BULLYING BY TWEEN AND TEEN GIRLS:
A LITERATURE, POLICY AND RESOURCE REVIEW

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1. Executive Summary

There is an increasing amount of literature on the subject of how girls bully, and relational aggression between girls, but the solutions to the issue on a systemic basis are still emerging.

The literature review identifies that relational aggression is broadly defined as "behaviour that is intended to harm someone by damaging or manipulating his or her relationships with others", is more common amongst girls, and is difficult to monitor or observe due to its covert nature. Cyberbullying is a growing issue and is rooted in relational aggression and because of the broad access by teens to a wide range of ways to communicate and "broadcast" information among their peers.

The consensus is that relational aggression has both short term and long term emotional impacts in some cases equivalent in degree to more overt or physical forms of bullying.

The majority of resources and approaches to addressing this phenomena are based on increasing awareness of what roles various girls play within the social dynamic, the nature of behaviours, and how it can be addressed in common situations where relational aggression is at play. Broader approaches are emerging, but no application of broader approaches in the Canadian school context could be identified.

Emphasis in strategies, which will generally be a subset of overall anti-bullying strategies, is to educate girls in healthy self-esteem and relationships, to encourage respectful school environments, and to encourage conflict resolution at an early stage in individual instances.

2. Introduction

It is commonly assumed that boys are the primary, if not exclusive, perpetrators of bullying and violence. While boys remain the most salient and most studied group of bullies, times are changing. Recently, there has been a significant statistical and anecdotal increase in bullying and violence among young girls in a number of Western countries. As society has experienced social, cultural and technological change, the ways in which adolescent girls and boys display anger and aggression have converged. Today, we see increasing numbers of girls showing their 'mean streaks' in a variety of ways. In particular, girls display "hidden" and "indirect" aggression in the form of rumor spreading and/or social exclusion, and they are increasingly using forms of verbal violence using electronic media such as the Internet, email and cell phones.

Girl bullying has also recently received attention in the media and become the centrepiece of movies popular among teenagers. The teen comedy movie *Mean Girls* (2004), for example, deals with a group of popular girls who ridicule and put down their peers. The movie led to the coining of the term "Mean Girls Syndrome", which refers to the conniving and manipulative behaviour which is apparently becoming more prominent among white, middle-class girls and teenagers. Some newspaper commentators have also noted the emergence of the so-called "girl power" phenomenon over the last two decades, which has encouraged girls' entry into contact sports, to enjoy and be proud of their physicality, and to become more assertive as regards their desire to achieve their career and personal goals while retaining the independence to become mothers and to be paid a salary which matches that of equally qualified men. This speculative theorizing has implied that girls and teens are becoming more overtly physical, violent and assertive in their aggressive behaviour, and that various social factors are responsible for the change in girls' transformation from "sugar and spice and all things nice" to more male-typical behaviors.

The first part of this literature review examines some of the recent and foundational research relating to teenage girls' expression of hostility to their peers. In particular, it considers the ways in which teenage girls exhibit aggression in the context of their relationships with both boys and girls. The review begins with a brief discussion of way in which female aggression has been defined, and the development of aggressive behavior in females under the age of 10. It then goes on to examine those studies which have focused on bullying and other forms of aggression in 'tweens' (females aged 10-12), and teenagers (females aged 13+). These studies are almost exclusively situated in school contexts, and are focused on the notion of bullying; however, this review examines some more recent studies, which have begun to move the focus of attention outside the physical space of the school and schoolyard in their investigation of the contemporary phenomenon known as 'cyber bullying'. This form of female bullying takes place using electronic forms of communication such as cell phones and computers. The few studies which addressed the issue of girls bullying boys are also reported. Having reviewed the existing literature relating to the form in which teenage girls' aggression is exhibited, the effects of this aggression are discussed. The second part of the review identifies a number of general and specific strategies for dealing with problems raised by female bullies and their victims, which have been presented or demonstrated as effective in recent accounts of female aggression. The review concludes with a summary of the evidence and a discussion of its significance.

PART 1: HOW GIRLS BULLY AND ITS EFFECTS

2. Defining Female Aggression

The complex nature of teenage girls' friendships and aggressive conflicts has received relatively little attention from social and educational researchers, as compared with bullying and other forms of violence among males. Most research on aggression has focused on overt, physical forms of aggression among boys and men. In the past decade, however, there has been an increased interest in

exploring and understanding the ways in which girls engage in conflict. Recent studies on girls' aggressive behaviour have produced consistent findings: girls are aggressive toward each other but usually in more covert, indirect ways, which are motivated by the relational goals concerned with the making and breaking of friendships (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Crick, 1996; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; James & Owen, 2005; Owens, Shute & Slee, 2000; Underwood 2003).

2.1 Definitions of aggressive behavior

Definitions of aggression vary widely, but most researchers describe it as any negative behavior intended to cause pain or discomfort to others (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Olweus, 1993). Within the school environment, aggressiveness between learners is often referred to as bullying (or peer victimization). By definition, however, bullying is only one aspect of aggression (Roland & Idsoe, 2001). Bullying is carried out with the intention of causing physical and/or emotional harm (Limber & Nation, 1998; Olweus, 1991). In definitions of aggression the act of hurting the victim is also central. However, bullying always involves hurting someone who is not quite able to defend himself/herself: there is almost always an imbalance of power, such that the victim has difficulty defending him/herself from aggressors (Olweus, 1991), and there is little or no retaliation (Mouttapa, et al., 2004). Aggression however, encompasses bullying as well as conflicts between parties of equal power that occur in two-way processes of attack and retaliation (Roland & Idsoe, 2001). This notion of aggression rather than only bullying is particularly important when considering the conflicts between girls of similar social status.

2.2 Differences between boys and girls

There are some marked differences between the sexes in the ways that aggression is exhibited or received. While boys tend to inflict bodily pain through physical forms of bullying (e.g., kicking, pushing), or via direct verbal aggression, girls most often, though not exclusively, display aggression through indirect

means. Females typically engage in so-called 'relational aggression' or 'covert bullying', which involves concealed methods of hostility based on communication-based attacks (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996) and social isolation (Seals & Young, 2003). This form of bullying relies more on psychological methods that are indirect, relational and socially motivated (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Björkqvist et al., 1992; Hadley, 2003). Remillard & Lamb (2005: 221) define relationally aggressive behaviours as "the intent to harm another through the exploitation of a friendship". Other definitions are "behaviour that is intended to hurt someone by harming his or relationships with others" (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995); "behaviour that is intended to harm someone by damaging or manipulating his or her relationships with others" (Randall & Bowen, 2007).
By contrast, there is evidence that indirect forms of aggression are more often tolerated among males, and are even associated with social acceptance among their peers (Salmivalli, et al., 2000).

These less overt modes of aggression among female children and teenagers have been termed variously, as "indirect" (James & Owens, 2005; Lagerspetz et al., 1988; Owens et al., 2000), "social" (Crick, 1996; Crothers, Field, & Kolbert, 2005; Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Remillard & Lamb, 2005; Vail, 2002) or "relational" (Paquette & Underwood, 1999; Underwood, 2003). Despite minor differences they are essentially the same form of aggression (Archer & Coyne, 2005, Underwood, 2003). Acts of relational aggression include gossiping, spreading rumors, ignoring, staring, giving nasty looks, exclusion from a friendship group, isolation, alienation, writing hurtful letters, and stealing friends or boyfriends (Crothers et al., 2005). They are a subtle form of attack which involves girls' manipulation of another child in order to injure or control that child's ability to maintain rapport or social standing with their peers, or their own self-esteem. An important characteristic of all the behaviours recognised as relationally aggressive are their covert nature, whereby they are masked to not appear aggressive. In particular, a bully can operate in this way without ever interacting with a victim. For example, she may make use of social manipulation

by attacking the victim in circuitous ways through a third person in order to conceal her aggressive intent, or otherwise pretend that the behavior is not aggressive at all (Lagerspetz et al., 1988). In real world terms, relational aggression is associated with the formation of social cliques and the subtle and cruel verbal and psychological tactics girls may use to injure another child's feelings of social acceptance.

3. Developmental Theories of Female Aggression

3.1 Learned gender roles

Socio-cultural and developmental theories have been used to explain the apparent differences apparent in aggressive behaviours and conflict strategies between boys and girls. In Western cultures, boys and men are socialised and encouraged to be domineering, and to exhibit overt, physical and verbal aggression. Research shows that “parents positively reward verbal and physical aggression in sons and positively reward interpersonal and social skills in daughters” (Wood, 2007:164-165). This leads children to express aggression differently, based on socially learned gender roles: while boys display overt aggression, there is a strong social imperative upon girls/women to hide their intent to hurt others by initiating peaceful outcomes and delivering their aggression in culturally approved, but more covert ways (Lagerspetz, Björkqvist & Peltonen, 1988). Women are socialised to be nurturing and to focus their energies on creating and sustaining relationships, which is the cultural and social opposite of aggressive behaviour.

Crick & Grotpeter (1995: 710) explain that “when attempting to inflict harm on peers (i.e., aggressing), children do so in the ways that best thwart or damage the goals that are valued by their respective gender peer groups”. Boys inflict aggression upon other boys by attacking their valued goals of dominance, independence and anything that *isn’t* female (Wood, 2007). Studies on male aggression in childhood find that male bullies tend to use direct verbal and

physical attacks to attack their victims. How strong, fast, or brave you are means everything in terms of male dominance in childhood and adolescence (Lever, 1976). Shakeshaft et al. (1995), as quoted by Li (2006) contends "Males with atypical gender related behaviors were at a much greater risk for peer assault than other young men. Females on the other hand, express their aggression in terms of attacks upon social relationships, which are of the utmost importance to their social wellbeing and status. Girls tend to value intimate relationships with girls; therefore aggressive girls often gain power by withholding their friendship or by sabotaging the relationships of others.

3.2 Girl play

Young and 'tween' girls' play encourages cooperation and talk, which provides a developmental basis for their style of aggressive expression. Most young girls aim to 'play nice' and build intimacy through verbal and nonverbal interaction (Crick, Bigbee, & Howe, 1996), which is usually characterized by small groups or pairs of girls engaged in forms of imaginative, verbal play. Games that require parts and roles give girls the opportunity to try out gender roles, as well as mimic social interaction. These forms of girls' play "occurs in private places and often involves mimicking primary human relationships instead of playing formal games", which helps to develop "delicate socio-emotional skills" (Lever, 1976: 484). The girls in Lever's (1976) study claimed to feel the most discomfort within groups of four or more, medium discomfort in triads, and most comfortable in pairs. Deep intimacy develops between pairs and small groups of young girls, which encourages the development of a keen ability to decode non-verbal messages (Lever, 1976). Lever emphasizes that "most girls interviewed said they had a single 'best' friend with whom they played nearly every day. They learn to know that person and her moods so well that through non-verbal cues alone, a girl understands whether her playmate is hurt, sad, happy, bored, and so on" (Lever, 1976: 484).

Girls' early friendships may also serve as training for later heterosexual dating relationships: "there is usually an open show of affection between these little girls – both physically in the form of handholding and verbally through 'love notes' that reaffirm how special each is to the other"(Lever, 1976: 484). These intimate relationships are also subject to emotions such as jealousy, possessiveness, and other traits commonly associated with dating relationships, and these are often are at the root of friendship dissolution.

Wood (2007) suggests that the gender differences between boys and girls are not biological in origin, but are socially constructed and learned by children as they grow up. In particular, scientists and social commentators claim that human aggression, whether in males or females, is dependent upon learned rules (Cummings, Iannotti, & Zahn-Waxler, 1989), some of which may be copied from parents or by mimicking television or video game violence (Wood, 2007). Human emotions are internalized as 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate' for each gender, according to learned and institutionalized rules, and manifest themselves in ways which are 'socially appropriate' for each. Because girls are discouraged from direct, overt aggression yet still feel aggressive at times, "they develop other, less direct ways of expressing aggression" (Wood, 2007:165).

4. Female Aggression in 'Tweens'

4.1 The instability of young girls' friendships

Relational aggression has been shown to occur between girls of all ages, but is most salient during adolescence (Owens et al., 2000). Developmental researchers define adolescence as a critical period in the psycho-social development of individuals, which is marked by an increase in peer interaction, the increasing importance of close friendships, and the beginnings of real romantic relationships. During this period, children start to spend less time with their parents and do not see them as their primary source of social support. Friends and peers become much more important as social referents and

advisers, and tend to contribute considerably toward adolescents' self-concept and well-being (Cole & Cole, 2001).

Studies examining aggression amongst girls in the 10-12 age range include Artz (2005), Björkqvist et al. (1992), Crick & Grotpeter (1995) and Simmons (2002). Once girls reach the age of 9 and upwards, they realize the power they have over the emotions and allegiances of others, and it is during this time that bullying behaviour may first manifest itself (Simmons, 2002). Girls' social life has been highly focused upon, and invested in, their close intimate friendships and the value of being accepted within a social group (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Underwood, 2003). They develop powerful friendship bonds which create close, personal bonds between girls, but their relationships have been shown to be less stable and more fragile than those of boys (Harris, 1995: Pipher, 1994; Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002) and are primarily characterized by a "best friend" dyad (two-person relationship) (Lever, 1976; Maccoby, 1999: Simmons, 2002). Whilst powerful, these friendship bonds are fluid and fragile, and are rarely stable over time (Harris, 1995; Savin-Williams, 1980; Simmons, 2002).

In a study of the friendship bonds among a group of girls aged 10 to 12 years old, Besag (2006: 535), found that "the girls considered their friendships extremely important and nominated the breaking of a friendship as the most anxiety-provoking aspect of school life". She monitored the girls on video, and gathered personal information through questionnaires and interviews over a sixteen-month period; the video data "showed the girls interacting in an unguarded manner away from adult supervision. This made it possible to watch the subtleties of both the verbal and body language of the girls including the silent provocations that frequently passed between them" (Besag, 2006: 547). Her findings indicated that many girls went through a series of 'best friends' throughout childhood and adolescence, fluctuating several times between close friendship networks of two or three. By the end of the sixteenth month of her study, Besag found only one original dyad still intact. Most of the conflicts and instances of bullying among the

girls stemmed from emotions related to these friendships, such as jealousy, suspicion, disappointment and anger. A commonly reported reason for the dissolution of friendships was the presence of a third girl entering (or attempting to enter) into a dyadic relationship being perceived as a threat, which in many instances was a realistic possibility. Since membership in a friendship dyad or group is exclusive, it is reserved for those who have proven themselves to be worthy of the trust and intimacy needed to develop an emotional connection (Besag, 2006). However, the fickle nature of girls' friendships means that this trust is often shattered, which leads to conflict and aggression. In particular, several girls could be identified as instigators of the breakdown of friendships through the use of gossip and other forms of relational aggression. As Lever (1976: 484) notes: "…sharing secrets binds the union together, and 'telling' the secrets to outsiders is symbolic of the 'break-up'".

The instability of tweens' relationships appears to be at the root of a constant level of low-key bickering and conflict between girls. Previously supportive friends may exclude a target girl from a group, call her names, spread gossip about her and text her with abusive messages (Owens, et al., 2000; Simmons, 2002). Commonly, a girl who was previously the 'best friend' of the target girl instigates these attacks. Victims are also unable to escape the mesh of social relationships within which bullies lurk (Besag, 2006), particularly because their aggressors know all about their target due to past friendly relationships. For example, Crick & Grotpeter (1995) found that members of friendship groups which were dominated by aggressive girls appeared to be caring and helpful toward each other. However, they also observed a higher level of intimacy and secret sharing in these groups, which put members of the group at risk because of the personal information known about them by the aggressive child. This risk was exacerbated by the fact that these friendship groups were highly exclusive, meaning that followers would usually have few other friends to turn to if they were rejected by the aggressive child. Crick & Grotpeter (1995) found that the dynamics of these groups resulted in girls' conforming to its behavioural

standards for fear of being isolated, as well as a higher level of aggression amongst its members.

Mouttapa et al. (2004) found a similar pattern of friendship groupings amongst female bullies in a sample of Southern Californian 6th graders: although these girls had fewer friends, those they did have were strongly tied to them, and were also participants in their aggression. The authors suggest that because there are relatively few female bullies, these girls select each other as friends based on their personality profiles and preference for direct forms of bullying. If so, then efforts to prevent bullying amongst females by targeting highly aggressive students may also diffuse to their friends.

4.2 Girls' covert bullying

One of the reasons girl bullies can thrive is because the disputes and conflicts which they create are often misinterpreted as squabbles between friends, and are therefore taken less seriously by teachers, parents and school administrators than if they had been recognized as bullying incidents with clearly identified ringleaders and victims (Besag, 2006). It can also be extremely difficult to identify the instigator of gossip or to challenge a group who have deliberately excluded a girl from their friendship circle (Besag, 2006). Girls usually attack their target using an intangible, subjective focus based on personal opinion such as criticism of physical attributes and personal characteristics, which makes it difficult for the victim to challenge or comply (Besag, 2006), or for adults to intervene.

The dichotomy between the closeness of a friendship and the fractious and volatile nature of their relationships often lead to conflict. In short, the fact that girls' friendships are so intimate means that relational aggression is extremely effective when a bully is intent on hurting a girl (Bright, 2005; James & Owen, 2005; Remillard & Lamb, 2005). Mouttapa et al. (2004) described the three basic roles a female can take in a bullying situation: bully, victim, or aggressive victim.

Bullies (approximately 7-15% of the school aged population) are characterized by a high need to dominate others, and possess the social and leadership skills to do so. Victims (approximately 2-10% of the school aged population) tend to have low self-esteem, are quiet or shy in nature, and are cautious and sensitive. Aggressive victims (2-10% of the school-aged population) are both bullies themselves, as well as victims of aggressive acts, and are characterized by peer rejection, reactivity, poor social or emotional skills, and academic difficulties. However, all are characterized by their execution and/or receipt of aggressive behaviors which are subtle, manipulative, and socially motivated.

5. Aggression in Teenage Girls

5.1 Environmental, social and developmental changes

The patterns of aggressive relationships found amongst 'tween' girls continue once they reach their teenage years. However, as Duncan (2004: 140) notes, girls in this age range (12-16) express "a pronounced belief that the nature of their friendships had altered over the years, and several groups pointed to a difference between friendships in primary school and friendships in secondary school". In particular, teenage girls report that their relationships change from an intimate dyadic same-sex friendship to a more fluid and strategic set of relationships within a context of 'heteronormativity' (a culture in which perceived variation from a heterosexual orientation are marginalized and persecuted). However, girls were still "unanimous in their expressed belief that friendships between girls were very important, more so than for boys" (Duncan, 2004:140).

Certainly there are numerous upheavals going on in the lives of girls during their teenage years. Changing schools from elementary to middle school leads to new friends, more challenging school work, less socialization time at school, and more competition for resources (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Girls' priorities begin to change from wanting to spend all of their time with other girls, to an emerging interest in the opposite sex (Crick, & Grotpeter, 1995; Duncan, 2004). These

changes alone create pressures on previous relationships, which may lead to bullying (Ponsford, 2007). Puberty and the accompanying hormonal onslaught of physical and mental changes only compound these challenging events for teenage girls. While friendship groups remain small, semi-exclusive, and important to the self-identity and esteem of teenage girls, they begin to incorporate boys, and girls' social focus switches to an "imperative to be widely known in the larger school community, and outside in the neighbourhood" (Duncan, 2004: 142). With this in mind "a close, intimate, dyadic friendship might be an impediment to social mobility" (ibid: 142).

The significance of communication and the disclosure of intimate information - which was characteristic of 'tween' girls' interactions - is heightened by the emergence of gossip as an important activity among teenage girls. The girls in Duncan's (2004) study perceived gossiping as "an indulgence condemned by male authority and masculine values" (ibid: 142) but found it too exciting and socially valuable to discontinue. For example, Duncan (2004) found that while "recounting some incidents, the excitement of the narrators was evident in the raised tone, pace and pitch of the conversation" (ibid: 142). For adolescent girls, there appears to be a natural need to develop intimate and trustful relationships in which to divulge problems, fears, crushes and intimate secrets, which provide benefits in terms of learning how to cooperate, share, create empathy with others and exercise moral and social judgment (Lever, 1976). However, the sharing of self-revealing information is a risk: it can be used as a weapon of immense psychological damage through the spreading of gossip and negative rumors. While most girls do not use personal information to *bully* other girls, it seems that most girls experience relational aggression at some time during their formative years. Anger, jealousy and negative reactions to others' behaviors are natural and unavoidable features of all girls' experiences of adolescence, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that all teenage girls will be both aggressors and victims of relational aggression (Ponsford, 2007). While it is important for parents and other responsible adults to understand that conflicts among girls need to be

considered as possible acts of bullying rather than petty quarrels, they should also be sensitive to the fact that all girls will be instigators of, and subject to, forms of female aggression, and that as long as these instances are not repeated and severe they are normal - and instructive - features of girls' adolescent relationships.

Another emergent feature of girls' relationships as they move from the developmental 'tween' years to full adolescence is the significance of 'popularity' to their self-esteem and identity. Girls try to achieve popularity for themselves, or by association with other girls who have it. In Duncan's (2004) study, there was a general consensus among high school girls that "'popular' was used to mean those girls who had the highest social status in the school, and was linked to heterosexual attractiveness" (ibid: 144). Further, he found that "to be known as one of *the* popular girls implied you would be brash, aggressive and involved in rumors and fights amongst girls" (ibid: 144). This contrasts sharply with the previously discussed socialization of girls to 'play nice' and cooperate in early childhood. By becoming concerned with issues of social status, teenage girls become involved in rivalries between each other for popularity, and for the attention of boys. This element of competition between girls is also a factor which may contribute to female bullying. Further, some commentators have identified the competitive environment within schools - which encourages teachers, students and schools themselves to compete on the basis of grades and sports - as contributing to the rise of bullying among teenage girls. As Duncan (2004: 149) notes, "this competitive, combative culture might be heard as an echo of the national culture of competition in education".

5.2 Profile of teenage girl aggressors

The literature concerned with teenage girls' aggression emphasizes that it is often very difficult to spot a female bully. They may be more dominant in some friendships, or they may exhibit some behavioural problems, but for the most part they blend right in (Brinson, 2005). Female bullies do their best not to be seen,

because being identified as a bully contradicts the prevalent societal imperative for females to be passive, cooperative, compliant with authority, and 'lady-like'. Studies which have specifically examined the sociometric characteristics of bullies and victims find that, compared to other students, they have higher sociometric rankings (Björkqvist, Oesterman, Lagerspetz, Landau, Caprara, Vittoro, & Fraczek, 2001), and earlier dating experiences after controlling for pubertal development (Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Taradash, 2000). Relationally aggressive girls are disliked more than most children their age (Björkqvist, et al. 1992), exhibit adjustment problems, and report high levels of loneliness and depression (Björkqvist et al., 2001) In addition, these girls often have difficulty creating and sustaining social and personal bonds (Crick, 1996). Girls who bully are also linked with depression (Obeidallah & Earls, 1999, in Besag, 2006) and a prediction of early pregnancy (Miller-Johnson et al., 2005).

Studies report that bullies tend to victimize students who are the same age as themselves, since they mix less often with younger or older students (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Bullies are therefore generally peers of the victim, of the same age and in the same grade or class. In general, they victimize students with whom they spend time and know well.

5.3 Methods of teenage girl aggressors

Teenage girls primarily use relationally aggressive strategies as a means to gain control or retaliate against another girl, for reasons such as revenge, jealousy, the assertion of social status, or as a demonstration of power. Hazier, Hoover, & Oliver (1992) report that the five highest rated items that motivate girls to bully were "didn't fit in", "facial appearance," "cried/was emotional," "overweight," and "good grades". They asked students who were bullied what they believed were the reasons for their victimization. Victims identified a number of reasons, including favouritism, not being part of the in-group, how they acted, what they said, who their friends were, religion, body size, and academic or social shortcomings. Duncan's (2004) study of friendships, bullying, popularity and

school attendance among girls in high school found that girls fall out most often over boys, with girls' anger directed towards other girls, even when boys attempt to provoke fights between girls. In particular, conflicts were often based on constructions of sexuality and popularity in the school-based relationships of young women.

Using covert forms of negative verbal and nonverbal communication expressed through indirect means, a teenage girl aggressor can manipulate her victim (Underwood, 2003) and attack personal relationships and intimacy with others (Crick, Bigbee, & Howe, 1996). Although these interactions may look like squabbles and frivolous arguments between groups or individuals, they are typically much more complex than they appear, with the goal of social exclusion. Girl bullies *modus operandi* is usually subtle forms of harassment, including rumor-spreading, malicious gossip, and manipulation of friendships (e.g., depriving another girl of her best friend). There is often a sexualized element to the bullying, including accusations of being a lesbian, or heterosexual promiscuity (Duncan, 2004). Most of this bullying behavior occurs within school rather than on the way to and from school (Olweus, 1991), and the playground is the most common setting for bullying (Siann et al., 1993; Whitney & Smith, 1993).

A number of studies have noted the powerful influence of non-verbal communication in teenage girls' aggressive behavior. This form of aggression is particularly significant to females, who are naturally skilled in the observance and interpretation of this non-verbal communication (Lever, 1976). For example, by rolling the eyes, glaring, ignoring, turning away, pointing, giggling, menacing looks, or the use of the 'silent treatment' upon a victim, a teenage aggressor can cut her victim off from communication and succeed in socially isolating her from former or potential friends. These forms of nonverbal communication can convey a multitude of possible intentions, functions, and forms. They can include the pitch, rate and volume at which verbal messages are given; aspects of physical appearance such as clothing, jewelry or other personal artifacts; body language

such as the crossing of arms, flipping hair, the cocking of the head, and dirty looks; and the use of touch (or non-touch) (Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1996). The messages sent by these forms of non-verbal communication can convey superiority, power, disdain, and covert aggression, and can be just as powerful as spoken or written forms of female bullying (Burgoon, et al., 1996).

5.4 The characteristics of a victim

A consistent profile of bullying victims has emerged from the literature. Victims tend to be physically smaller, more sensitive, unhappy, cautious, anxious, quiet, and withdrawn than other children (Byrne, 1993; Hoover, Oliver, & Hazier, 1992). Most victims of bullying can be termed "passive" or "submissive" (Olweus, 1991). They are generally insecure and non-assertive, and react by withdrawing and crying when attacked by other students. In this sense they are vulnerable to being victimized; bullies know these students will not retaliate (Salmivalli, Karhunen & Lagerspetz, 1996). There is also some evidence that teenage girls who consider themselves attractive are more likely to be victims of bullying (Leenaars, Dane & Marini, 2008). In a study of 2300 students in Ontario aged 12 -18, Leenaars et al. (2008) found that popular, attractive girls were seen as competition among other girls for the attention of boys, and thus experienced a 35% higher risk of bullying. This finding confirms a study by Shakeshaft et al. (1995), which found that females who were seen as less or more attractive than others were at the highest risk for harassment.

A less common profile, the "provocative victim", has also been described in the bullying literature. This type of victim exhibits a combination of both anxious and aggressive traits, and sometimes provokes classmates into victimizing them by their overactive and irritating behaviour (Olweus, 1991). Being bullied also creates a vicious cycle: these students tend to feel badly about themselves which predisposes them to being bullied, which in turn makes them feel worse about themselves and thus vulnerable to even more victimization.

6. Cyber Bullying

Although the problem of school bullying has received attention from researchers, teachers and administrators over the past two decades, there has been relatively little recognition of the increase in cases of student harassment through electronic communication (Beran & Li, 2005). Just as individuals in Western societies have enthusiastically incorporated new communication technologies such as cell phones and computers into the fabric of their daily lives, schools have embraced new forms of classroom technology by providing students with access to computers, email and the Internet. These have been shown to increase students' social interaction and to enhance their collaborative learning experience (Beran & Li, 2004), and there is plentiful evidence that these gadgets and interactive media have transformed the communication patterns and relationships of adolescents (e.g., Schianno, Chen, Ginsburg, Gretarsdottir, Huddleston, and Isaacs, 2002).

However, the emergence of these new forms of messaging has given rise to a new form of bullying, known as "cyber bullying", which uses electronic communication devices to harass or otherwise victimized others. It has been defined as "the use of information and communication technologies such as email, cell phone and pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal Web sites, and defamatory online personal polling Web sites, to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others" (Li, 2006, p. 1779). The Canadian Teachers' Federation, which recently adopted a policy on Cyberconduct and Cyberbullying, defines cyberbullying as "the use of information and communication technology to engage in conduct or behaviour that is derogatory, defamatory, degrading, illegal and/or abusive" (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2008). The recent emergence of social networking websites such as Facebook, MySpace, and

Bebo appear to have encouraged the development of teenage aggressive behaviors. These may include 'flaming' (overt attacks on a person), harassment, cyber stalking (use of the internet to 'stalk', threaten or harass), denigration (put-downs), masquerade, 'outing' (publicizing that someone is gay), trickery and exclusion, and can extend to "highly sexual comments and visual pornography that dehumanize women" (Soukup, 1999: 169). In extreme cases cyber bullying can lead to stalking, death threats and suicide (Li, 2006). Some commentators claim that cyber bullying is a widely overlooked form of assault that may be more damaging than face-to-face verbal assault due to its long lasting psychological damage and the frequent inability of victims to identify, avoid, and terminate its use (Underwood, 2003).

6.1 Prevalence of cyber bullying

The numbers who report experiencing cyber bully tactics suggests that it is becoming an increasingly critical problem for schools, and for society. According to a survey conducted in by National Children's Homes in Britain in 2002, one in four children aged 11 to 19 had been cyber bullied. A similar survey conducted in Canada showed that one-quarter of young Canadian Internet users reported that they had experienced getting messages saying hateful things about others (Mnet, 2001). A recent study by Li, (2006:160) confirms these figures, concluding that "about one in four adolescents are cyber victims and they experience various negative consequences, particularly anger and sadness". A poll commissioned by the Canadian Teachers' Federation this year reported that 34% of Canadians surveyed knew of students in their community who had been targeted by by cyberbullying in the past year. (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2008a).

6.2 Forms of cyber bullying

Studies suggest that the hostile messages sent in cyber space may be more powerful than other forms of indirect aggression because they lack any accompanying visual and auditory non-verbal cues, which may moderate the

meaning of a relationally aggressive remark or behavior (Guiseppe & Galimberti, 2003). This means that messages sent via electronic media are more open to interpretation, which in a bullying situation may lead a victim to construe a message in the most hurtful way. In other words, the ambiguity of electronic communication can increase the negative power of the messages it relays. Although a code-based form of communication consisting of key strokes (e.g., :), : (, ;), : o, etc.) and/or icons (e.g., ☺, ☹, etc.) has developed to indicate whether the sender of a message is happy, sad, angry, etc., these symbols lack the subtlety and richness of face-to-face communication, and can be as easily manipulated by a sender as the written words of a message.

Electronic communications are also characterized by the tendency of some users - particularly teenagers - to use a unique form of language. In particular, shortened phonetic spellings of words and acronyms are used in place of their standard English forms in order to save time, keep messages secret from adults, or to conform to peer trends. Known as 'netlingo', 'internet jargon', 'chat', 'instant messaging' or 'text speak', this language can be very confusing to those not "in the know," and can therefore be used as a form of social exclusion by bullies or friendship groups who wish to victimize a fellow student. Further, the changes to this constantly growing vernacular of electronic language can impede parental or school investigations, or the disruption of bullying messages.

Another feature of cyber bullying was identified by Guiseppe & Galimberti (2003), who claim that the lack of non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, status symbols, spatial behavior and proximity results in people becoming "more self-oriented and less concerned with the feelings, opinions, and evaluations of others…this, in turn, is thought to lead to uninhibited and even hostile behavior, with accompanying negative perceptions of others" (ibid: 55). They argue that from behind a computer monitor, weak, shy or unattractive people can feel empowered to interact with others as equals, or even attempt to dominate them through cyber bullying. The implication of this argument is that the nature of

electronic communication may increase bullying in those individuals who may not display the behavior in face-to-face situations. Similarly, Beran & Li (2005) note that many Internet users are socially isolated and may look for peer support on the Internet which allows them to act out in violence against their bullies (Beran & Li, 2005). In particular, girls who might not otherwise be involved in bullying behaviors may feel that the anonymity of the Internet allows them target other girls in a direct and threatening manner, or may even give them licence to victimize boys.

6.3 Girls as cyber bullies

Given the communication-based nature of cyber bullying, it bears many similarities with the forms of relational aggression which occur between teenage girls. For example, the Internet offers the perfect tool for covert bullying due to its anonymity and difficulty to regulate (Giuseppe & Galimberti, 2003). As Li, (2006: 161) notes, "the nature of new technology makes it possible for cyber bullying to occur more secretly, spread more rapidly and be easily preserved". Given females preference for indirect, covert forms of aggression which avoid face-to-face communication, the distance and impersonality of the cell phone, email or web page would appear to be the ideal medium for the expression of aggression in teenage girls. Indeed, there is anecdotal evidence in web and news reports that females prefer this type of bullying (Li, 2006). Further, there are studies which suggest that females have transferred their relationally aggressive tactics to the realm of cyber space. Ponsford (2007) found that teenage girls use electronic media to engage in social exclusion or the demotion of other girls from the social hierarchy. However, their on-line communications were more extreme and direct than in the real world, focusing on gossip, criticisms of appearance, attacks on sexuality, declarations of disloyalty, and statements about desiring physical violence. Galen & Underwood (1997) also found that the 'hidden' nature of electronic communication allowed female cyber bullies to be more direct, overt and aggressive in their bullying of others.

Does this mean that the majority of cyber bullying is done by females? The evidence from the literature suggests this is not the case. Li (2006) investigated the nature and extent of adolescents' experience of cyber bullying, with a particular focus on gender. He found no significant differences by gender in terms of bullying and cyberbullying. Teen boys were more likely to be bullies and cyber bullies than girls, consistent with previous research (Borg, 1999; Boulton & Underwood, 1992) that females are less likely to bully than are males. His research suggests that that bullying and cyber bullying follow a similar pattern in terms of male and female involvement. However, the result contradicts the theory that females prefer to use electronic communication mediums such as chat rooms and email to bully others. A possible explanation is that traditional bullies are also more likely to engage in cyber bully actions, and that there is a close relationship amongst bullying, cyberbullying and victimization (Li, 2005), hence the similar pattern of involvement by males and females in bullying and cyber bullying.

7. The Effects of Teenage Bullying

7.1. Short term impact

Girls are distressed by acts of aggression - particularly relational aggression - as these can be devastating to the self-image of the victim. In particular, these behaviors undermine some of the most significant personal needs and goals of teenage girls (and, indeed, all females), which include the need for social inclusion, a positive sense of esteem and identity, and the development of friendships in which communication and the sharing of personal information are paramount (Crick et al., 1995).

Studies have shown that frequent acts of aggression toward victims, are related to increased loneliness for the victim (Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004; Underwood, 2003), peer rejection (Björkqvist et al., 2001; Graham & Juvonen, 1998), anxiety (La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004), depression (Jack, 1999; La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Underwood, 2003) and low self-esteem

(Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004; Underwood, 2003). Furthermore, Casey-Cannon, Hayward, and Gowen (2001) stated that many girls reported negative feelings such as sadness, hurt or anger in relation to victimization.

Both bullying and victimization are associated with intrapersonal problems such as anxiety and depression (Kumpulainen & Rasanen, 2000; Salmon & West, 2000; Kumpulainen, Rasenen & Puura, 2002), eating disorders (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpala, Rasanen & Rimpela, 2000), low self-esteem (O'Moore, & Kirkham, 2001), and less satisfaction with school (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Karatzias, Power & Swanson, 2002).

Research by Duncan (1999, 2002) also found that bullying resulted in some girls who "refused to attend schools or sought transfers to other schools due to harassment by peers. Real reasons for seeking transfers were often concealed from parents and professionals for fear of retaliation by the aggressors, or because of internalized guilt and shame" (Duncan, 2002: 137). While girls are more likely than boys to report a bully (Li, 2006), they still exhibit a great deal of reluctance to bring their stories to attention of parents, teachers or other responsible adults. As mentioned previously, it is very hard to spot a female bully, and since they use social exclusion instead of physical violence, it becomes very difficult to punish aggressors (Li, 2006). Psychological or emotional abuse is harder to prove than physical injury and can cause mental doubt and self-blame, leading to even greater psychological distress (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). If a victim cannot prove that a girl has been bullying or aggressing her, and if the perpetrator can deny their actions or intent, the victim can feel helpless and see little point in trying to rectify her situation. Further, girls may internalize the pain inflicted by a bully, and feel ashamed or responsible for what is happening to them (Besag, 2006). Because teenage bullies may focus on aspects of the victim's physical appearance, the victim may even agree with the bully's criticisms of, for example, her excessive weight or unfashionable clothes, even if she does not have the mental or economic resources to address

these criticisms. This train of thought gives credibility to the bullies' behavior, and further paralyzes the victim from taking action. In any event, the bully's strategy is usually not to bring about a change in their victim but to attack her on whatever grounds possible. If a victim attempts to conform to some social ideal like losing weight then, as Besag (2006) points out, bullies will often simply switch their plan of attack from calling her fat to calling her skinny.

According to the National Resource Center for Safe Schools in the United States, approximately 15% of victims are severely traumatized or distressed as a result of encounters with bullies. In some rare but highly publicized cases, relentless bullying can result in a victim committing suicide. Similarly, some commentators have suggested that the perpetrators in school shootings - such as Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, who gained infamy for killing 13 people at Columbine High School, including themselves - were victims of bullying and that their attacks stem from this initial form of psychological abuse (Seals & Young, 2003).

Not only does bullying harm both its intended targets and the perpetrators, it also may create a climate and culture in schools that is hostile and affects students' abilities to learn and grow.

7.2 Long term effects

The long-term damage caused by negative peer relationships such as bullying has only recently been recognized (Besag, 1989; Olweus, 1978). Emotional and psychological scars do not heal quickly, and the damage caused by such behaviours may be more potent and long-lived than physical scars. Seals & Young (2003: 736) say that “bullying and victimization [are] associated with negative consequences in adulthood”. Both victims and aggressors are at risk for serious adjustment problems in later life, including depression and suicide (Olweus, 1991; Perry, Kusel & Perry, 1998; Tritt & Duncan, 1997). In addition, bullying has been associated with later delinquent and criminal behaviour cannot be ignored (Limber & Nation, 1998).

PART 2: Solutions and Strategies

As Besag, (2006) notes, the difficulty in recognizing and stopping teenage girls' acts of aggression towards their peers stems from the inability of parents, teachers and other responsible adults to 'see' what is really going on. Physical bullying among boys has long been acknowledged as a widespread problem, and there are established strategies to deal with it; however, adults need to understand that conflicts between girls may not be petty squabbles but possible acts of bullying, and that intervention strategies for dealing with physical bullying may not be appropriate for the relational conflicts arising from girls' friendship or acquaintance groups, or from the use of electronic media. A study involving pre-service teachers presented with 6 written vignettes describing physical bullying, verbal bulling and relational bullying events demonstrated that respondents had less empathy for the victims of relational bullying and were least likely to intervene in relational bullying incidents. (Bauman, 2006). Many parents and teachers assume that girls are just naturally nicer and more gentle, and therefore do not take girls' aggressive acts as seriously as those of boys, nor attempt to be too punitive. Bullying among girls is a harmful and unhealthy behavior and it is dangerous to assume that culture, or girls' natural instincts, will take care of it.

8.1 General approaches to bullying behaviors

Parents, teachers, school administrators and community leaders can all help to discourage and prevent bullying, whether from the actions of boys or girls. Indeed, it is essential that schools adopt explicit anti-bullying practices since, as Pelligrini & Bartini (2000) point out, schools which do not implement an effective official policy toward bullying, or which fail follow anti-bullying programs, can result in an increase in the amount of bullying which occurs.

The most widely known program to decrease bullying among school children is Olweus' (1993a) Intervention Model. It has three levels. First, school-wide interventions include surveys of bullying, increased supervision of suspected bullies, school-wide assemblies addressing the issues of aggression and

strategies for dealing with it, and teacher training to heighten awareness about bullying. Second, classroom-level interventions include the imposition of classroom rules against bullying, regular class meetings to discuss bullying at school, and meetings with all parents to make them aware of the signs which may indicate that their child is either a bully or a victim. Third, individual-level interventions involve discussions with students identified as bullies or the target of bullies. The program has been widely adopted, and has been effective in reducing bullying and other forms of antisocial behaviour among students at primary and middle schools.

Other forms of anti-bullying, or conflict resolution, programs exist. Brinson (2005) mentions 'bibliotherapy', defined as "therapy through books" (Pardeck & Pardeck (1990: 229), which can help children resolve bullying issues by allowing them to identify with characters in books who have similar problems, thereby helping them to gain insight into their peer-related conflicts, and to devise solutions for them (Afolayan, 1992). Another strategy is "moratherapy", which Brinson (2005: 172) defines as "a vehicle to facilitate an individual's understanding of he essence of high quality verbal and physical moral behaviour (ibid: 172). Essentially, she advocates that children be taught to incorporate sound morals into their perceptions, choices, feelings and actions, towards themselves and others. However, these strategies, and others, have a particular focus upon the direct - often physical - forms of bullying which are the preferred forms of aggression among boys. There is relatively little consideration of the strategies and prevention programs which might be effective in dealing with the aggressive behavior of teenage girls. In particular, Duncan (2004) expresses concern that the particular difficulties faced by girls who are not 'heteronormal' has been overlooked in pastoral curriculum which supports vulnerable young teenagers at school. Even where there are programs in place to deal with the oppressive social aggression which these girls may face, there are still children who 'fall between the cracks' since they may not be easily categorized or don't self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender etc., but who are still not 'heteronormal' (Epstein & Johnson, 1994; Lehtonen, 2002).

8.2 Specific approaches to addressing relational aggression

Despite more recent recognition that relational aggression is a significant form of bullying and prevalent amongst and between girls, there are only a limited number of specific strategies and resources that have been developed to address this issue. Overall strategies mirror the general approach to bullying by recommending:

1. The concept of relational aggression needs to be included in the definition of "bullying".
2. Teachers, parents and students need to develop a common understanding of relational aggression, a common language around the behaviours, and an understanding and belief that it has negative impacts similar to more overt forms of bullying.
3. Creation of a culture that recognizes that while girls' social relationships will necessarily involve a degree of instability, particularly during the middle school years, gossip and comparisons in appearance, behaviours and values, interactions should be constructive and avoid intentional emotional harm to others.
4. Use of specific resources around relational aggression can supplement general anti-bullying practices and curricula in schools. These resources are listed in the Appendix. It should be noted that the resources developed are predominantly from the U.S. The most frequently cited resource is from the Ophelia Project, a project that serves youth and adults who are affected by relational and other non-physical forms of aggression by providing them with tailored tools, strategies and solutions.
5. There are some additional strategies that can be utilized in the case of cyberbullying. These include setting up some clear and preventative rules at school and home around expectations of conduct, access to and use of technology. The Canadian Teachers' Federation policy outlines key elements for teachers and parents (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2008).

While research on prevalence of relational aggression in Canada has been undertaken, no documentation of projects designed to specifically address relational aggression in Albertan or Canadian schools could be found.

9.3 Coping strategies

Researchers have studied adolescents' strategies for coping with bullying and other forms of adolescent aggression, but few have done so in the context of relational aggression among girls. One thing which is clear is that male victims are less likely to tell anyone that they were bullied (Cowie, 2000), and more often retaliate with aggression relative to female victims (Salmivalli, Karhunen, & Lagerspetz, 1996). Similarly, female cyber victims are more likely to report cyberbullying incidents than males (Li, 2006). General research on adolescent coping suggests that reciprocal friendships may buffer the psychological consequences of victimization, including withdrawal and depression (Hodges, Malone, & Perry, 1997; Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999). However, the literature suggest two main strategies that adolescents use to deal with aggression: ***emotion–focused strategies***, which include avoidance, ignoring and expressing oneself negatively; and ***problem–focused strategies***, which are characterised by gaining support from others and organising a plan of action to deal with the issue (Remillard & Lamb, 2005).

James & Owens (2005) found evidence for emotion-focused coping strategies among teenage girls in a study which used an unusual letter writing methodology to examine girls' reactions to peer conflicts. Adolescent females were asked to write letters about their conflicts with other girls and to detail the coping strategies they used to deal with them. The authors found that girls' peer conflicts generated a number of different reactions and responses from the participants, including seeking support from peers and mothers; avoidance of the situation; revenge or retaliation against the bully; or confrontation of the bully in attempt to find out why they were being aggressed. Consistent with James & Owens' (2005) findings, Casey-Cannon et al. (2001) collected information on middle school girls' reports of peer victimization by using qualitative interviews. They

found that girls' behavioural responses to victimization included retaliation, ignoring or minimising the incident.

Verification of the use of problem-focused coping strategies of adolescents was demonstrated in a study by Remillard & Lamb (2005), which examined girls' behaviors when faced with relational aggression. The authors asked participants to complete a structured questionnaire and to write a brief personal account of an incident in which they were the victim of relational aggression. The surprising result was that 40% of the girls in this study remained friends, or became even closer friends, with the bully after the incident. Remillard & Lamb (2005) propose that these findings may indicate that either relational aggression might not be as harmful as most people think, or that girls have developed effective coping mechanisms to deal with such aggression. They went on to suggest that seeking and securing social support is the most effective coping strategy in dealing with and resolving a peer conflict between girls. This support may work to preserve a friendship - even one on bad terms - by allowing the parties to express their negative feelings yet avoid confrontation. In a similar vein, Underwood (2003) notes research which points to the fact that where victims take a proactive approach to a bullying situation by immediately challenging the behavior of the perpetrator, the escalation of socially aggressive behaviors is often disrupted. These studies then, appear to suggest that openly confronting a bully about her mean behavior is an effective way of coping with, and preventing, its reoccurrence. Since relational aggression is covert and abstract, a good defense is to make it overt and concrete. A victim can potentially break down a bully by approaching her attacker face to face, telling them that she knows what they are doing and specifically detailing how she will inform teachers or other authorities of what the bully is doing.

A number of resources for girls, for example those from the Ophelia project, books written for teenage girls (Kearns, 2004) cover such strategies to counter the various types of girl behaviour are explored and examples given of how to deal with each type of issue and explore how girls can lead change within their school environments and empower themselves and others through self-

confidence and refusing to participate in, support or give in to negative behaviours within their social environments. In addition, there are a number of websites designed for teens to share experiences and seek advice relating to social pressures and experiences with relational aggression. These include:

www.hardygirlshealthywomen.org
www.4girls.gov
www.kidshealth.org/teen/school_jobs/bullying/cliques.html

8.4 Options for parents

There are many resources which parents can access in order to understand and deal with problems presented by bullies and their targets. There are literally hundreds of on-line sites which discuss bullying and propose strategies for dealing with it. These include:

www.stop-bullies.com
www.parentingteens.about.com
www.teachersandfamilies.com
www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov
www.iparenting.com

In addition, there are a number of books which specifically address tactics for dealing with teenage girl bullies (e.g., Dellasega & Nixon, 2002; Garbarino & deLara, 2002; Giannetti & Sagarese, 2001; Pipher, 1994; Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002), as well as information provided by government bodies, school boards, researchers, educators, administrators, and parenting groups, which may also be accessed on-line or through local links to government agencies and educational resources.

The "parent advice books", such as "Queen Bees & Wannabes" (Wiseman, 2002) focus on helping parents (or other adults) identify the role within social groups their teenager might be playing (thus, the classification into roles such as "Queen Bees", "Sidekick", "Banker" etc and then set out common situations in which

relational aggression occurs – cliques (and exclusion from cliques); teasing, gossiping and reputational damage. Some examples of the type of advice which parents can use to prevent their teenage daughters from being, or becoming the victim of, a bully, include the following.

1. Parents should talk about bullying even before it happens, and let girls know that they can always come to them with any problems.
2. Teach girls to be both nonviolent and not a victim.
3. Teach and model healthy assertiveness.
4. Do not underestimate the pain felt by bullied children.
5. Seek support from your daughter's school, but remember that adults at school may not respond to bullying or may not know how to respond.
6. Ask your adult friends to be involved with your child.
7. Encourage your childe to form and maintain friendships based on mutual interests rather than social status.
8. Get a professional caregiver involved in your child's life early on (pediatrician or teacher, for example).
9. Get to know the parents of your daughter's friends; create a network.
10. Don't excuse your child's bad behavior, but don't overreact either. It is generally best to respond with disciplinary strategies (rather than punishment) that help your daughter develop the skills and capacity to be a healthy adult.
11. Seek counseling from a psychologist, school counselor or social worker if your daughter is a bully or a victim.
12. Victims of relational aggression can benefit from keeping a journal or diary to help them express their feelings in a safe way.
13. Teaching is far more effective and beneficial than punishing, which does not create the opportunity for real change.
14. Celebrate a child's accomplishments. Acknowledgement and praise is the best way to promote healthy pro-social behaviors.

8.5 Options for schools and teachers

Teachers and school administrators can access similar resources to those directed at parents in their efforts to implement specific strategies to address teenage girls' aggressive behaviors. On-line information includes websites such as:

www.nobully.com
www.stopbullyingnow.net
www.keystosaferschools.com
www.teachsafeschools.org
www.bullypolice.org

These websites and other school-oriented resources provide a plethora of bully reduction programs and materials which can help teachers and students understand and deal with aggression in schools. These range from books, training courses, and touring theatre presentations, to the establishment of school ambassador programs, and initiatives to lobby state and federal lawmakers. Some practical suggestions which researchers and educators suggest as effective in dealing with girls' relationally aggressive behaviors include the following:

1. Increase awareness among school staff so that they understand what relational aggression is and discuss ways to combat it. Consequences for relentless covert aggression will vary depending on school discipline procedures, the action, and the age of the girls. Consequences could include a referral to a counseling group or losing privileges.
2. Observe children in the classroom, at lunch, in the hall, on the playground, and before and after school, noting students' nonverbal reactions to peers. Consider:
    - Who is alone on the playground?
    - Who is a group leader?
    - How do her followers act toward others?

3. Discuss relational aggression with students in order to make sure they know that starting rumors, ridiculing others, and other forms of covert aggression are not acceptable.
4. Reinforce student social interaction skills through the use of role-playing exercises, literature, writing assignments, and other means. Emphasize considering the feelings of others, developing listening skills, and exhibiting other character traits that are critical to forming lasting friendships.
5. Help girls understand that conflicts are a natural occurrence in friendships and provide them with an opportunity to practice being supportive of one another. Encourage them to honestly resolve problems through open discussion and compromise.
6. Believe the victim. Relationally aggressive girls are skilful at concealing their bullying. Hence, many educators are blinded by the appearance of a model student who they feel would never engage in covert aggression.
7. Understand that having at least one friend buffers a child from relationship aggression, so facilitating friendships between girls will help them cope with a relational aggressive child. Encourage girls to choose friends who are considerate and trustworthy, not exclusive or mean.
8. Model respect and caring. Assist each girl in developing the belief that she is a capable person who has many strengths and who can stand up for herself by reinforcing these attitudes at every opportunity.
9. Find assistance for the victim and perpetrator. Contact a parent and/or work with staff to foster their social and emotional development.

8.6 Dealing with cyber bullies

While Li (2006) reports that many schools are now becoming more cognizant of the damage that cyber bullying causes, there are still a number of difficulties in bringing the perpetrators of this form of harassment to account. Combating cyber bullying is more difficult for schools than people initially expected, not least because many bullies are anonymous or hidden behind a “screen name”.

Further, under free speech rights, it is difficult to take down a website and there are few rules - legal or otherwise - governing what can get posted on the Internet (Li, 2006). Cyber bullying also takes various forms and electronic communication tools - from email, listserves, cell phones to websites - and therefore it is often difficult to track or to monitor.

Research examining the effectiveness of anti-cyber bullying tactics has yet to be performed, but one might assume that some of the strategies which have proved useful in combating relational aggression among girls may be of some use in this context. In addition, educational researchers suggest that where a child is suspected of being the victim of cyber bullying, talking is the first step to a solution (Kowalski, Limber & Agatston, 2007). If a child is distressed, parents should seek the help of school counselors or psychologists. The next step is to stop the cyber bully by first finding out who he/she is. Researchers suggest saving evidence of cyber aggression and cyber bullying by downloading and printing emails, or taking screen-shots of bullying websites, and then attempting to identify the cyber bully. This can be done by contacting the victim's ISP (internet service provider), speaking with an attorney or, if a crime has occurred, contacting the police. Some tactics for proceeding include telling the cyber bully to stop in a non-emotional, assertive message; informing cyber bullies that threatening messages posted online can be traced through the nine-digit ISP attached to the computer from which the message is sent; ignoring or blocking the cyber bully; changing the victim's screen name or email address; avoiding the web site where victim has been attacked; and filing a complaint on the offending website or cell phone network (Ponsford, 2007). The latter may be particularly effective since cyber bullying is a violation of the "terms of use" of most cell phone companies, ISPs, and websites. On-line resources for dealing with cyber bullying situations can be found on sites such as:

www.cyberbullying.ca
www.stopcyberbullying.org
www.cyberbullying.us

www.cyberbullyhelp.com

As regards the prevention of cyber bullying, parents need to discuss this form of bullying with their children as part of their regular discussions about Internet safety and appropriate use of technologies. They should make it clear that using the Internet or cellular phones to embarrass or hurt others' feelings is not part of their family values. Parents can also aid their own understanding of the culture and language of the internet, text messaging etc., and the kinds of discussions that children are involved in, by using online dictionaries (e.g., www.netlingo.com) and other available sources which translate common text/chat/instant messaging phrases.

9. Conclusions

While teenage female aggression has received relatively little research attention as compared with studies of physical violence among males, recent studies of female bullies have found that adolescent girls engage in a characteristic range of aggressive behaviors which are covert, indirect and motivated by relational goals that are often difficult for outsiders to detect and estimate. Bullying among teenage girls involves socially isolating and ostracizing others through verbal behaviors, such as teasing, rumor-spreading, and cyber bullying, which are designed to injure their victim's ability to maintain rapport with others, or to retain their own self-esteem.

Several researchers have suggested that at an early age, girls are socially conditioned to 'play nice', be nurturing and passive, and not to exhibit aggression. They also grow up to value social relationships highly, and to become extremely adept at decoding verbal and non-verbal messages. Girls' aggression and bullying behaviors emerge from the jealousy, disappointment and anger which emerge from their failed or betrayed relationships with other girls, which are both highly prized but fluid and fragile. The pressure they feel to be compliant and not show negative emotions means that their resentment may linger and their anger

manifests itself indirectly. Excessive relational aggressiveness can become a habit that can cause a lifetime of problematic relationships.

As girls mature, the significance of their friendships increase; however, they also become interested in attracting male attention, which means that other girls become their social competitors. Clearly, the need for peer acceptance is great, and popularity —a form of personal power — becomes extremely important to girls. Often, the female who bullies, fuelled by her own insecurities, looks for ways to take advantage of the even greater insecurities of other girls. She begins to mistrust her peers and engage in behaviors which ostracize, isolate and emotionally injure her social competitors. Some girls engage in relational bullying because they lack constructive ways to express their anger, resorting instead to such culturally sanctioned behaviors for females as rumor-spreading and ostracism. The challenge for parents, teachers and school administrators is to spot these forms of covert bullying, which often appear as normal girl behaviors or criticisms. Further, they also need to recognize that all girls will likely engage in, or be the victim of, forms of relational aggression, and that these experiences - in moderation - are valuable lessons for future adult life.

A ‘new’ form of girl bullying, which is currently receiving a great deal of media attention, is the phenomenon of cyber bullying. While it is largely a relational form of aggression, which suggests that it should be the method of choice for girl bullies, studies indicate that this form of bullying is dominated by boys, and that patterns of bullying and cyber bullying follow a similar pattern of gender involvement. Research has yet to establish whether this form of female aggression is favoured by females over traditional forms of bullying.

The effects of teenage girls’ bullying behaviors can range form mild distress and sadness, to suicide. The long-term effects can be devastating, as studies also indicate that bullying is associated with adult depression, suicide and delinquent behavior. While the effects of relational aggression can potentially be extremely serious, the operation of girls’ bullying behavior can be difficult to identify, prove,

or punish. There are also institutionalized, societal reasons why girls' aggression is taken less seriously, which contribute to its relative lack of recognition by responsible adults as compared with traditional forms of physical bullying among males. There appears to be a particular inability on the part of teachers and parents to recognize that girls may be guilty of bullying boys, and thus there is a distinct lack of support and programmed intervention when this form of female aggression occurs.

The solutions and strategies which have been devised to address teenage girls' aggressive behavior is rooted in the kinds of strategies which have been applied in the case of physical bullying, yet these may not be appropriate to deal with subtle and covert forms of relational aggression. It is clear that there are abundant resources for parents and teachers, particularly from on-line sources - which can assist in formulating effective strategies and programs to prevent and deal with forms of female teenage hostility. In addition, teens' coping strategies echo those which are applied to instances of overt aggression, in that victims either avoid the bullying behavior, or seek support from others in order to face up to a bully. In the latter case, it would appear that the covert behaviour of teenage girls is best attacked using overt means.

The solutions which are required to deal with cyber bullies are currently less well developed than for other bullying situations, given the emerging nature of the phenomenon and the attendant lack of research which addresses it. However, current guidelines suggest that confronting the bully - once she is identified - may be an effective strategy for cyber victims, along with efforts to paralyze the operation of a bully by restricting their access to social networking sites and other fora in which they may transmit their hateful messages.

Surprisingly, the whole issue of aggression by and amongst teenage girls is of relatively recent origin, having only become the subject of serious investigation over the last 20 years. Besag (2006) suggests that girls' friendships and conflicts in the context of bullying have not received a lot of research attention because its

covert nature necessitates time-consuming research that is expensive. However, if we are to cultivate children's healthy cognitive, emotional and social development, there is more that can be done to examine the forms and instigators of girls' aggressive behavior, of cyber bullying, and of the programs and strategies which work best in combating them.

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APPENDIX

Awareness and Curricular Resources addressing Relational Aggression

Awareness:

"In Their Own Words: Stories of Relational Aggression and Bullying" includes 13 stories from youth ages 13-17. Each story demonstrates how relational aggression and bullying is common to all young people, regardless of the motivation behind it. In these revealing vignettes, you will hear regret, loss, courage and hope, and come to understand the impact of relational aggression on the lives of youth. Now includes a complete study guide for teachers and youth group leaders.

Grades 5-12. Running time 39:09 minutes.

Cost: $35, DVD and Guide

"Relational Aggression: An Introduction" is a comprehensive overview of relational aggression and an essential addition to a home, school or institutional library.

Charisse Nixon, Ph.D. defines relational aggression; describes different forms of aggression; identifies cultural influences on aggressive behaviors, and discusses the prevalence of relational aggression and its potentially negative consequences. CD-ROM and online course include 38 minutes of lecture, downloadable PDF of corresponding PowerPoint slides, video clips and easy to follow script. Presented by The Ophelia Institute™.

Cost: $120, CD-ROM includes resources

"Relational Aggression: Strategies and Solutions" is a follow up course to "Relational Aggression: An Introduction." Learn concrete strategies and proven solutions to reducing relational aggression in schools and other youth-serving agencies.

Presented by Charisse Nixon, Ph.D. with The Ophelia Institute™, this course is the ultimate companion to any relational aggression awareness campaign: it gives you the tools to create a safe social climate.

Cost: $120, CD-ROM includes resources

To purchase, go to:

http://www.opheliaproject.org/main/programs_and_services.htm#Multimedia

Curriculum:

From Adversaries to Allies: A Curriculum for Change

73 pages long, is broken up into units containing activities and discussion questions as well as instruction for facilitation. Topics include: Cliques and Clubs, Girlfighting, and Media Literacy.

Current harassment and bully-prevention programs do little to address the relational and societal realities of girls' lives, or the underlying causes of girlfighting behavior. From Adversaries to Allies builds on 20 years of research about how adolescent girls understand their relationships, and how they experience the world around them. This knowledge has been translated into an effective curriculum authored by Lyn Mikel Brown, Ed.D and Mary Madden, PhD, for addressing girl to girl aggression and bullying. By offering girls a safe space,

adult muses, and tools to critically look at media stereotypes, double standards, and divisive messages, girls learn how to support one another in camaraderie while positively affecting the world through social action.
To purchase, go to:
http://hghw.org/catalog/product_info.php?cPath=25&products_id=43
"It Has a Name: Relational Aggression" is a curriculum for girls that introduces relational aggression, covering six topics:

- The Language of Peer Aggression
- Normative Beliefs
- Developing Healthy
- Inclusive Friendships
- Popularity and Leadership
- The Role of the Bystander
- Cyberbullying

"It Has a Name: Relational Aggression" is available for 5 age levels - Kindergarden-1st Grade, 2nd-3rd Grade, 4th-5th Grade, Middle School, and High School. Entire curriculum: $85, Individual age volume: $20/piece
"All the RAGE: Relational Aggression Girls Empowered" is a study guide designed to educate parents about: relational aggression, the challenges faced by kids in today's culture and resources available to reduce relational aggression. The guide includes five sessions titled:

- The Language of Peer Aggression
- Identifying the Roles in Relational Aggression
- Danger Signs for Parents
- Media and Today's Youth
- Collaborating to Create Safe Social Climates.

"All the RAGE: Relational Aggression Girls Empowered" parent study guide: $30
"Kids Helping Kids" builds a sense of personal power in each child through the practice of pro-social skills. Students find the courage to welcome a new student into their work and play, develop an understanding of empathy, and learn how to defend a classmate when he or she is being treated unfairly.
Grades 4-5.
"Kids Helping Kids" curriculum: $99

To purchase, go to:
http://www.opheliaproject.org/main/programs_and_services.htm#Multimedia