to physically bully another student at school:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Bullying Survey

Verbal Bullying

3. Verbal bullying involves teasing, putting down, intimidating or insulting someone on purpose with words. It may include face-to-face verbal insults, face-to-face name calling, or ridiculing or making fun of someone with words or sounds.

Using the above definition of Verbal Bullying, please read and answer the following questions:

	Never	Once or Twice	About once per week	Several times a week
During the course of a typical month (30 days), I have been verbally bullied at school:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
During the course of a typical month (30 days), I have verbally bullied another student at school:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Social Bullying

4. Social Bullying involves harming others through purposeful damaging of their friendships and relationships with their peers. It is often secretive and hard to see. Social bullying may involve social exclusion, purposeful ignoring, eye-rolling, gossiping, behind-the-back name calling, cliques that exclude others, rumor spreading, someone saying something mean then pretending they were joking, or purposeful betrayal of secrets.

Using the above definition of Social Bullying, please read and answer the following questions:

	Never	Once or Twice	About once per week	Several times a week
During the course of a typical month (30 days), I have been socially bullied at school:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
During the course of a typical month (30 days), I have socially bullied another student at school:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Cyber Bullying

Bullying Survey

5. Cyber Bullying involves using technology (cell phone, email, internet chat and posting, etc.) to tease or put down someone. It may involve sending mean-spirited or hurtful text messages, using social media to spread rumors, using social media to gossip, posting hurtful or damaging images via technology, or purposefully ignoring someone via technology (not responding to another student's chats, postings, messages).

Using the above definition of Cyber Bullying, please read and answer the following questions:

	Never	Once or Twice	About once per week	Several times a week
During the course of a typical month (30 days), I have been cyber bullied at school OR while at home:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
During the course of a typical month (30 days), I have cyber bullied another student at school OR while at home:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Bullying Actions & Behaviors

6. If you were bullied in any way, did you tell anyone that you were bullied in the past 30 days while at school?

- I have not been bullied
- I have been bullied, but I have NOT told anyone
- I have been bullied, and I told someone

7. The following questions have to do with your perceptions about how often bullying happens in general at your school.

In your experience, please rate how often each type of bullying occurs between students at school (or outside of school for cyber bullying) during the course of a typical month (30 days).

	Never	Once or twice a month	About once per week	Several times a week
Physical bullying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verbal bullying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social bullying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cyber bullying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

At this School....

Bullying Survey

8. Read each of the following statements carefully, and rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
If another student was bullying me in any way, I would tell one of the teachers, counselors or staff at school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical bullying is a problem at this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verbal bullying is a problem at this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social bullying is a problem at this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cyber bullying is a problem at this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cliques and social exclusion are common at this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Students Here....

9. Read each of the following statements carefully, and rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Students here often get talked or gossiped about regarding their clothing or physical appearance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students here often get talked or teased about regarding their ACADEMIC performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students here often get talked or teased about regarding their ATHLETIC performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students here often get purposefully hit or pushed by other students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students here often get called names or teased to their faces.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Demographics

Bullying Survey

10. I am a:

- Male
- Female

11. I currently am in:

- 7th Grade
- 8th Grade

12. I have told the truth, as best I am able, on this survey

- Yes
- No

Appendix B: Pre & Post Study Relational aggression Teacher Survey

Behavior Classification				
1. How do you classify the following behaviors?				
*In the choices below, "bullying" is defined as an act of purposeful intimidation in which a student/students demonstrate(s) superiority or influence over another student.				
	Just Normal Behavior (for girls)	May/Possibly be bullying	Bullying	Unsure
Social Exclusion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Purposeful Ignoring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eye-rolling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gossiping	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verbal Manipulation (non-physical)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verbal Intimidation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical Intimidation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gestures (Intended to intimidate or offend)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ridicule	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Saying something mean then pretending they were "joking"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Behind-the-back name calling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To-the-face name calling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Silent Treatment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teasing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cliques (that exclude others)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rumor-spreading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"On again-off again" friendships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Betrayal of confidences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using social mediums/media to post hurtful messages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sending direct hurtful messages via mobile device or computer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical Aggression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Face-to-face verbal insults	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Behavior Observaton

2. Please rate how often you witness the following behaviors among your female students

(Please check one box per row)

	Never	Rarely (1-3 times per school year)	Sometimes (4-6 times per school year)	Frequently (7+ times per school year)	Unsure
Social Exclusion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Purposeful Ignoring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eye-rolling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gossiping	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verbal Manipulation (non-physical)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verbal Intimidation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical Intimidation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gestures (intended to intimidate or offend)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ridicule	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Saying something mean then pretending they were "joking"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Behind-the-back name calling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To-the-face name calling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Silent Treatment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teasing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cliques (that exclude others)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rumor-spreading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"On again-off again" friendships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Betrayal of confidences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using social mediums/media to post hurtful messages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sending direct hurtful messages via mobile device or computer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical Aggression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Face-to-face verbal Insults	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Behavior Intervention Needed

3. Please rate how often you believe intervention is necessary for the following behaviors. For this question, "intervention" is defined as a purposeful interference in the behaviors of your students with the goal of altering the subsequent behaviors.

(Please check one box per row)

	Never	Rarely (1-3 times per school year)	Sometimes (4-6 times per school year)	Frequently (7+ times per school year)	Unsure
Social Exclusion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Purposeful Ignoring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eye-rolling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gossiping	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verbal Manipulation (non-physical)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verbal Intimidation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical Intimidation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gestures (intended to intimidate or offend)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ridicule	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Saying something mean then pretending they were 'joking'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Behind-the-back name calling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To-the-face name calling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Silent Treatment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teasing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cliques (that exclude others)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rumor-spreading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'On again-off again' friendships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Betrayal of confidences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using social mediums/media to post hurtful messages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sending direct hurtful messages via mobile device or computer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical Aggression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Face-to-face verbal insults	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Intervention

4. Please rate how often you have actually intervened to address the following behaviors in your classroom in the past year.

For this question, “intervene” is defined as a purposeful interfering in the behaviors of your students with the goal of altering the subsequent behaviors.

Note: Teachers may intervene in some instances and not others for a variety of reasons.

(Please check one box per row)

	Never	Rarely (1-3 times per school year)	Sometimes (4-6 times per school year)	Frequently (7+ times per school year)	Unsure
Social Exclusion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Purposeful Ignoring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eye-rolling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gossiping	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verbal Manipulation (non-physical)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verbal Intimidation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical Intimidation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gestures (Intended to intimidate or offend)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ridicule	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Saying something mean then pretending they were 'joking'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Behind-the-back name calling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To-the-face name calling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Silent Treatment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teasing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cliques (that exclude others)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rumor-spreading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'On again-off again' friendships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Betrayal of confidences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using social mediums/media to post hurtful messages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sending direct hurtful messages via mobile device or computer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical Aggression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Face-to-face verbal insults	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Intervention

The following series of questions (5 & 6) ask about ways that you may have tried to intervene when you have observed these behaviors among your middle school female students.

5. Please rate how frequently you have employed the following intervention strategies in instances of aggressive behaviors between or among female students in the past year. For the purpose of this question, “aggressive” is defined as offensive, malicious, or threatening.

(Please check one box per row)

	Never	Rarely (1-3 times per school year)	Sometimes (4-6 times per school year)	Frequently (7+ times per school year)	Unsure
I typically don't get involved	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verbally confront aggressor (in front of others)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verbally confront aggressor (in private)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confront victim (in front of others)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confront victim (in private)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Refer aggressor to counselor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Refer victim to counselor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confront victim & aggressor together	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speak to counselor without victim or aggressor's knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Call/email/or otherwise contact the aggressor's parent/guardian(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Call/email/or otherwise contact the victim's parent/guardian(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

6. How effective do you consider the following intervention strategies when employed in instances of bullying between students?

(For the purpose of this question, “effective” is defined as altering the behavior as you intended. “Bullying” is defined as an act of purposeful intimidation in which a student/students demonstrate(s) superiority or influence over another student.) “Bullying” may be either a physical or nonphysical act.

(Please check one box per row)

	Never effective	Rarely effective	Sometimes effective	Always effective	Unsure
No intervention	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verbally confront aggressor (in front of others)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verbally confront aggressor (in private)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confront victim (in front of others)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confront victim (in private)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Refer aggressor to counselor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Refer victim to counselor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confront victim & aggressor together	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speak to counselor without victim or aggressor's knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Call/email/otherwise contact the aggressor's parent/guardian (s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Call/email/otherwise contact the victim's parent/guardian (s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

Overt & Covert Agression

The following questions (7-9) have to do with how confident you feel about overt and covert aggression in middle school female students. For the purpose of these questions, please consider subtle or covert behaviors that are intended to inflict harm by deliberate manipulation of a student's peer relationships or social standing.

7. How confident do you feel IDENTIFYING acts of social intimidation/aggression among your girl students?

(Please check one box)

- Not confident
- Fairly Confident
- Confident
- Very Confident

8. How confident do you feel about INTERVENING when you observe acts of social intimidation/aggression taking place among middle school female students? (Please check one box)

- Not Confident
- Fairly Confident
- Confident
- Very Confident

9. Do you feel that you have the knowledge to effectively intervene with social intimidation/aggression among your students? (Please check only one box)

- Absolutely no knowledge/skills
- Limited knowledge/skills
- Sufficient knowledge/skills
- Ample knowledge/skills
- Unsure

Appendix C: Journal Prompts

Journal Prompt #1

Please reflect on how reading and discussing the seminal studies affected your identification of relational aggression among your middle school girl students.

Specifically, was there anything that we read or discussed that changed the behaviors you identify as relational aggression?

Do you regard social behaviors you may have witnessed previously differently now than you did prior to reading and discussing the studies?

Please offer your reflections.

Journal Prompt #2

How did the meeting with the middle school girls change, if at all, your identification of relational aggression?

Did you feel the meeting was a successful method for increasing your knowledge of relational aggression among your students?

If so, why? If not, why not? Please specifically note any specific elements of their feedback that you felt were particularly important and/or impactful?

Journal Prompt #3

Journal Prompt: Understanding yourself and the culture of Whirlwind and your students, how do you personally think you would intervene/address acts of relational aggression/relational aggression among your students (if at all?)

Do you think that having discussed relational aggression and hearing about relational aggression behaviors, or reading literature about intervention strategies, has impacted how (or if) you address these type of socially manipulative behaviors among your students?

How do you think the students' feedback has impacted your changes, if at all?

Please expand and explain as you see fit.

Appendix D: Teacher Interview Protocol

1. How do you think your understanding of relational aggression has changed since finishing the study?
 - a. What behaviors, if any, do you now identify as relational aggression that you previously did not consider to be?
 - b. What elements of the action research contributed most to your change in the behaviors you now regard as relational aggression?
 - c. Have you witnessed any relational aggression among your girls since beginning the study? If so, what are they?
 - d. If you witnessed relational aggression behaviors, did you feel confident in your identification of them as acts of relational aggression?
 - i. How do you perceive your confidence to identify relational aggression has changed, if at all?
 - e. Do you recognize more/fewer relational aggression behaviors among your students than you did previous to the study?
 - i. What are the most frequent relational aggression behaviors you now witness among your students?
2. How do you think your understanding of relational aggression intervention has changed since finishing the study?
 - a. In what ways did the study facilitate learning about intervention strategies that you had previously not considered or tried?
 - b. What are the interventions that the study made you consider?
 - i. Have you implemented, or tried any of the intervention strategies since beginning the study?
 1. Which interventions have you employed?
 2. If you have not attempted intervention, what are the reasons you have not? (Lack of confidence? Lack of witnessing bullying behaviors?)
 - a. If so, what specifically? Explain the scenario.

- c. How do you think hearing from the students impacted your understanding of effective relational aggression intervention?
 - ii. Specifically, what was it that the students said/revealed that resonated with you?
3. How do you think your confidence level to identify and intervene in relational aggression among your middle school girl students has changed (if at all) since finishing the study?
 - a. Which aspect of the reflection group was most influential in changing, if at all, your confidence levels? (Reading the literature? Discussing the literature? Hearing from the students? Asking questions?)
4. Reflecting on the action research group, discuss how this process has impacted the way you identify and address student conflict and student dynamics in general?
5. What do you think this action research reflection process would look like if we made it accessible to the students regarding conflict or discipline issues?
6. How do you think that this study has affected or has the ability to affect the culture at this school site?
7. How do you feel that this action research reflection group affected you, or will affect you, as an educator?
 - a. Was it useful? Not useful?
 - i. Were there any aspects of the study that you felt were more useful/impactful than others?
 1. If so, what were they and why?
8. Do you think this type of study would be useful at other middle school campuses?
 - a. If so, why?
 - b. If not, why not?
9. Looking back, is there anything else you would like to share about this reflection process?

Appendix E: Action Research Overview

Meeting Theme	Objective(s)	Participants	Meeting Content	Homework Assignment	Duration
1 Introductions	Establishing trust, group norms, process overview, Introductions	(9) Middle School Teachers	Pre-survey	Article review	60 minutes
2 Relational aggression Behavior Identification	Define relational aggression, review pre-study survey findings	(9) Middle School Teachers	Review studies and teacher feedback and notes	Journal prompt (see Appendix C)	60 minutes
3 Reflection(s)	Connecting research and practice, Student panel question development	(9) Middle School Teachers	Review of journal responses, discussion	Observe girls social behaviors in class	60 minutes
4 Student Panel; Relational aggression Behavior	Panel exercise with student participants	(9) Middle School Teachers (7) Middle school female students	Teacher developed questions	Journal prompt (see Appendix D)	60 minutes
5 Reflection(s) II and Introduction to Relational aggression Intervention	Validate perceptions of relational aggression behaviors	(9) Middle School Teachers	Review of journal responses, discussion	Article review	60 minutes
6 Intervention	Literature review, connecting literature and potential practice, student panel II question development	(9) Middle School Teachers	Articles, teacher notes	Email additional questions to pose to student panel	60 minutes
7 Student Panel; Intervention Preferences	Panel exercise with student participants	(9) Middle School Teachers (7) Middle school	Teacher questions	Write down notes regarding student feedback	60 minutes

			female students			
8	Intervention	Review and validate perceptions on intervention	(9) Middle School Teachers	Reflections on panel themes and findings	Journal prompt (see Appendix E)	60 minutes
9	Action Research Process	Review and reflect on process	(9) Middle School Teachers	Review of journal responses, final reflections		60 minutes

Appendix F: Student Panel Questions #1-Relational aggression Identification

- 1) What are your personal goals with participating in this study group? What do you hope comes of this?
- 2) What do *you* consider the definition of relational aggression to be (specific to your experiences of Windward)?
- 3) What behaviors do you regard as being relational aggression behaviors?
- 4) Are there some relational aggression behaviors that happen more frequently than others?
- 5) Are there places or times of day that relational aggression happens most frequently about which we should be aware (i.e. lunch time, CTL, in class, etc.)
- 6) Do you feel that faculty/teachers recognize relational aggression when it happens? (Do teachers see it when it happens?)
- 7) Do you think that relational aggression is related to popularity? Does it happen between different groups of girls or mostly among friend groups?
- 8) Do you sense that the behaviors you identified are *normal* middle school girl behaviors or that the behaviors shouldn't be accepted as normal?
- 9) Are the behaviors you identified as relational aggression specific (or more specific) to girls and their friendships/relationships, or do boys use these same types of behaviors?

Appendix G: Student Panel Questions #2-Relational aggression Intervention

1. What would be some good things for teachers to keep in mind about girl social dynamics when they assign group work or even arrange the seats in class? (Does being able to choose your own groups enhance or alleviate drama?)
2. Is it helpful when topics like using social media or identifying bullying are addressed explicitly in school (in class or advisory)?
3. Have you personally witnessed any instances of bullying being resolved? If so, what brought about this change?
4. Do you think teachers/faculty recognize when relational aggression is taking place? If so, how do you think they should handle it? If not, would you want them to recognize and address it?
5. What would you suggest as intervention techniques that would work for you and your experiences?
6. Is there any type of intervention policy/strategy that you would like to see in place here at Windward given this particular environment?

Appendix H: Action Research Meeting Agendas

DAY #1 Introduction & Assessment of Relational aggression at Site

1) (15 minutes)

-Share why each teacher is participating in the action research and why this issue may be important to her. Also, if they have one, what are her personal goal(s) for participating?

2) (20-30 minutes)

-Provide definition of relational aggression.

-What have YOU noticed at this site about the middle school girls and their social interactions?

-Is this different from what you may have noticed at other sites?

-Do you think these behaviors are unique to Windward or schools similar?
-Why or why not?

4) (Remainder of meeting time—but may be moved to next meeting) Looking over the results of the survey she took (individual copies to be distributed) did any questions/responses stand out to you?

-Is there any response that surprises you?

-Are there any particular questions that you had to weigh particularly carefully?

-Are there any changes/additions/omissions you would like to make if this were to go out to the entire middle school faculty?

HW: Relational Aggression/Relational aggression Studies to be emailed and put in mailbox. Read and take notes.

DAY #2 Inform AR Team of Existent Research & Pertinent Literature

1) (20-30 minutes)

-Continue to Review Survey Results (see Day 1 Agenda)

2) (45 min-1 hour)

Begin Discussion of Literature they read and highlighted for homework (that was previously emailed and put in their mailbox)

-After reading the literature, and highlighting impactful selections, let's first discuss the definition of "relational aggression." Was there any part of the definition of "relational aggression" or "social aggression" as a type of bullying that surprised you?

-Having now read a few definitions of "relational aggression" and "relational aggression," does that alter your perceptions of social interactions you have witnessed among your middle school girl students?

-According to the definitions of "relational aggression" and "relational aggression," were there any behaviors mentioned or identified that stood out to you?

-If so, what were they and why were they remarkable?

-If not, why not? Are they behaviors you already considered to be bullying?

-Does "knowing the facts" change your identifications of relational aggression behaviors between middle school girls?

-Were there any notes you took or sections of the studies you would like to discuss?

-What stood out and why?

-Does anyone have any questions from the studies they would like to ask the team?

HW: Journal Prompt: Please reflect on how reading and discussing the seminal studies affected your perceptions of relational aggression among your middle school girl students. Specifically, was there anything that we read or discussed that changed the behaviors you identify as relational aggression? Do you regard social behaviors you may have witnessed previously differently now than you did prior to reading and discussing the studies? Please offer your reflections.

DAY #3 Journal Response Reflection & Literature Review

1) (30 minutes)

- Review & Discuss teachers' responses to the journal prompt. What did they identify as relational aggression and why?

-Which elements of the studies they read resonated the most with them or did they feel were most relevant to their students, as they reported in their journal responses?

2) (30 minutes)

-Create questions for the middle school girls student panel meeting.

HW: Observe and document your girls' social behaviors. What do you notice about their interactions with each other? Are there social behaviors that may align with the definition of relational aggression? If so, what are they?

DAY #4 Question & Answer Session with Middle School Student Panel

- 1) Handout Agenda with Summary of Definition of Relational aggression
- 2) Discuss Purpose of meeting: *why are we there and our goals.*

The teachers' questions:

1. What are your personal goals with participating in this study group? What do you hope comes of this?
2. What do *you* consider the definition of relational aggression to be (specific to your experiences of Windward)?
3. What behaviors do you regard as being relational aggression behaviors?
4. Are there some relational aggression behaviors that happen more frequently than others?
5. Are there places or times of day that relational aggression happens most frequently about which we should be aware (i.e. lunch time, CTL, in class, etc.)
6. Do you feel that faculty/teachers recognize relational aggression when it happens? (Do teachers see it when it happens?)
7. Do you think that relational aggression is related to popularity? Does it happen between different groups of girls or mostly among friend groups?
8. Do you sense that the behaviors you identified are *normal* middle school girl behaviors or that the behaviors shouldn't be accepted as normal?
9. Are the behaviors you identified as relational aggression specific (or more specific) to girls and their friendships/relationships, or do boys use these same types of behaviors?

HW: Journal Prompt: How did the meeting with the middle school girls change, if at all, your identification of relational aggression? Did you feel the meeting was a successful method for increasing your knowledge of relational aggression among your students? If so, why? If not, why not?

DAY #5 Reflections on Q & A With MS Girls & Intro to Intervention Discussion

- 1) Introduction Discussion (50 minutes)
 - What was the purpose of hearing from the middle school girls? Did you have a goal in mind for the meeting?
 - Did you have any “preconceived notions” or biases that you are entering the meeting with regarding their (the middle school girls’) experiences with relational aggression at this school?
 - What did the girls say that you felt was impactful? Did they inform you of anything that changed your mind about relational aggression? In general or here at Whirlwind?
- 2) Introduction to Intervention
 - Have you ever “intervened” in acts of relational aggression? If so, how? If not, why not?

HW: Relational Aggression/Relational aggression Intervention Studies to be emailed and put in mailbox. Read and take notes.

Day #6 Literature Review & Create Plan for MS Student Panel

- 1) (45 minutes) Discussion of Literature they read and highlighted for homework (that was previously emailed and put in their mailbox)

-After reading the literature, and highlighting impactful selections, what is the definition of intervention?

- Was there any part of the intervention literature that surprised you?
- Did any of the studies alter your perceptions of effective intervention strategies?
- Were there any notes you took or sections of the studies you would like to discuss?
- Which elements of the relational aggression intervention literature do you feel are most applicable to Whirlwind and Whirlwind girls?

- 2) (15 minutes) Compile List of questions for MS students regarding teacher intervention. What do they want? What do they NOT want?

HW: Email any remaining questions they may want to ask the girls at the next student panel meeting.

DAY #7 Question & Answer Session With MS Girls regarding Intervention Strategies

- 1) Handout Agenda with list of teachers' questions
- 2) Discuss Purpose of meeting: *why are we there and our goals. Intervention Preferences*

The teachers' questions:

1. What would be some good things for teachers to keep in mind about girl social dynamics when they assign group work or even arrange the seats in class? (Does being able to choose your own groups enhance or alleviate drama?)
2. Is it helpful when topics like using social media or identifying bullying are addressed explicitly in school (in class or advisory)?
3. Have you personally witnessed any instances of bullying being resolved? If so, what brought about this change?
4. Do you think teachers/faculty recognize when relational aggression is taking place? If so, how do you think they should handle it? If not, would you want them to recognize and address it?
5. What would you suggest as intervention techniques that would work for you and your experiences?
6. Is there any type of intervention policy/strategy that you would like to see in place here at Windward given this particular environment?

HW: Write down your notes and initial thoughts about the student meeting and the content of their feedback. What did they say that you feel changed your understanding of relational aggression intervention?

Day #8: Student Panel Review & Intervention Discussion

1) Review and Discuss Prior Student Panel:

- What were the findings from the meeting?
- What did you recognize as impactful information the students offered?
- Was there anything the students revealed that you discounted?
- Can you synthesize any of the students' feedback and the information from the studies? i.e., Did the students' feedback correlate with the studies' findings?

HW: Journal Prompt: Understanding yourself and the culture of Whirlwind and your students, how do you personally think you would intervene/address acts of relational aggression/relational aggression among your students (if at all?)

Do you think that having discussed relational aggression and hearing about relational aggression behaviors, or reading literature about intervention strategies, has impacted how (or if) you address these type of socially manipulative behaviors among your students?

How do you think the students' feedback has impacted your changes, if at all?
Please expand and explain as you see fit.

Day 9 Agenda: Study Review

- 1) Sum up and review prior student panel and journal responses
 - Had they changed their intervention perceptions and/or actions based on the study?
 - If so, which elements of the study most impacted any change they may have experienced with relational aggression intervention?

- 2) Review AR Process
 - How has this process changed your understanding of what relational aggression is or its frequency, if at all?
 - Do you have any sense of HOW we should/shouldn't intervene as faculty?
 - Has your confidence level to either recognize or address relational aggression changed since this process?
 - What factors influenced any changes in your confidence levels to intervene in relational aggression?

- 3) What's next? Where would you like to see us go from here?
 - Is this problem worth addressing in the future? If so, how?
 - Is this enquiry process worth Whirlwind utilizing again? If so why and in what capacity?

- 4) Set up interviews and remind teachers about post-study survey.

References

- 9 Teenage Suicides In The Last Year Were Linked To Cyber-Bullying On Social Network
Ask.fm. (n.d.). *BuzzFeed*. Retrieved May 23, 2014, from
<http://www.buzzfeed.com/ryanhatesthis/a-ninth-teenager-since-last-september-has-committed-suicide>
- Andreou, E. (2006). Social Preference, Perceived Popularity and Social Intelligence Relations to Overt and Relational Aggression. *School Psychology International*, 27(3), 339–351.
doi:10.1177/0143034306067286
- Austin Independent School District: Department of Program Evaluation. (2010). *Results of the 2010 Student Substance Use and Safety Survey*. Retrieved from
http://archive.austinisd.org/inside/docs/ope_09-53.c_District_SSUSS_09_10.pdf
- Bauman, S., & Del Rio, A. (2006). Preservice teachers' responses to bullying scenarios: Comparing physical, verbal, and relational bullying. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(1), 219–231. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.98.1.219>
- Bauman, S., Rigby, K., & Hoppa, K. (2008). US teachers' and school counsellors' strategies for handling school bullying incidents. *Educational Psychology*, 28(7), 837–856.
doi:10.1080/01443410802379085
- Beauchamp, C., & Thomas, L. (2009). Understanding teacher identity: an overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(2), 175–189. doi:10.1080/03057640902902252
- Berstein, D. (1998). *Gender and Motivation*. U of Nebraska Press.
- Björkqvist, K., Österman, K., & Lagerspetz, M. J. (1994). Sex Differences in Covert Aggression Among Adults. *Aggressive Behavior*, 20(1), 27–33.

- Boulton, M. J. (1997). Teachers' views on bullying: definitions, attitudes and ability to cope. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 67(2), 223–233. doi:10.1111/j.2044-8279.1997.tb01239.x
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). Contexts of child rearing: Problems and prospects. *American Psychologist*, 34(10), 844–850. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.34.10.844
- Butler, D. L., Lauscher, H. N., Jarvis-Selinger, S., & Beckingham, B. (2004). Collaboration and self-regulation in teachers' professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(5), 435–455. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2004.04.003
- Byrne, B. J. (1994). Bullies and victims in a school setting with reference to some Dublin schools. *The Irish Journal of Psychology*, 15(4), 574–586.
- Casey-Cannon, S., Hayward, C., & Gowan, K. (2001). Middle-School Girls' Reports of Peer Victimization: Concerns, Consequences, and Implications. *Professional School Counseling*, 5(2), 138–147.
- Clarke, E. A. K. (1997). A systematic counseling approach to the problem of bullying. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 31(4), 310.
- Coghlan, D., & Brannick, T. (2009). *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*. SAGE Publications.
- Coyne, S. M., Archer, J., & Eslea, M. (2006). "We're not friends anymore! unless...": the frequency and harmfulness of indirect, relational, and social aggression. *Aggressive Behavior*, 32(4), 294–307. doi:10.1002/ab.20126
- Craig, W. M., Henderson, K., & Murphy, J. G. (2000). Prospective Teachers' Attitudes Toward Bullying and Victimization. *School Psychology International*, 21(1), 5–21. doi:10.1177/0143034300211001

- Crawford, N. (2002, October). New Ways to Stop Bullying. *Monitor on Psychology*, 33(9).
- Crick, N. R. (1996). The Role of Overt Aggression, Relational Aggression, and Prosocial Behavior in the Prediction of Children's Future Social Adjustment. *Child Development*, 67(5), 2317–2327. doi:10.2307/1131625
- Crick, N. R., & Bigbee, M. A. (1998). Relational and overt forms of peer victimization: A multiinformant approach. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 66(2), 337–347. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.66.2.337
- Crick, N. R., Bigbee, M. A., & Howes, C. (1996). Gender Differences in Children's Normative Beliefs about Aggression: How Do I Hurt Thee? Let Me Count the Ways. *Child Development*, 67(3), 1003–1014. doi:10.2307/1131876
- Crick, N. R., Casas, J. F., & Ku, H.-C. (1999). Relational and Physical Forms of Peer Victimization in Preschool. *Developmental Psychology*, 35(2), 376–385.
- Crick, N. R., Casas, J. F., & Mosher, M. (1997). Relational and overt aggression in preschool. *Developmental Psychology*, 33(4), 579–588. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.33.4.579
- Crick, N. R., Casas, J. F., & Nelson, D. A. (2002). Toward a More Comprehensive Understanding of Peer Maltreatment: Studies of Relational Victimization. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 11(3), 98–101. doi:10.2307/20182779
- Crick, N. R., & Grotpeter, J. K. (1995). Relational Aggression, Gender, and Social-Psychological Adjustment. *Child Development*, 66(3), 710–722.
- Crick, N. R., & Nelson, D. A. (2002). Relational and Physical Victimization Within Friendships: Nobody Told Me There'd Be Friends Like These. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 30(6), 599–607. doi:10.1023/A:1020811714064

- Crossan, M. M., Lane, H. W., & White, R. E. (1999). An Organizational Learning Framework: From Intuition to Institution. *The Academy of Management Review*, 24(3), 522–537.
doi:10.2307/259140
- Crothers, L. M., Kolbert, J. B., & Barker, W. F. (2006). Middle School Students' Preferences for Anti-Bullying Interventions. *School Psychology International*, 27(4), 475–487.
doi:10.1177/0143034306070435
- Espelage, D. L., & Holt, M. K. (2001). Bullying and Victimization During Early Adolescence. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 2(2-3), 123–142. doi:10.1300/J135v02n02_08
- Espelage, D. L., & Swearer, S. M. (2004). *Bullying in American Schools: A Social-Ecological Perspective on Prevention and Intervention*. Routledge.
- Fink, D., & Brayman, C. (2006). School Leadership Succession and the Challenges of Change. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 42(1), 62–89. doi:10.1177/0013161X05278186
- Galen, B. R., & Underwood, M. K. (1997). A developmental investigation of social aggression among children. *Developmental Psychology*, 33(4), 589–600.
doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.33.4.589
- Garbarino, J. (2002). Words Can Hurt Forever. *Educational Leadership*, 60(6), 18.
- Graham, S., Bellmore, A., & Mize, J. (2006). Peer Victimization, Aggression, and Their Co-Occurrence in Middle School: Pathways to Adjustment Problems. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 34(3), 349–364. doi:10.1007/s10802-006-9030-2
- Grotzinger, J. K., & Crick, N. R. (1996). *Relational Aggression, Overt Aggression, and Friendship*. (pp. 2328–2338). Retrieved from
<http://search.proquest.com/eric/docview/62597460/13BCB4B199C8A318F0/22?accountid=14512>

- Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional Development and Teacher Change. *Teachers and Teaching*, 8(3), 381–391. doi:10.1080/135406002100000512
- Hawker, D. S. J., & Boulton, M. J. (2000). Twenty Years' Research on Peer Victimization and Psychosocial Maladjustment: A Meta-analytic Review of Cross-sectional Studies. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 41(4), 441–455. doi:10.1111/1469-7610.00629
- Henington, C., Hughes, J. N., Cavell, T. A., & Thompson, B. (1998). The Role of Relational Aggression in Identifying Aggressive Boys and Girls. *Journal of School Psychology*, 36(4), 457–477. doi:10.1016/S0022-4405(98)00015-6
- Janesick, V. (1999). A journal about journal writing as a qualitative research technique: History, issues, and reflections. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 5(4), 505–524.
- Jeffrey, L. R., Miller, D., & Linn, M. (2001). Middle School Bullying as a Context for the Development of Passive Observers to the Victimization of Others. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 2(2-3), 143–156. doi:10.1300/J135v02n02_09
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1996). Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation Programs in Elementary and Secondary Schools: A Review of the Research. *Review of Educational Research*, 66(4), 459–506. doi:10.3102/00346543066004459
- Juvonen, J., & Graham, S. (2001). *Peer Harassment in School: The Plight of the Vulnerable and Victimized*. Guilford Press.
- Juvonen, J., Nishina, A., & Graham, S. (2000). Peer harassment, psychological adjustment, and school functioning in early adolescence. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(2), 349–359. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.92.2.349

- Kaltiala-Heino, R., Rimpela, M., Marttunen, M., Rimpela, A., & Rantanen, P. (1999). Bullying, depression, and suicidal ideation in Finnish adolescents: school survey. *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 319(7206), 348–351.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice-Hall.
- Lasky, S. (2005). A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(8), 899–916. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.003
- Lawson, H. A. (2004). The logic of collaboration in education and the human services. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, 18(3), 225–237. doi:10.1080/13561820410001731278
- Leff, S. S., Gullan, R. L., Paskewich, B. S., Abdul-Kabir, S., Jawad, A. F., Grossman, M., ... Power, T. J. (2009). An Initial Evaluation of a Culturally Adapted Social Problem-Solving and Relational Aggression Prevention Program for Urban African-American Relationally Aggressive Girls. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, 37(4), 260–274. doi:10.1080/10852350903196274
- Leff, S. S., Waasdorp, T. E., & Crick, N. R. (2010). A Review of Existing Relational Aggression Programs: Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions. *School Psychology Review*, 39(4), 508–535.
- Lipka, R. P., & Brinthaupt, T. M. (1992). *Self-Perspectives Across the Life Span*. SUNY Press.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (Third Edition.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

- Merrell, K. W., Buchanan, R., & Tran, O. K. (2006). Relational aggression in children and adolescents: A review with implications for school settings. *Psychology in the Schools*, 43(3), 345–360. doi:10.1002/pits.20145
- Merrell, K. W., Gueldner, B. A., Ross, S. W., & Isava, D. M. (2008). How effective are school bullying intervention programs? A meta-analysis of intervention research. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 23(1), 26–42. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1045-3830.23.1.26
- Merriam, S. B. (1997). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education: Revised and Expanded from Case Study Research in Education*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Murray-Close, D., Ostrov, J. M., & Crick, N. R. (2007). A short-term longitudinal study of growth of relational aggression during middle childhood: Associations with gender, friendship intimacy, and internalizing problems. *Development and Psychopathology*, 19(01), 187–203. doi:10.1017/S0954579407070101
- Nansel, T. R. (2001). Bullying Behaviors Among US Youth: Prevalence and Association With Psychosocial Adjustment. *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285(16), 2094–2100. doi:10.1001/jama.285.16.2094
- Nansel TR, O. M. (2001). Bullying behaviors among us youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *JAMA*, 285(16), 2094–2100. doi:10.1001/jama.285.16.2094
- Nixon, C. L., & Werner, N. E. (2010). Reducing adolescents' involvement with relational aggression: Evaluating the effectiveness of the Creating A Safe School (CASS) intervention. *Psychology in the Schools*, 47(6), 606–620. doi:10.1002/pits.20494

- O'Moore, M. (2000). Critical issues for teacher training to counter bullying and victimisation in Ireland. *Aggressive Behavior*, 26(1), 99–111. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1098-2337(2000)26:1<99::AID-AB8>3.0.CO;2-W
- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at School*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.
- Olweus, D. (1994a). Bullying at School: Basic Facts and Effects of a School Based Intervention Program. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 35(7), 1171–1190. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.1994.tb01229.x
- Olweus, D. (1994b). Bullying at School: Basic Facts and Effects of a School Based Intervention Program. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 35(7), 1171–1190. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.1994.tb01229.x
- Ostrov, J. M., Massetti, G. M., Stauffacher, K., Godleski, S. A., Hart, K. C., Karch, K. M., ... Ries, E. E. (2009). An intervention for relational and physical aggression in early childhood: A preliminary study. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 24(1), 15–28. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2008.08.002
- Paquette, J. A., & Underwood, M. K. (1999). Gender differences in young adolescents' experiences of peer victimization: social and physical aggression. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 45(2), 242–266.
- Pellegrini, A. D. (2002a). Affiliative and aggressive dimensions of dominance and possible functions during early adolescence. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 7(1), 21–31. doi:10.1016/S1359-1789(00)00033-1
- Pellegrini, A. D. (2002b). Bullying, Victimization, and Sexual Harassment During the Transition to Middle School. *Educational Psychologist*, 37(3), 151–163.

- Pellegrini, A. D., & Bartini, M. (2000). A Longitudinal Study of Bullying, Victimization, and Peer Affiliation during the Transition from Primary School to Middle School. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(3), 699–725. doi:10.3102/00028312037003699
- Prinstein, M. J., Boergers, J., & Vernberg, E. M. (2001). Overt and Relational Aggression in Adolescents: Social-Psychological Adjustment of Aggressors and Victims. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 30(4), 479–491.
doi:10.1207/S15374424JCCP3004_05
- Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2006). *Handbook of Action Research: Concise Paperback Edition*. SAGE.
- Rose, A. J., Swenson, L. P., & Waller, E. M. (2004). Overt and Relational Aggression and Perceived Popularity: Developmental Differences in Concurrent and Prospective Relations. *Developmental Psychology*, 40(3), 378–387. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.40.3.378
- Savin-Williams, R. C., & Berndt, T. J. (1990). Friendship and peer relations. In S. S. Feldman & G. R. Elliott (Eds.), *At the threshold: The developing adolescent* (pp. 277–307). Cambridge, MA, US: Harvard University Press.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. Basic Books.
- Smith, J. D., Barry H. Smith, Peter K. Ananiadou, Katerina. (2004). The Effectiveness of Whole-School Antibullying Programs: A Synthesis of Evaluation Research. *School Psychology Review*, 33(4), 547.
- Smith, R. L., Rose, A. J., & Schwartz-Mette, R. A. (2010). Relational and Overt Aggression in Childhood and Adolescence: Clarifying Mean-Level Gender Differences and Associations with Peer Acceptance. *Social Development*, 19(2), 243–269.

- Stringer, E. T. (2004). *Action Research in Education* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- Sutton, J., Smith, P. K., & Swettenham, J. (1999). Social cognition and bullying: Social inadequacy or skilled manipulation? *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, *17*(3), 435–450. doi:10.1348/026151099165384
- Swearer, S. M., & Cary, P. T. (2003). Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Bullying in Middle School Youth. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, *19*(2), 63–79. doi:10.1300/J008v19n02_05
- Swearer, S. M., & Doll, B. (2001). Bullying in Schools. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, *2*(2-3), 7–23. doi:10.1300/J135v02n02_02
- Swearer, S. M., Peugh, J., Espelage, D. L., Siebecker, A. B., Kingsbury, W. L., & Bevins, K. S. (2006). *A social-ecological model for bullying prevention and intervention in early adolescence: An exploratory examination*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Unnever, J. D., & Cornell, D. G. (2004). Middle school victims of bullying: Who reports being bullied? *Aggressive Behavior*, *30*(5), 373–388. doi:10.1002/ab.20030
- Verlaan, P., & Turmel, F. (2010). Development Process and Outcome Evaluation of a Program for Raising Awareness of Indirect and Relational Aggression in Elementary Schools: A Preliminary Study. *School Psychology Review*, *39*(4), 552.
- Walcott, C. M., Upton, A., Bolen, L. M., & Brown, M. B. (2008). Associations between Peer-Perceived Status and Aggression in Young Adolescents. *Psychology in the Schools*, *45*(6), 550–561.

- Wang, J., Iannotti, R. J., & Nansel, T. R. (2009). School Bullying Among Adolescents in the United States: Physical, Verbal, Relational, and Cyber. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 45*(4), 368–375. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2009.03.021
- Yoon, J. S., Barton, E., & Taiariol, J. (2004). Relational Aggression in Middle School Educational Implications of Developmental Research. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 24*(3), 303–318. doi:10.1177/0272431604265681
- Yoon, J. S., & Kerber, K. (2003). Bullying. *Research in Education, (69)*, 27.
- Young, E. L., Boye, A. E., & Nelson, D. A. (2006). Relational aggression: Understanding, identifying, and responding in schools. *Psychology in the Schools, 43*(3), 297–312. doi:10.1002/pits.20148