

The Role of Cyberbullying in Relational Aggression – School Counselor Advocacy with
Students, Schools, Home and the Community

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Abstract

Aggression has long been a topic of concern for teachers, parents, and students. Yet in today's world, peer groups have even more influence than ever before while technology makes it easier for children to be anonymous and widespread in their cruelty. Many bullies resort to hidden, indirect relational aggression to harm others. Cyberbullying is defined as a means of indirect aggression in which peers use electronics to taunt, insult, threaten, harass, and/or intimidate others (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Bullies and victims in the school culture suffer as a result. School counselors are in a unique position to influence these outcomes. Interventions for the school, home, and community will be identified and discussed. This paper will provide an overview of relational aggression and technology, discuss factors that contribute to the use of online relational aggression, and analyze the impact relational aggression and cyberbullying have on adolescents. This paper will also examine and discuss implications for school counselors and provide an Adlerian perspective on the issue.

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Cyberbullying and Relational Aggression

Bullying has been a part of our society for many years and was once considered to be a normal part of growing up. However, research has found that bullying is not a harmless phenomenon; rather it is a widespread and serious problem that must be addressed (Jacobsen & Bauman, 2007). Bullying not only has negative consequences for the victim, but also for the bully. Bullying is a subset of aggression that is typically categorized as physical, verbal, or relational. Research focused on relational aggression has increased significantly in the last decade (Elsaesser, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2012).

Dr. Nicki Crick developed the term Relational Aggression in the early 1990's. She defines Relational Aggression as, "emotional violence and bullying behaviors focused on damaging an individual's social connections within the peer group" (Randall, 2008, p.1). Relational aggression is described as any behavior that is intended to harm someone by damaging or manipulating their relationship with others. Relational aggression is defined in terms of its endpoint, which is to manipulate or disrupt relationships and friendships (Archer & Coyne, 2005). It involves an aggressor (the bully), a victim (the target), and often one or more bystanders or individuals in the middle. Relational aggression is different from other forms of bullying in that most bullying occurs outside of the peer group while relational aggression occurs within the peer group. Relational aggression is similar to other forms of bullying because it is repeated, aggressive, harassing and severe.

Relational Aggression within Gender

In general, males have been shown to engage in more bullying behaviors than females. Studies have consistently documented higher rates of aggression in males than females (Nansel et al., 2001). Crick and Nelson (2002) found that boys use physical victimization with their

friends whereas girls use relational victimization. Consequently, much of the literature on relational aggression has focused on girls (Leff et al., 2010). Growing up, girls are often taught that it is much more flattering to “be nice”. As a result, when girls are angry they may resort to covert or indirect acts of aggression. It seems that girls intend to inflict harm on others just as boys; however the difference is in how they express these feelings. Girls tend to indirectly inflict harm while boys inflict harm directly. Evidence indicates that girls are more affected by the act of relational aggression than boys. Relationally aggressive situations result in significantly higher levels of emotional distress for females (Crick, Grotpeter & Bigbee, 2002).

Relational aggression has been shown to be highly stable across the developmental period (Doyle & DeFago, 2009). Relational aggression has been shown to occur between girls of all ages, but it is more prominent during adolescence (Owens, Shute & Slee, 2000). While relational aggression is present throughout childhood, adolescence, and even adulthood, the nature of the behaviors changes in step with cognitive and social development. Adolescence is a critical period in the psychosocial development of adolescents. Middle childhood is cited as being a period where relationally aggressive tactics become more complex and sophisticated. This time is marked by an increase in peer interaction and the growing importance of friendships. Friends become more important than parents, as adolescents look to them for support and comfort. As a result of this friendships contribute considerably toward adolescent’s self-concept and their overall wellbeing (Cole & Cole, 2001). Female friendships play an important role in navigating the hardships of adolescence and developing a sense of identity.

Around the age of 12, girls experience a heightened need to be well liked and accepted by their peers. They desire to achieve popularity and recognition, as well as a high degree of status within their social groups. Ironically, these desires often lead to meanness due to competition

both between and within girl's cliques (Willer & Cupach, 2008). A study on friendship bonds among adolescent girls found that, "girls considered their friendships extremely important and nominated the breaking of a friendship as the most anxiety-provoking aspect of school life" (Besag, 2006). Some girls place a higher value on friendships and use relational aggression as a very effective weapon within their peer group. Other girls go along with relationally aggressive behaviors to feel like they belong to a group. They may find themselves gossiping and spreading rumors to feel a sense of belonging, empowerment and popularity (Owens, Shute & Slee, 2000).

The literature supports the theory that, indirect aggression is predominantly used by adolescent girls who direct their aggression at same-sex peers. This may also suggest that indirect aggression is used in the context of competing for mates. The association between indirect aggression and age is similar to the positive link found between age and intrasexual competition (Vaillancourt, 2013). Research shows that younger women gossip more about rivals than older women do (Massar, Buunk & Rempt, 2012). Females may feel threatened by their attractive peers, and therefore attack the peer indirectly as a way of intimidating them, diminishing their rivals' value, or improving their own self-image (Vaillancourt, 2013). According to Bjorkqvist (1994), females prefer to use indirect aggression over direct aggression because this form of aggression maximizes the harm inflicted on the victim while minimizing the personal danger involved.

Types of Relational Aggression

Relational aggression includes both covert (indirect) and overt (direct) behaviors, although it is typically covert. Archer (2001) noted that relational aggression can manifest either as a direct or indirect form of aggression. Direct relational aggression involves overt, confrontational behavior where the aggressor openly and unabashedly attacks their target.

Indirect relational aggression includes non-confrontational social acts where the aggressor attempts to conceal the aggressive behavior. Relational aggression is difficult to detect because of the subtle gestures that are used in this type of bullying. The indirect nature of many relationally aggressive acts implies that it is difficult to identify, punish and retaliate against the aggressor (Terranova et al., 2008).

There are two types of relational aggression: reactive relational aggression and proactive relational aggression. Reactive aggression is characterized as a “hot blooded”, automatic, defense response to immediate and often misperceived threat (McAdams & Schmidt, 2007). Reactive relational aggression is behavior that is in response to provocation, with the intent to retaliate. Relational aggression can be reactive when used as a response to the adolescent being threatened or angry. For example, an adolescent may spread rumors when they feel they have been wronged. Unlike reactive aggression, proactive aggression does not characteristically occur as an emotion-laden, defensive response to immediate threat. Instead, it is described as organized, purposeful, and often premeditated rather than automatic (McAdams & Schmidt, 2007). Aggression for proactive aggressors has become an internalized means of achieving personal security, competence, and control in one’s life. Proactive aggression is used consistently as a tool for personal gain (status, self-confirmation, gratification) (Eisenberg, Spinrad & Eggum, 2010). The aggressive behaviors are a means for achieving a goal and are applied strategically, methodically, subtly, and with increasing intensity until the desired goal is achieved (Hubbard et al., 2001). For example, an adolescent may exclude someone to maintain his or her own social status. It is important that educators are able to recognize what type of aggression is taking place so that they can be better aware of what is motivating the aggressive behavior.

Attributes of Relational Aggression

The primary components of relational aggression are a power imbalance, manipulation, torment, a lack of empathy, and that the behavior often goes unnoticed. A sense of power infuses throughout the concept of relational aggression. If the power was equally shared between the victim and the aggressor the aggressor would not feel empowered enough to inflict harm onto the victim. The desire of manipulation is also present in the concept of relational aggression. There must be a need to change another person's view on the victim in a negative way. Aggressors use relational aggression in a desire to damage relationships, dissolve friendships and to distort the reputations of those who threaten their status. With relational aggression there is a lack of ability to have compassion for the victim. Unlike physical aggression, an observer of relational aggression is often times naïve to any existence of aggression. This is because relational aggression lies just beneath the radar to an individual who is not directly experiencing the aggression (Gomes, 2007). The unfortunate reality of relational aggression is that it is one of the most difficult forms of bullying to address in an educational environment.

Methods of Relational Aggression

Relationally aggressive adolescents are very creative in their methods of behavior and their motivations drive them to always be one up on everyone else (Randall, 2008). Students who use relational aggression are often quite sophisticated, keeping it out of adult-radar range (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). Indirect aggression harms others in such a socially skilled manner that the aggressor can make it appear as if there was 'no intention to hurt at all' (Bjorkqvist, 1994). The silence of these behaviors often means that those who are not the intended victim often do not recognize the relational aggression that is taking place. Relational aggression may take the form of exclusion, ignoring, spreading rumors, verbal insults, teasing,

intimidation, eye rolling, taunting, manipulative affection, gossiping, lying, backstabbing, revealing secrets, being sarcastic, isolating, prank calling, and cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying

Technology has transformed the lives of adolescents, including the way they bully one another. Advances in technology have revolutionized the way adolescents communicate, learn and interact (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2012). Cyberbullying is a form of aggression where bullies use technology to target their victims (Drogin & Young, 2008). The Canadian Teachers' Federation (2008) defines cyberbullying as "the use of information and communication technology to engage in or conduct behavior that is derogatory, defamatory, degrading, illegal and/or abusive". Cyberbullying is a form of relational aggression because it is a deliberate attempt to inflict direct or indirect harm on peers through manipulation and damage of peer relationships (Johnson, 2009). A cyberbully may target their victims through the use of text messaging, social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, chat rooms, blogs or e-mails. Technology has escalated bullying to a new and particularly insidious level (Beale & Hall, 2007). Technology continues to develop rapidly and is therefore changing the way our society functions. This brings new dimensions to our responsibilities as educators (Li, 2010).

The UCLA Internet Report (2013) estimates that 91 percent of children between the ages of 12 and 15 years of age and almost 99 percent of adolescents between the ages of 16 and 18 years of age use the Internet. Over 11 million youth go online every single day. Almost three-fourths of teens have a desktop computer, and 18 percent have a laptop. Although 93 percent of teens access the Internet through their computer, an increasing number are also accessing the Internet through their cell phones (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2012). According to the Pew Report, 88 percent of American teens ages 13 to 16 own a cell phone (Lenhart, 2015). As of Spring 2011,

76 percent of all teens between the ages of 12 and 17 used social networking sites (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2012). Facebook is the most popular and frequently used social media platform among teens; half of teens use Instagram, and nearly as many use Snapchat. 71 percent of teens use more than one social networking site (Lenhart, 2015).

Methods of Cyberbullying

According to Willard (2004), cyberbullying can take different forms. The following are different types of cyberbullying, flaming, masquerade, harassment, denigration/humiliation, outing/trickery, exclusion and cyber stalking. Flaming is a common form of bullying that can be very harmful to the victim. Flaming is defined as sending angry, rude or vulgar messages directed at a person privately or to an online group. This is a very hostile form of abuse where the bully uses offensive and cruel language with the intention of starting a fight with the victim. Masquerading is also a very common type of cyberbullying where the bully creates fake identities to harass the victim while keeping their identity private. Masquerade is pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material that makes that person look bad or places that person in potential danger. Harassment is defined as repeatedly sending a person offensive messages. These messages are sent persistently and tirelessly. Denigration/humiliation is defined as sending or posting harmful, untrue or cruel statements about a person to other people. Bullies use the Internet to spread rumors and hearsay with the purpose of damaging the victim's reputation. Outing or trickery occurs when individuals share private information with someone and this person then "outs" the information sharing it publicly through the Internet. Outing or trickery is sending or posting material about a person that contains sensitive, private, or embarrassing information, including forwarding private messages or images. Exclusion occurs when the victim is singled out and then excluded from a group. Exclusion is actions that

specifically and intentionally exclude a person from an online group. Cyber stalking is not as common as other forms of cyberbullying, but it does occur on a daily basis all over the world. Cyber stalking is defined as the sending of messages to frighten or threaten someone. Cyber stalking includes harassment through the use of threats. The person receiving the messages begins to feel intimidated and may worry about their safety and general well being (Willard, 2004).

Patchin and Hinduja (2012) conducted an online survey involving 384 respondents who were under 18 years of age. Their results showed that various forms of bullying occurred online, including being ignored (60.4%), disrespected (50%), called names (29.9%), threatened (21.4%), picked on (19.8%), made fun of (19.3%), and having rumors spread about them (19.8%). Children who have Internet access in their bedrooms report higher rates of sending hostile messages online, as well as more overall misconduct on the Internet (Ridout, Roberts & Foehr, 2005). These behaviors are likely occurring right alongside the bullying that is happening at school. That is because what is happening online is often happening at school. Research has shown that most cyberbullies are generally not strangers but peers at school (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2012). Research studies have indicated that cyberbullying is becoming a major issue in schools and has various negative effects.

Unique Characteristics of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is unique to other more traditional forms of bullying because of the bullies anonymity, the ability to reach their victims 24 hours a day and an unlimited audience (Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011). Before technology became such a big component of bullying, children could escape their bullies at the end of the school day by going home. Unfortunately this is no longer the case; as technology allows victims to be attacked at anytime and in any place. A cyberbully

can essentially follow a student into their home at any time of the day through technology such as computers and cell phones (Keith & Martin, 2005). Cyberbullies are also able to hide behind the anonymity of a computer or cell phone screen and can commit their acts even when they are physically separated from their target (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2012). Cyberspace also gives bullies the option to stay anonymous by hiding behind a screen name that protects their actual identity, which adds further challenges for schools (Wong-Lo, & Bullock, 2011). Cyberbullying also tends to be more virtual than traditional bullying. Even though rumors can spread very quickly throughout a school via traditional methods, they travel at lightning speed with the aid of technology (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2012).

Characteristics of Victims

Research indicates that just about anyone can be the target of relational aggression and cyberbullying. Although no student is immune from being bullied, there tends to be patterns when looking at certain demographics and characteristics. Most research shows that girls are more likely than boys to be cyberbullied. Age also appears to be related to experiences with bullying, with a majority of studies showing these behaviors most prominent during the middle school years. Research also shows that adolescents of all races experience bullying at roughly the same rate (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2012). LGBT students are almost twice as likely to experience cyberbullying compared to heterosexual students. Students who are struggling in schools, both academically and behaviorally, are more at risk of being cyberbullied (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2012). Victims tend to comply with the bullies aggressive behaviors allowing the bullying to continue throughout time. Glew et al. (2000) articulate that victims tend to be insecure, cautious, and lack good communication and problem-solving skills. The lack of self-esteem and confidence may cause the victim to blame himself or herself for the bullying and cause the

victim to not report the bullying. Studies show that adolescents with low positive self-regard are more likely to be victimized by bullies.

Attractive adolescent girls fall victim to other female's indirect aggression at a higher rate than their less attractive peers (Massar et al., 2012). One study found that attractiveness increased the odds of being indirectly aggressed against by 35% for adolescent girls (Leenaars et al., 2008). Thus, being physically attractive places females at risk of being indirectly victimized by other females.

Characteristics of Bullies

Just as any student can be bullied, anyone can easily become a bully. Willard (2006) described students who most often engage in cyberbullying as social climber bullies. "Social climber bullies" are upper social class students who bully within the context of interrelationships. Willard indicated that these types of bullies are often overlooked because they are seen as leaders in the school. They are 'popular' and well liked by students, parents and school personnel. Female bullies do their best to not be seen, because being identified as a bully contradicts the prevalent social imperative from females to be passive, cooperative and compliant. The most commonly reported reason students' cyberbully others is revenge. The bully often feels justified in their behavior because they were bullied first or they believe the target did something to warrant the bullying (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2012).

More and more research is showing that bullying behaviors are developed between toddler and preschool years, and are further engrained into a child's communication style as they grow if the behavior is left unchecked (Cyberbully, 2015). Children are a product on their upbringing, and many parents unknowingly expose their children to interactions that shape the way their child communicates with others. Adolescents involved in frequent bullying during

middle and high school tend to have lower levels of parental monitoring, parental trust and higher levels of conflict at home (Pepler et al., 2008). According to Olweus (1993), children who bully are likely to come from home situations in which there is little warmth and little positive adult attention and in which discipline is inconsistent and may be emotionally and physically aggressive. Therefore, these adolescents may not develop adequate empathy for others and may not make cause-and-effect connections between their behaviors and the consequences of these behaviors.

Research has also linked jealousy with aggression. Girls who were seen as the most jealous were also the most aggressive (Parker, Low, Walker & Gramm, 2005). Relational aggression occurs when fear, security, popularity, and power are used to coerce control. Aggressors are associated with popularity because in order for the aggression to be harmful, the aggressor must have a central role in their social circle. If the aggressor does not have a social network, then relationally aggressive behaviors such as gossiping and exclusion would fail. Because of their increased concern with social status, adolescent girls become involved in rivalries with each other for popularity and for attention from boys. Being part of a popular crowd is about competition. The perceived popularity of peers and relational aggression indicates a pattern that "if relational aggression leads to perceived popularity for girls, then perceived popularity may lead to even greater relational aggression among girls as they attempt to enhance their status further" (Rose, Swenson & Waller, 2004, p. 385). Adolescents who desire a high popularity status may see the legitimacy of using relational aggression and thus use it more often (Li & Wright, 2013). Popular girls may use their power to bully and hurt others raising them higher in social status at the expense of those they hurt.

Left unchecked, bullying attitudes and behaviors in adolescents appear to become more serious and more difficult to prevent and may be carried into adulthood, where the potential dangerousness and consequences increase exponentially. Bullies face risks of escalating behavior, further emotional injury, and punishment for harm to others unless their aggression is stopped (McAdams & Schmidt, 2007).

Impact of Relational Aggression and Cyberbullying

Electronic aggression is now so extensive that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recognize it as an emergent health risk to students (Borgia & Myers, 2010). School bullying has been identified as a problematic behavior among adolescents, affecting school achievement, prosocial skills, and psychological well-being for both the victim and the bully (Wang, Iannotti & Nansel, 2009). Relational aggression can deprive girls of opportunities to meet their needs for friendship, closeness, acceptance and affirming the self, which ultimately is harmful to their emotional health (Chesler, 2001). Bullying takes a significant psychological and emotional toll on youth and has a negative effect on both the victim and the aggressor. In a study of victims and aggressors (Iverson et al., 2005), students that reported themselves as both bully and victim had higher levels of self-reported psychiatric problems. These symptoms included aggression, delinquency, depression, confusion, self-destruction, identity problems and suicidal feelings. Both bullying and victimization are associated with problems such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, poor academic performance and suicide.

Mental Health Impacts on Victims

The harmful, subtle gestures of female aggressors may cause as much damage emotionally as any type of physical infliction. Victims of bullying report having low self-esteem, high stress levels, frequent headaches and stomachaches, nightmares and bedwetting (Horne et

al., 2007). Victims of relational aggression have been found to be more depressed, anxious, lonely, and to have more negative thoughts in a variety of categories including physical appearance, romantic appeal, global self-worth, and close friendships (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006). Peer victimized adolescent girls are at a greater risk for suicidal ideation (Kim, Koh & Bennett, 2005).

According to research done by Casey-Cannon et al. (2001), relational aggression has an impact on victim's self-image. Adolescents reported internalizing the behaviors and feeling bad, even if they knew the remarks were untrue or done just to hurt them. Rueger et al. (2011) found that for girls, internalizing problems persisted even after the bullying had stopped. Psychological or emotional abuse is more difficult to prove than physical injury and can cause doubt and self-blame, which can lead to even greater distress (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

It is possible that the damage from cyberbullying would be greater than that of traditional bullying because there is no escape from the victims; harmful material could be easily preserved as well as quickly and widely spread (Li, 2010). Because girls strongly desire to feel included and accepted, being a victim of relational aggression in a context where other people are involved may have more detrimental effects than when acts are committed in private (Willer, & Cupach, 2008). Students who are cyberbullied report negative emotional responses such as sadness, fear, anxiety, and humiliation. Victims also experience an inability to concentrate and study, thus directly impacting grades and social relationships (Beran & Li, 2007).

Research has also linked relational aggression with loneliness, alienation, and isolation (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003). Adolescents that are repeatedly victimized by peers may avoid social interactions in order to avoid possible aggressors (Storch et al., 2005). In some cases, relational aggression can result in the victim refusing to attend school or seeking a transfer in

order to escape the bullying. The National Education Association reports that as many as 160,000 students miss school every day out of fear of being victimized by such behaviors (n.d.) Victims of relational aggression also may exhibit social adjustment difficulties and be at risk for future social problems (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996).

The effects of relational aggression can be devastating and can last a lifetime. A study by Coyne, Archer & Eslea (2006) found that participants perceived indirect and direct relational aggression as the most harmful type of bullying. This may be because the effects of verbal and social aggressions are not as long lasting as other forms of indirect and direct relational aggression. It is crucial that school counselors be aware of the negative effects of relational aggression and the seriousness of it.

Mental Health Impacts on Bullies

Bullies may also struggle with mental health problems. Aggressors are also at risk of developing adjustment problems that persist into their adult lives. This can lead to difficulties with relationships, depression and even suicide (Ripley & O'Neil, 2009). Even though socially aggressive youth are often perceived to be more popular than their peers, social status is not necessarily related to strong, quality friendships. Research suggests that close friendships among children who engage in relational aggression are often characterized by increased conflict and jealousy and can result in feelings of loneliness (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996). Adolescents who tend to be more relationally aggressive have been shown to become more depressed, rejected, withdrawn and delinquent overtime. A longitudinal study conducted by Pellegrini and Long (2002) shows a link between childhood bullying and dating aggression, sexual and workplace harassment, and child and elder abuse.

Impacts on the School Climate/Culture

In addition to the impact that relational aggression can have on individuals, recent studies suggest it also has an impact on the broader school climate. The National School Climate Center defines School Climate as, “the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students, parents, and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures” (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2012).

Schools with positive school climate will have fewer problems with relational aggression and cyberbullying because students will not want to damage the positive relationships they have at school by doing anything that will disappoint or upset educators or others students to whom they have strongly bonded (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). Research has found that the more positively students rated their school climate (staff were trusting, supportive, and fair and the overall environment of their school was pleasant) the less frequently they indicated participation in verbal, physical, and online bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). When there is a negative school climate students are more likely to engage in aggressive behaviors.

Research shows that students feel less safe in schools with higher levels of relational aggression (Goldstein, Yough & Boyd, 2008). Research also shows that adolescents are more likely to use relationally aggressive strategies to solve problems in classrooms with higher overall levels of relationally aggressive behaviors (Kuppens et al., 2008). This can be particularly troubling for urban schools in low-income communities, as students in these schools are already at a higher risk for school and community violence. In urban schools relationally aggressive behaviors often lead to physical aggression (Leff et al., 2010). In a qualitative study of problem

situations encountered by urban African American middle school students, the students related that relational aggression often quickly escalated toward violent outcomes (Waasdorp, 2008).

Relational aggression and cyberbullying can have negative consequences for the larger school environment when bullying behavior detracts from teaching and learning and negatively impacts school climate. A recent national survey found that more than half of all teachers (53 percent) and one third of educational support professionals (e.g., paraprofessionals) perceived relational forms of bullying to be a moderate or major problem in their schools and rated relational aggression as an even greater concern than physical forms of bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2011). Other studies have found that relational aggression in the form of exclusion impacts adolescent classroom participation and causes students to become increasingly disengaged from classroom activities as they progress through school (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006). Relational aggression can interfere with a student's ability to feel safe at school and thus interferes with their ability to feel connected to others in the school climate, focus on academic content, and thrive in the learning environment (Kayler, 2010). When relational aggression is not addressed, adolescent girls are distracted by their emotional discomfort, are less available to participate in classroom activities, are cut off from friendships and peer support, and are less ready to benefit from the positive social context of school (Kayler, 2010).

Protective Factors

Protective factors are conditions or attributes in individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that, when present, lessen or eliminate the possibility of participating in the problem behavior. The presence of a positive school climate, well trained staff, and the involvement of parents and the community can decrease adolescents engaging in problem behaviors such as the use of relational aggression and cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012).

When these protective factors are present, there is an increase in the health and well-being of children and adolescents. “There is little question that what happens among youth via electronic devices affects what happens at school. It is also true that what goes on at school influences the nature and content of student interactions while away from school. This means that a lack of connectedness, belongingness, peer respect, school pride, and other climate components may very well increase the likelihood of technology misuse off campus by peers” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012, p.78). Jessor et al. (1995) asserts that protective factors can limit the connection to problem behaviors because the better the protection, the less the problem behaviors.

Assessing School Climate

School climate generally relates to the social atmosphere of a “learning environment” or the “feel” of the school as perceived by students and teachers. During the last several years, school staff have become well aware that what happens online often significantly impacts the environment at school and students ability to learn (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). Positive school climate is recognized as an important component of successful and effective schools. Therefore, it is crucial for schools to build and maintain a positive atmosphere, which promotes appropriate behaviors and facilitates healthy interactions. This will contribute strongly to reducing the frequency of many problematic behaviors at school and online. When looking at school climate, researchers have identified the following four components as highly relevant: the social, affective, academic, and physical environment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). A social environment promotes cooperation and healthy interactions; an effective environment promotes belongingness and fosters self-esteem; an academic environment promotes learning and self-fulfillment; and a physical environment promotes learning and positive behaviors.

One of the first steps to tackling a problem is to identify the nature and extent of the problem. Schools can evaluate the climate of their school in several ways. The most common method is by surveying students, staff, parents, and other community members. A comprehensive survey of students will allow administration to learn more about what their students are doing, experiencing, and seeing. The comprehensive school climate inventory (CSCI) (2015) is one of the nation's most scientifically sound and helpful surveys. It provides immediate feedback on how students, parents, school personnel, and community members perceive a school's particular climate for learning. Additionally, trained observers can monitor the activities and interactions in a school to determine the overall climate over time. Schools can also review official reports of absenteeism, academic performance, and behavioral problems. While this method is indirect, it can point to issues due to deficiencies in social, affective, academic, or the physical environment, which exists in the school (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). Creating and maintaining a positive school climate requires school personnel to stay ahead of any major issues that may eventually disrupt the learning environment. Conducting assessments through surveys and evaluating data are valuable ways to help do this (School Climate, 2015).

When constructing a concerted effort to improve school climate, it is crucial to begin with a top-down approach. Because relational aggression and cyberbullying occur so extensively in schools, administration and teachers need to address it school wide. School administrators must implement a comprehensive prevention plan that has support and cooperation from school staff, parents and community members. Combating aggression and cyberbullying is a mission that requires administration, teachers, counselors, parents, community members and students to work together to ensure that all students are afforded a safe and fear-free learning environment (Beale & Hall, 2007).

Addressing School Climate – School Personnel

It is critical to train all staff (educators, counselors, nurses, coaches and administrators) on issues that promote the personal, social, and academic growth of students. This involves the creation and maintenance of an environment that is supportive of common dignity, peer respect, the appropriate use of communication technology, and one that does not accept or tolerate bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). It is important that adolescents not only feel connected to their peers, but that they have a true connection with at least one adult in the school setting. Adolescents are less likely to engage in problematic behaviors when there is an adult they trust and like. It is important this person periodically checks in on them, builds them up with encouraging words, asks them meaningful questions, and issues gentle reminders that they are there for them if they ever need help. School personnel should make an effort to take part in various activities with students (apart from just teaching them in class) (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2012). School personnel should be proactive in creating opportunities that help build relationships with students. School staff can work at building relationships with students in a variety of ways such as inviting them to each lunch with them in their classroom, being an advisor or mentor, or coaching an after school activity (Keeping Kids Connected, 2000). A positive school climate can be built through school personnel knowing the students names, creating community-building experiences, having a small teacher-student ratio, staying in the loop, including students in the decision making process, encouraging the reporting of inappropriate behaviors, and cultivating hope (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012).

The climate of a school matters because, if cultivated positively, it creates an environment in which students feel welcomed, supported, and cared for (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). This can start with adults at a school simply learning the names of students. It shows a lot

when school personnel are able to greet students by name, ask them how they are doing and invite them to get involved in school activities. Knowing students names and expressing interest in their activities is a powerful way to develop a lasting relationship with them. When students don't feel a connection with any school personnel they may feel like they don't matter. One consequence of this is students feeling like they can do whatever they want without anyone noticing, let alone caring. When students are noticed they have a presence and hopefully also a standard of behavior to which they are held accountable.

Building upon the simple act of learning student's names, school personnel should organize community-building activities to show them they are important and that what they say and do has value. This can be as simple as asking meaningful questions about their lives and recognizing and rewarding positive behaviors, such as when a student does something that demonstrates their character (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). Community building can also be tied to peer interaction and online participation. School personnel can ask students to brainstorm positive things they can do to help peers at school or online. These actions can motivate adolescents to behave well, achieve more and see themselves as someone who can make a difference. Community building can help students see that they are a valued member of the school community, which will help them in taking ownership and responsibility in things that are happening in the classroom, school and in the community (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012).

Small teacher-to-student ratios, as well as teacher availability, can go a long way in showing students that their individual success matters (Ehrenberg et al., 2001). Classroom size has been linked to a number of student performance, behavioral and attitudinal measures (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). It can be difficult for adolescents to feel that school personnel truly care about them when they have to compete among many others for attention.

Not being current on the newest language and technologies puts teachers at a disadvantage. Failing to understand the places and technology where relational aggression and cyberbullying occurs prevents teachers from knowing what to do and how to do it. Teachers who ignore or fail to recognize warning signs from students such as a sudden drop in educational performance, absenteeism, withdrawal and isolation, and other related indicators cannot help victims (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). It is important that school personnel are aware of current trends in the use of adolescent aggression and technology (Beresin, 1999).

Students should also feel that they have a voice at school. School personnel should periodically review school policies concerning student behavior. It is important for students to provide assistance in this process (Elias et al, 2007). Students know what devices, programs or sites are being used or misused. Students can help adults understand the latest popular social networking fads and the newest technology tools (Hindjua & Patchin, 2012). Students can also inform adults about the problems they are seeing, including cyberbullying or general distractedness in the classroom. It is important that all students know and understand school policies regarding bullying and technology (Adams, 2010). Students who are involved in reviewing these policies cannot say they “didn’t know” what they were doing was wrong (Cyberbullying Research Center, 2014). Involving students in this process will ensure that policies are up to date and relevant to current concerns.

As a part of a positive school climate, every student should be encouraged to report instances or evidence of relational aggression and cyberbullying to a teacher, counselor or other staff member. Some students may be too humiliated or embarrassed to report cyberbullying to an adult. Research by Hinduja and Patchin (2012) found that fewer than 10 percent of victims of cyberbullying told a teacher or other adult at school about their experience. Students must be

made aware of the ways in which they are able to report inappropriate behaviors of all kinds. Also, it is important that an anonymous reporting system is set up so students are able to report things without fear of repercussion or retaliation. It is important that school personnel investigate and respond to any reports received (Key Components in State Anti-Bullying Laws, 2014).

Lastly, when school climate is positive, it will foster and convey a general sense of hope. It is important for students to feel that school personnel believe there is hope for the future in their school. Administrators and school staff must convey an optimistic attitude, which will hopefully be contagious throughout the school (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). No matter what difficulty students may be experiencing, it is important they remain hopeful.

Effective Prevention

The root causes and consequences of bullying are many and complex, presenting a multitude of challenges in addressing this significant problem. Schools are being challenged to develop ways to both prevent and intervene with relational aggression and cyberbullying. The emotional and psychosocial effects of bullying are often immediate and long lasting, underscoring the importance of prevention (School Bullying: A Closer Look and Possible Interventions, 2011). Prevention programs range in scope from systematically instituted “whole school” based programs, to classroom based, curriculum focused interventions, and ultimately to individual-centered prevention efforts. Each of these approaches has its own advantages and disadvantages, but when used together, there is a harmonious effect increasing the chance of success and thus transforming a school into a safer, more harmonious place (School Bullying: A Closer Look and Possible Interventions, 2011).

School policies and awareness campaigns have been recommended as important components of bullying prevention programs. Researchers generally agree that preventing

bullying in schools requires the application of a wide range of evidence-based approaches. These approaches include adopting clear anti-bullying policies and implementing a multi-tiered approach that involves students of all levels of risk. Providing adequate adult supervision during unstructured time, training teachers to respond to bullying incidents effectively, using positive behavior support systems, collecting data to monitor bullying and increase accountability, involving families and communities, and integrating and sustaining prevention efforts all impact this problem. As student advocates and collaborative consultants, school counselors can play an important role in the design and implementation of these initiatives (Chibbaro, 2007).

School Policies

Each school district is in need of clear policies regarding relational aggression and cyberbullying, both at and away from school (Dyrli, 2005). Just about every school has some type of policy in place against bullying. As of March 2012, 48 states require schools to have bullying policies (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). Although 48 states require bullying policies, cyberbullying isn't always addressed in these policies. It is important to make certain that the schools anti-bullying policy includes cyberbullying. The school's acceptable use policy should be updated to specifically prohibit using the Internet and technology for bullying. The policy should explain what constitutes cyberbullying and identify the anticipated consequences of cyberbullying. It is also suggested that a provision should be added reserving the right to discipline student for actions conducted away from school, if these actions have had an adverse effect on the student or if they adversely affect the safety and well being of the student in the school environment (Beale & Hall, 2007). This makes cyberbullying a contractual, not a legal, issue. School consequences for violating the policy may include the loss of computer privileges, detentions, suspension or expulsion. Currently 45 states have passed legislations prohibiting

electronic bullying in its various forms (Beale & Hall, 2007). Simply having a policy, however, without proper enforcement, can be counterproductive to any efforts of establishing a positive school climate.

Training School Personnel

Limber and Snyder (2006) suggests that bullying prevention best practices include training school personnel about the nature of bullying and its effects, how to respond if bullying is detected, and methods of reporting bullying incidents. Possible intervention strategies may include teaching students how to identify cyberbullying both at school and away from school, discussing school policies with students, and providing students with methods of reporting bullying. It is important that school districts provide professional development sessions so that all faculty and staff are educated and alerted to issues related to aggression and cyberbullying, especially detection (Beale & Hall, 2007).

School policies should communicate clear roles and expectations for school personnel to respond to incidents of school bullying. National surveys suggest that a majority of teachers and other school personnel are aware of their school bullying policies, yet less than half have received formal training on policy guidelines (Bradshaw et al., n.d.). For school personnel to respond effectively and consistently to bullying behaviors, they need clear guidance, support and practice on how to identify social bullying interactions, how to immediately intervene to resolve bullying situations, and how to provide appropriate follow-up and support to bullying-involved youth (National Education Association, n.d.).

Research conducted by Hinduja and Patchin (2015) found that teachers who talk about bullying issues with their students are making a difference. While 46 percent of students said their teachers have never talked to them about being safe on the computer and 69 percent of

students said their teachers have never talked to them about using a cell phone responsibly, when these conversations did happen, they seemed to have a positive impact. Fewer than 10 percent of those targeted by cyberbullying have told a teacher or other adult at school about their experience. Students reported that this reluctance to report stemmed from their skepticism that their teachers would actually do something useful to stop the behavior. In fact, most students reported that they thought telling a teacher (or other adult) often made things worse (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). In this particular study, 75 percent of students felt that teachers at their school took bullying seriously, while 66 percent of students felt that teachers at their school took cyberbullying seriously (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). Therefore, the research shows that school personnel have work to do to convince students that these problems are taken seriously and can be resolved effectively.

Monitoring and Responding to Behaviors

School personnel have a responsibility to monitor student behaviors and respond fairly and consistently to these unwanted behaviors. School personnel must properly supervise student's interactions and usage of school computers and personal cell phones to avoid inadvertently allowing them to engage in bullying or fall victim to it (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). If students are not closely monitored these behaviors may not be noticed by adults and may be reinforced by peers. Studies have suggested that increases in bullying prevalence in the transition to middle school may be related to reductions in adult supervision (Espelage, 2002). Effective supervision, especially in places where bullying is more prevalent, such as hallways, and cafeterias, represents an important component of effective school approaches. Unstructured time is a particularly important context for increased supervision (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009). When a student is caught participating in problem behaviors it is important that school personnel enforce

consequences fairly and consistently across situations, keeping in mind that the goal is to get the problem behavior to stop. Research has found that adult's response to relational aggression may differ from that of physical aggression, with teachers responding inconsistently to acts of relational aggression (Elsaesser, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2012). Over two-thirds of students believe that schools respond poorly to bullying, with a high percentage of students believing that adult help is infrequent and ineffective (Bullying Prevention: What Schools and Parents Can Do, 2002).

Parental Involvement

Families play a critical role in bullying prevention. Parental awareness of relational aggression and cyberbullying can help aid schools efforts to put an end to bullying. Parents need training on how to talk with their children about bullying, how to communicate their concerns about bullying to the school and how to get actively involved in school-based bullying prevention efforts (Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Duong, 2011). It is important for schools to provide parents with educational information regarding aggression and cyberbullying. Parents may be unaware of their child's online behavior and it is important that they know that they have a legal obligation to monitor their child's online activity (Chibbaro, 2007). It would be ideal for schools to hold a meeting for parents that demonstrates how the school is on top of issues related to aggression and the abuse of technology by students. It is important that parents are aware of the rules and consequences of inappropriate behaviors. Schools should provide parents with educational materials they can go through with their students. Chu (2005) suggested that parents talk with their children and teach them that what they should not do off-line also should not be done online. Schools should ask parents for their help in identifying, preventing, and responding to relational aggression and cyberbullying.

Part of the problem in combating cyber bullying is that parents and adolescents relate to technology very differently. Most adults approach technology as a practical tool, while adolescents use it as a lifeline to their peer group (Keith & Martin, 2005). Many parents don't pay attention to problems until they affect their own child; however, the damage is already done at this point. Therefore, schools encourage parental participation and support. This can be difficult, therefore initiatives such as prizes or food could be offered.

Parents can do their part by keeping open communication with their child. They can do this by talking about bullying before it happens, letting their child know they can talk to them about their problems, teaching their child to be compassionate, by modeling appropriate behaviors, seeking support from school personnel if they believe their child is being bullied or is bullying other students, and getting to know other parents in the community. It is important that parents and school personnel work together to maintain a positive school climate that promotes healthy student interactions and technology use (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012).

Community Involvement

Schools may partner with other community organizations to provide staff training on bullying, cyberbullying and technology safety. This could include school assemblies for students and staff, professional development, training for school board members, distribution of school rules and policies through student handbooks, newsletters to the community, meetings with parent groups, and resources on the school webpage or on public forums (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). Any educational effort around bullying and issues of teen technology misuse should be aimed at the whole community.

There are also important bullying prevention activities that can occur at the community level. One example is an awareness or social marketing campaign. These campaigns focus on

encouraging adolescents and adults to intervene when they see bullying and to become actively involved in school and community-based prevention activities (Stuart-Cassel, Terzian & Bradshaw, 2013).

Police officers, especially those assigned to a school, have a role in preventing and responding to aggression and cyberbullying. Officers can play an essential role in preventing bullying from occurring or getting out of hand by speaking to students in classrooms about bullying and online issues in an attempt to discourage them from engaging in these behaviors. Officers can also speak with parents and inform them on how they can properly respond if their child is involved in a bullying incident (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012).

There could be a number of positive initiatives going on at a school, but they will be less successful than they could be if they don't enlighten and involve parents and the community. Schools with good climates assist students through their transitioning, promote family and community involvement, and provide students access to specialized services and organizations when necessary to deal with emotional, psychological or behavioral problems.

Integrating and Sustaining Prevention Efforts

It is essential that schools integrate prevention efforts with their other existing programs and supports. Instead of adopting a different program to combat each new problem that emerges, it is recommended that schools develop a consistent and long-term prevention plan that addresses multiple student concerns through a set of well-integrated programs and services (Health Resources and Services Administration, n.d.). These efforts should address multiple competencies and skills in order to prevent bullying and help students cope and respond appropriately when bullying occurs. The three-tiered public health model provides a framework

for connecting bullying prevention with other programs to address bullying within the broader set of behavioral and academic concerns (Stuart-Cassel, Terzian & Bradshaw, 2013).

Interventions for Adolescents

Although it is important to focus on preventing problematic school and online behaviors before they start, it is also important to know how to respond effectively when bullying incidents do arise. There are many intervention strategies for bullying. Some interventions address bullying in general and target all students, while others focus on specific interventions for the bully or the victim.

School-wide Interventions

School-wide approaches target interventions at multiple levels within the school environment. The first step toward creating an effective school-wide anti-bullying program is to identify where, when and how students are experiencing bullying at the school. The application of whole-school strategies based on a three-tiered public health model is a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to the prevention of bullying and other emotional and behavioral problems (Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994). This model includes a universal system of support, or a set of activities that affects all students within the school setting. The first tier of support should include a school-wide anti-bullying policy. A tier 1 approach might include lessons on cyberbullying for all students, thus making it a universal program. Relational aggression and cyberbullying lessons should be integrated into the schools curriculum. School counselors can collaborate with classroom teachers for presenting classroom guidance lessons on appropriate behaviors and Internet etiquette (Beale & Hall, 2007). The second tier of support includes selected interventions that target a subgroup of students who are at risk. At the second tier, interventions may include safe technology training for small groups of students at risk for

becoming involved in cyberbullying. Finally, the third tier may include more intensive supports and programs for students identified as bullies or victims (Stuart-Cassel, Terzian & Bradshaw, 2013).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an example of a one tiered prevention model that is commonly used in schools and has been shown to be effective in changing school climate and reducing bullying and other aggressive behavior problems (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012). PBIS encourages teachers to be proactive and positive rather than reactive and negative in regards to behavior management strategies (Allen, 2010). PBIS also advocates teaching students social skills such as empathy, anger management, social problem solving skills and conflict resolution (Allen, 2010). Fewer behavior referrals, less bullying, and more appropriate interaction are reported when schools implement positive behavioral strategies and focus on creating and maintaining a positive school climate (Young, Boye & Nelson, 2006).

Given the consequences that victims of school bullying face, any school-wide anti-bullying initiative should include services targeted toward the victim in order to prevent further victimization and the long-term psychiatric consequences of victimization (Stuart-Cassel, Terzian & Bradshaw, 2013).

Structured Bullying Programs

Schools may choose to implement formal evidence-based programs or curriculum. Curriculum based approaches generally apply the use of videos, lectures, writing assignments and classroom discussion to address bullying. There is considerable variation in the way these types of programs are organized and conducted, but most employ cooperative behavioral skills and conflict resolution skills (School Bullying: A Closer Look and Possible Interventions, 2011).

Many programs that address bullying are designed for use in elementary and middle schools; fewer programs exist for high schools. There are many considerations in selecting a program, including the school's demographics, capacity, and resources. Structured bullying programs are designed to create awareness for all students within the school environment. Bullying prevention programs can increase awareness, knowledge, and effectiveness in intervening (Merrell et al., 2008). As with any complex problem, there is no "quick fix" to preventing or intervening with bullying. There are multiple risk and protective factors for bullying, as well as other forms of violence and victimization. Given this, it is not surprising that the most successful programs are those that use multi-tiered interventions. Effective programs focus on knowledge, attitude change, and skill development taught through modeling, role-playing and practice (Lazarus & Pfohl, 2010).

The Ophelia Project (Opheliaproject.org, 2010) is a national, nonprofit organization with expertise in the area of relational aggression. The organization is committed to creating a safe social culture for all students. The Ophelia Project addresses bullying by focusing on reducing relational aggression. The Ophelia Project offers several different types of programming - group lessons, student leadership groups, mentoring programs, and CASS (a schoolwide systemic change process). Creating a Safe School in an intervention program that serves as a framework towards creating positive changes, such as pro-social behaviors. These changes will happen among the students, faculty, and staff. CASS is designed for students in middle and high school but has components available for students K-12. CASS uses a variety of activities to implement these changes, including curriculum designed to: identify emotions in one's self and others, distinguish between social norms and rules, determine positive qualities of friendship and leadership, and demonstrate positive online communication strategies. Evaluation results indicate

that CASS has a positive impact on reducing both relational aggression and victimization among students who originally reported experiencing high levels of these behaviors (Nixon & Werner, 2010). Furthermore, results suggest that participation in the CASS program is also related to less acceptance or approval of relational aggressive behavior over time. School wide core components of the CASS programs include training of adult facilitators who in turn train high school mentors to work with middle school students, student lessons utilizing role plays, storytelling, and small group discussions, development of a school task force which includes key members of the school and community, and a pre-program evaluation to assess the areas of need within the school. CASS brings together the students, teachers, parents, administrators, staff, and the community to bring about systemic change in the schools social culture. Teachers, administrators, and staff attend in-service training, parents and community members attend community nights, and students have classroom meetings with all of these learning events focusing on the same skills. Additionally, specific curriculum is offered to address specific components of bullying in regards to the difference in aggression among boys and girls, cyberbullying, developing pro-social and relationship skills, and making positive choices (Nixon & Werner, 2010).

The Olweus Bullying Prevention program (OBPP) (2013) is a comprehensive school-wide approach to improving peer relations and making schools safer and a more positive place for students to learn. It is currently the most researched bullying prevention program. This program was initially instituted in Norway in the mid 1980's after three students committed suicide as a result of bullying. In response to this tragedy, the country instituted a nation-wide anti-bullying campaign, and the Olweus Prevention Program was developed and implemented to address the problem (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is

designed for students in elementary, middle and high school (students aged 5-15). The program involves restructuring the school environment to reduce bullying and building a strong sense of community among students and adults. All students participate in most aspects of the program, while students identified as bullies or victims receive additional individualized interventions. The Olweus program has been associated with large reductions in bullying behavior (being bullied or bullying others) (Olweus, 2005) as well as decreases in student reports of general antisocial behavior (vandalism, fighting, theft, and truancy) (Limber, 2011). The Olweus program has been connected to a decrease in reports of both relational and physical victimization and development of a more positive classroom social climate (Bauer, Lozano & Rivara, 2007; Fleming et al., 2005). Some specific key program components include: the Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee, ongoing evaluation of students' experiences with and attitudes toward bullying, school rules, staff discussion groups, classroom meetings, parent involvement, and on the spot bullying interventions (Limber, 2011). Some strengths of the program include its comprehensive, whole system approach as well as the long history of evidence-based research.

Roots of Empathy (Rootsofempathy.org, n.d.) is an evidence-based classroom program that has shown significant reduction in aggression among school children while raising social/emotional competency and increasing empathy. The program reaches children from Kindergarten through Grade 8. Part of the success of the programs is its universal nature; all students are positively engaged instead of just targeting bullies or aggressive children. At the heart of the program are classroom visits by an infant and parent. A trained Roots of Empathy Instructor coaches students to observe the baby's development and to label the baby's feelings. In this experiential learning, the baby is the "Teacher". The instructor uses the baby to help children identify and reflect on their own feelings and the feelings of others (Roots of

Empathy, n.d.). The students are then more competent in understanding their own feelings and the feelings of others (empathy) and are therefore less likely to physically, psychologically and emotionally hurt each other through bullying and other cruelties. In the Roots of Empathy program children learn how to challenge cruelty and injustice. Messages of social inclusion and activities that are consensus building contribute to a culture of caring that changes the tone of the classroom (Roots of Empathy, n.d.). Research results from national and international evaluations of Roots of Empathy indicate significant reductions in aggression and increases in pro-social behavior. Nine independent studies have shown Roots of Empathy schools experience “reduced aggression” and “increased prosocial behavior” (Szalavitz, 2010, p. 45). Research shows this programs produced significant drops in relational aggression; things like gossiping, excluding others, and backstabbing (Bornstein, 2010). Through guided observations of this loving relationship, children learn to identify and reflect on their own thoughts and feelings and those of others. Independent evaluations consistently show children who receive Roots of Empathy experience dramatic and lasting effects in terms of increased positive social behavior (sharing, helping and including) and decreased aggression (Roots of Empathy, n.d.).

Interventions for Bullies

A number of individual centered interventions to combat bullying have been developed. While effective anti-bullying programs depend on prevention and school climate programs as their cornerstones, some amount of bullying behavior will inevitably occur given the nature of adolescent development and the process of learning to function cooperatively with those who are different. Thus, consequences and remediation programs for those who bully must be established prior to launching any bullying prevention program. Initiatives to stop school bullying often advise counseling for the bullies (McAdams & Schmidt, 2007).

Aggression can be expected to continue until the aggressor is able to develop genuine empathy for others; until their aggressive behavior ceases to satisfy their needs; or until they have access to more satisfying, pro-social, ways to maintain positive self esteem (McAdams & Schmidt, 2007). Research suggests that moral behavior in adolescents is not acquired automatically, rather, it is initially and mainly influenced by others instruction, supervision, correction, establishment of rewards and punishment, and modeling (Berkowitz & Grych, 1998).

School counselors could provide training for bullies that includes developing a more positive self-concept, improving social problem solving and anger management skills, teaching the bully how to meet their needs in other ways, increasing their ability to empathize with victims, and recognizing legal and personal consequences of relational aggression and cyberbullying (Chibbaro, 2007). Teaching bullies concepts such as, belonging and contributing, is likely to foster empathy and increased social skills (Cunningham & Whitten, 2007).

School counselors can also reach bullies through remediation programs. Restorative practices focus on repairing the harm that was done to people as opposed to solely penalizing them for their actions. Restorative practices work to change the climate at schools in hopes of reducing bullying, violence, and other harmful behaviors (School bullying: A closer look at possible interventions, 2011). Varying from small discussion circles to school-wide conferences, the goal of these practices is to build relationships and foster a climate of respect and tolerance for one another. Restorative practices appear to show promise and are a potentially effective tool in the fight against bullying (School Bullying: A Closer Look and Possible Interventions, 2011).

Interventions and support for the bully can be offered both individually and in small group settings. School-based interventions aimed at promoting higher levels of moral reasoning show potential for helping aggressive students develop a concern for others (McAdams &

Schmidt, 2007). A comprehensive response must also include coordinated and collaborative efforts involving schools, families, and the community to promote developmental change in adolescents who lack concern for others in their actions (McAdams & Schmidt, 2007).

Interventions for Victims

In addition to establishing rehabilitative practices for student bullies, school administrators must also direct resources towards the victim (School Bullying: A Closer Look and Possible Interventions, 2011). School personnel and other adults must clearly communicate to victims of bullying that they are not at fault and do not deserve the bullying they are experiencing or have experienced. When schools intervene to help a victim they should make arrangements to keep the victim safe from future bullying attacks. It is important to hold separate follow-up meetings with bullies and their victims in order to provide protection to the victimized student due to the unequal balance of power. Conflict resolution and peer mediation strategies may not be appropriate if there is an unequal balance of power (Lazarus & Pfohl, 2010).

Interventions for victims of bullying should focus on the victim through individual counseling and through groups with peers that can support them. School personnel may also want to consider implementing support groups for bullying victims. Groups can provide victims with opportunities to develop better social skills, while at the same time, communicating to these students that others in the school are there to help them. Informing the parents of the victim is also important so the victim and the school have parental support (Jacobsen & Bauman, 2007).

Victims could be offered training in increasing assertiveness skills, developing a more positive self-concept, increasing social skills and reducing social isolation, and practicing positive behaviors that reduce the risk of further victimization (Chibbaro, 2007). Victims can often benefit from interventions designed to increase their self-esteem. Interventions in this area

can help students identify personal strengths and accomplishments, thereby instilling feelings of pride and confidence. By building self-esteem, victims are better able to guard themselves from future bullying (Milsom & Gallo, 2006). Additionally, researchers have found that victims of bullying who developed assertiveness skills experienced a reduction in bullying (Hazler, 1996). Victims can practice assertiveness skills through role-play activities to develop confidence in their abilities to respond assertively to a variety of situations (Milsom & Gallo, 2006). Individual counseling and support should be given both to the victim and the bully (Bullying Prevention: What Schools and Parents Can Do, 2002).

Adlerian Perspective

School counselors are an important part of the educational leadership team and provide valuable assistance to students. School counselors help students develop a positive lifestyle. Adler believed that we all have one basic desire and goal: to belong and to feel significant. The main focus of Adlerian counseling with adolescents is to heighten and increase awareness around the issues of self-respect, self-esteem, and belongingness. This involves feeling appreciated or loved, the development of positive self-worth, and an encouraging atmosphere. Adler proposes a holistic view on personality, that the individual acts as a whole, their feelings, beliefs and behaviors are guided by the same organizing principle, the fictional goal (Oberst & Stewart, 2003).

Social Interest

What Adler called “Social Interest”, refers to the notion of the individual as a social being. He was known for saying, “Social interest is the true and inevitable compensation for all the natural weaknesses of individual human beings” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p.156). “To see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another.

Alfred Adler in his lifetime considered this an acceptable definition of social interest”

(Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 135). Having social interest means feelings like a part of something, such as a school, community or friend group. It means to participate, to contribute, to share, to feel accepted, appreciated and loved, as well as to accept, appreciate, and love others (Oberst & Stewart, 2003). Social interest is an attitude or outlook towards furthering the welfare of others, and not concerned only with the welfare of oneself.

Empathy and understanding are two important facets of social interest. The ability to empathize, which enables us to make friends, to love and to sympathize, is the basis for social interest and can only be used and practiced in conjunction with others (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Contribution is the idea that a person understands how their actions affect the society (Griffith & Powers, 1984). True social interest must take the form of some kind of contribution (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

Bullies and relationally aggressive children often lack social interest and the ability to empathize with others. Adler claimed that aggressive children lack social interest because it was never taught to them as children. In Adlerian psychology, social interest is the measure of one's mental health. Therefore the more social interest a person has, the more mentally healthy a person is (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Though social interest is thought to be innate, it also needs to be developed in a child. The driving force behind development of social interest is the mother. If the mother does not model and foster social interest, the child will not learn it (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Research has shown that it is also important for other family members to model social interest to the child (Johnson, Smith, & Nelson, 2003). Social interest is a skill that can be taught at any time. Therefore, if a child does not learn it while they are very young, it is something that can be taught and learned throughout life (Ansbacher & Ansbacher,

1956). When aggressive children are able to see that they make a difference and belong; they are more likely to grow up to become healthy, contributing adults (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964).

Belonging and Significance

Humans are socially embedded and are motivated to find their place in their family, at school, at work and in society. According to Adler, when people feel encouraged, they feel capable and appreciated and they will generally act in a connected and cooperative way. Children who feel a sense of belonging are more apt to perform proficiently, competently, and responsibly (Rosenberg, McKeon & Diner, 1999). When people feel inadequate or inferior they may start to doubt their place in the group. When people are discouraged, they may act in unhealthy ways such as competing, withdrawing, or giving up.

Inferiority and Superiority Complex

Inferiority feelings arise when a child is discouraged. Inferiority feelings can arise when a child compares themselves to other people who they perceive to be more skilled, accomplished, or better off. It is not only the feeling of envy; it is a feeling of personal worthlessness, which challenges the whole concept of oneself (Oberst & Stewart, 2003).

In the case of discouraged children, the overcoming of inferiority feelings goes along with a striving for power. For these children, it is not enough to be equally as good as others; they want to be better. In order for these children to stop the inferiority feelings they need to feel superior and have real or imaginary power over others (Oberst & Stewart, 2003). Feelings of inferiority become exaggerated and serve as an excuse for selfish, anti-social behavior. Some examples include neurosis, an unrealistic expectation of self and others; inferiority complex (submissiveness); and superiority complex (bullying).

Alfred Adler claimed that aggressive children have deeply rooted feelings of inferiority. These feelings of inferiority can evoke an attitude of aggression, with the purpose of overcoming insecurity (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). In order to feel better about oneself, children are aggressive, cruel, or mean. In Alfred Adler's writings he claims, "No act of cruelty has ever been done which has not been based upon a secret weakness" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Adlerian Psychology focuses on people's efforts to compensate for their self-perceived inferiority to others. These feelings of inferiority may derive from one's position in the family constellation, particularly if early experiences of humiliation occurred, a specific physical condition or existing defect or a general lack of social feeling for others.

Goals of Misbehavior

The beginning of social interest for children is the four mistaken goals of misbehavior. Individual psychology assumes that all behavior is goal oriented; therefore when children are misbehaving, they have a goal in mind. However, most children are unaware of their goals (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964). Adler believed that "a misbehaving child is a discouraged child" and that helping children to feel valued, significant, and competent is often the most effective strategy in coping with difficult child behaviors. Dreikurs (1968) stated that discouraged students pursue four mistaken goals for misbehavior: attention, power, revenge, and inadequacy. Knowing what the motivation behind self-defeating behaviors is can help counselors and educators better handle these situations. When a counselor understands the student's goal, they can help them develop constructive goals and appropriate behaviors.

Adolescents, who bully others, may be seeking attention, wanting power, seeking revenge or feeling inadequate. Thus, instead of belonging and contributing in a positive way, the bully finds significance in commanding attention, grasping power, getting revenge, or giving up

(Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964). The misbehavior is the child's choice to fulfill their need. Such children believe that they will be able to reach their goal by participating in the problem behaviors.

The most vital technique for misbehaving children is encouragement (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964). Encouragement is so important because in Adlerian psychology, a child who misbehaves is a child who is discouraged. These children have found their attempts to gain significance blocked. Therefore, they make themselves feel significant by the only means that has thus far worked for them, misbehavior (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964). School counselors and teachers should help modify the adolescents motivation rather than focusing on changing the adolescents behavior. Through redirecting, children can begin to rebuild faith in themselves and begin to see their strengths and abilities. Without encouragement change will not happen (Sonstegard & Bitter, 1998).

Felt Minus to Perceived Plus

People are always moving or striving to correct their problem and satisfy their goals. Individuals start "below" and want to get to a "perceived" better place. Adler believed that individuals move from a "felt minus" to a "perceived plus" with their creative power. The four goals of misbehavior are expression of all forms of a felt minus. To develop courage within the discouraged individual who misbehaves is to go beyond the behaviors and redirect the individual to move from a felt minus feeling to perceive plus thoughts (Yang, Milliren & Blagen, 2009). We are always moving, striving to correct a problem or satisfy a goal. We start "below" and want to get to a "perceived" better place. A person's lifestyle is what carries them to their various goals of significance or "perceived plus". Adler theorized that the condition of helplessness or a felt minus stimulated a compensatory striving to overcome and move toward a felt plus. In some,

the direction of striving will take a constructive and socially useful path; others however, may take a destructive or socially useless path. Individuals on the destructive path may cope with their perceived inadequacies by dominating, controlling or bullying others (Prout & Brown, 2007).

Implications for School Counselors

Relational aggression can have a negative impact on those involved within a school. School policies, awareness campaigns, and school counseling interventions have all been recommended as important components of bullying prevention and intervention programs (Chibbaro, 2007). As student advocates and collaborative consultants, school counselors play an important role in the design and implementations of these initiatives.

School counselors, by the very nature of their work, are in a prime position to address the needs of a school in regards to relational aggression and cyberbullying. School counselors need to be cognizant of the issues of relational aggression and cyberbullying and its dynamics within the school system (Johnson, 2009). By gaining the appropriate knowledge and skills, implementing the appropriate services, and tracking the effectiveness of services and interventions, school counselors can prove themselves invaluable in addressing relational aggression within their school. School counselors need knowledge, awareness and skills to address this widespread behavior (Jacobsen & Bauman, 2007). They need to know about the prevalence and consequences of bullying and be aware of signs of bullying involvement and victimization. School counselors also need skills in intervening when bullying incidents occur. School counselors should be an “agent of change” by proactively opening a dialogue about the problem (Johnson, 2009). School counselors can address awareness, prevention and intervention strategies for school personnel, students, parents and the community.

It is crucial that schools educate adolescents about relational aggression and cyberbullying as a part of establishing clear expectations for student conduct while in and outside of school. School counselors are in a position to lead these initiatives through school wide assemblies, classroom guidance lessons, groups counseling and individual counseling. School counselors can play a proactive role with students by implementing prevention programs and teaching guidance curriculum (West Virginia Department of Education, 2015). School counselors can also play a responsive role through working with at-risk students in groups and individually. School counselors are in a unique position, as they work with the whole school population, therefore they are able to reach all students. School counselors can work to create a school climate where all students feel safe (American School Counselor Association, 2016).

School counselors can also work as a team with other school personnel and serve as a “resource guide” in a non-confrontational and non-authoritative way (Johnson, 2009). School counselors can assist with training other school personnel and help with the implementation of bullying prevention programs. School counselors should also educate, collaborate, and reach out to parents, families and the community for additional support. School counselors can send home information regarding relational aggression and cyberbullying and hold informational meetings with parents and community members. School counselors can educate parents on how to talk to their children about bullying and communicating concerns to administration, teachers and other parents (Johnson, 2009). The consulting role of a school counselor makes them the ideal person to coordinate the efforts of various stakeholders (Jacobsen & Bauman, 2007). School counselors can also assist by advocating for anti-harassment and cyberbullying policies in their school districts. School counselors should suggest the use of a policy that states that all forms of cyberspace harassment, both at and away from school, will not be tolerated.

Conclusion

Aggression has long been a topic of concern for teachers, parents, and students. But in today's world, technology makes it easier for children to be anonymous and widespread in their cruelty. The middle school and high school years are a crucial time for adolescent girls because it is a time period where friendships and social status mean everything. Bullying takes a significant psychological and emotional toll on youth and can have a negative effect on both the victim and the bully.

As technology continues to develop rapidly, it is changing the way adolescents interact and function in our society. It is important that school personnel and parents are aware of how this brings new dimensions to their responsibility as educators. The root causes and consequences of bullying are many and complex, presenting a host of challenges in addressing this important problem. Although there are many challenges to addressing the needs of relational aggression and cyberbullying, several promising approaches have been implemented and validated such as PBIS, The Ophelia Project, The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and Roots of Empathy. Prevention programs range in scope from systematically instituted "whole school" based programs, to classroom based, curriculum focused interventions, and ultimately to individual-centered prevention efforts.

School counselors, by the very nature of their work, are in a prime position to address the needs of a school in regards to relational aggression and cyberbullying. School counselors play a critical role in helping implement anti-bullying programs and in creating awareness of bullying in the school environment. School counselors can work to create a school climate where all students feel safe. Because the problem occurs both at school and in the hidden online world, it reaches beyond the school and into the home. Therefore, it is vital that school administrators,

counselors, staff, parents and the community work together to help keep schools and adolescents safe. Bullying remains a serious issue in American schools and school counselors are ideally suited to make a significant contribution to reducing school bullying.

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