PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE: THE MEDIA AND RELATIONAL AGGRESSION
AMONG FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS

By

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To my husband, Andrew, for his enduring support, love, and friendship—he inspires me every day

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PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE: THE MEDIA AND RELATIONAL AGGRESSION
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By

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For this study, the researcher examined the media's influences on the experience of

relational aggression among college women. Women in the United States of America are

learning to stifle their true selves in favor of the feminine ideal, which includes behaving

covertly. Examples of female behavior as presented in the Western media include a wide array of

images of women committing acts of relational aggression by means of backstabbing,

manipulating, gossiping, and indirectly expressing anger. When considering resolutions to this

problem, feminist and relational-cultural frameworks were applied with the understanding that a

person develops her self-identity within the context of greater cultural structures. The individual,

as well as society, must change in order to rectify the negative effects associated with relational

aggression. The presence and impact of these phenomena were considered.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Citizens of the United States of America live in a society whereby global communication is literally at one's fingertips. Individuals are inundated with various forms of mass media on a daily basis, including Internet, movies, television, and magazines. With the upsurge in time that Americans spend exposed to media comes intrigue and reason for investigation. The socio-cultural influence of the Western media is more pervasive than ever and lends itself to a multitude of areas for inquiry. A growing body of literature supports the belief that television desensitizes children and adolescents to violence and undesirable social behaviors. Contact with violent forms of media increases an individual's acceptance and likelihood of using violence. Short-term effects of media violence exposure include increased physiological arousal and decreased inhibition (Coyne & Archer, 2005; Ostrov, Gentile, & Crick, 2006; McHugh, Livingston, & Ford, 2005; Wallace, 2005). Girls learn to imitate not only the women they see in their daily lives, but also women in the mass media. Unfortunately, female role models in real life and popular culture tend to send varying and often conflicting messages to girls (McClure, 2003). Pipher (1994) refers to our media-saturated culture as one that is "girl-poisoning" (p. 12). She purports that the media's influences on females in America can be traumatic and devastating, truncating development and authenticity, resulting in anxiety, depression, conformity, anger, and withdrawal (Pipher).

Although it is noted that violence shown on television and in movies creates potential maladjustment for its viewers, there exists another kind of problematic behavior on display that does not receive enough attention: relational aggression, which occurs when individuals commit subtle acts, both verbal and nonverbal, against one another with the intent of damaging another person's reputation or isolating an individual from her or his peers (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

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Interestingly, America's television series and films are now forums in which relationally aggressive behavior plays out routinely. Popular culture is filled with unhealthy examples of female friendships; relational aggression is exacerbated further by pervasive mass media images. Films like *Heathers* (Lehmann, 1989) and *Mean Girls* (Waters, 2004) popularized relational aggression and served as antecedents for films that include harmful relational images for young girls. Since these films were first released, almost every new film targeting young audiences includes some form of relational aggression, whether obvious or not. Other films in which these behaviors are routinely exhibited include *13 Going on 30* (Winick, 2004), *Legally Blonde* (Luketic, 2001)*,* and *Jawbreaker* (Stein, 1999)*.* In addition, reality television shows are commonplace that feature numerous women competing against each other using conniving, backstabbing methods to win the attention of a male or some other advantage over their female peers. Some recent examples include *The Bachelor* (2002)*, Next* (2005), and *Rock of Love* (2007). These pervasive relational images depict groups of girls who purport to be close friends but treat each other like enemies, spreading rumors about one another, name calling, and exerting power through means of exclusion and deception. These vivid illustrations, though exhibited as entertainment, perpetuate the idea of women as competitors versus allies.

The primary goal of this research study is to explore whether or not exposure to the mass media promotes the materialization of relationally aggressive behaviors among female college students. A secondary goal includes considering how quality of relationships that female college students have with one another affects the presence and experience of relational aggression. This researcher uses feminist and relational-cultural theories to guide the development of strategies for considering the phenomenon of and combating the effects of relational aggression. Feminist

theory is an umbrella under which lies relational-cultural theory; however, each will be considered and explained separately in the following section.

Theoretical Frameworks

Feminist Theory

Postmodern feminism promotes the idea of multiple truths and realities, as opposed to a single, positivist reality. Each individual's experience is respected and understood as being unique (Crawford & Unger, 2004). Feminist theory considers an individual's social and cultural context and how a person's surroundings contribute to her problems. At the same time, one's environment can also aid in the resolution of problems, as support systems are all around.

When working under this paradigm, it is necessary to contemplate sexism and the role it plays in an individual's life. For example, sexist beliefs espoused through the media tend to focus on impossible weight standards and the social importance of looks (Crawford & Unger, 2004). These can have devastating effects on females' body image and self-esteem. Activism is highly promoted in feminism and there is an overarching goal of reforming "the social order in ways that would permit the full economic, political, and social participation of women" (Luepnitz, 2002, p.14). Basow (2004) explains that in traditional mixed-sex classrooms, teachers are more likely to pay attention to boys than girls. Girls are less likely than boys to raise their hands in class or to ask for help from the teacher. The feminist's task becomes empowerment with the aim of helping the individual acknowledge the influence that society's sexist portrayal of gender roles has on her.

Anger in females is often muted, which, according to Saarni (1999), is a result of the socialization of our culture. Traditionally, women have been made to remain silent or quiet and unassertive in the presence of men. The Bible states: "I permit no women to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent" and "Let the woman learn in silence with full

submissiveness" (St. Paul's epistle to Timothy, *1 Tim. 2:11-12;* Meeks, 1993). It is clear that the culture of silence we live in has contributed to the endurance of relational aggression. Societal expectations for girls are such that their emotions are to be controlled at all times, even when met with intense feelings of anger, fear, jealousy, or sadness. From the time that females are born, they are usually socialized to be explicitly nice and appeasing to those around them, with the goal of evading discord. Females often fear exclusion from relationships or being disliked or punished for being who they are (Underwood, 2004). Direct physical and verbal aggressions have been long considered typically male manifestations. Females have been denied access to open conflict, as society deems it unfeminine, and they are then forced to hide their aggressions. Females' anger is influenced by the patriarchal society in which they live, which attaches shame and anxiety to open expression of anger for females and impedes with the ideal feminine image (Cox & St. Clair, 2005). Physical fighting among girls is considered deviant and since the cultural rules are in opposition to girls exhibiting overt aggression, they engage in other types that are less conspicuous, like the silent treatment, shooting mean looks or rolling one's eyes, and spreading rumors. Carrying out a cruel act against another is easier when detection can be avoided. Acting behind another's back is likely to be met with fewer negative social consequences, as it is easily unnoticed. Exacting revenge may be accomplished while appearing nice and unproblematic. Society sends girls confusing messages that they must behave evasively, utilizing passivity to manipulate others (Simmons, 2002; Underwood). This loss of voice lends to confusion and inauthenticity, which maintains females' tendency to stifle their aggressive emotions (Gilligan, 1993). Evading conflict in close friendships lends to women being psychologically detached from themselves, resulting in inner turmoil and interpersonal struggles (Underwood). According to the theoretical tenets of feminist theory, it is likely that exposure to

the mass media promotes relational aggression among female college students, as sexist messages maintain loss of voice for women. The anger experienced by females in reaction to being the target of relationally aggressive behaviors will result in feeling stifled and manifest in additional relationally aggressive behaviors, thus creating a cycle of relational aggression.

Feminist theory is a broad umbrella under which numerous subtypes fall. Feminists are often classified as being first, second, or third wave, depending on where they fall on the historical timeline of feminism (Crawford & Unger, 2004). In addition, there are a plethora of feminist theoretical perspectives, including liberal, radical, and socialist feminism, to name a few. One specific branch of feminism is relational-cultural theory, which emphasizes identity development through connections with others and promotes five characteristics of healthy relationships. The focus on interpersonal relationships makes relational-cultural theory of particular interest for the purposes of this paper.

Relational-Cultural Theory

Relational-cultural theory (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver & Surrey, 1991) began at the Stone Center at Wellesley College and promotes shifting thinking away from dysfunctional relationships and toward ones that are positive and healthy, called growth-fostering relationships. Theorists working under this paradigm profess the importance of recognizing identity development through connection and sharing; interpersonal growth occurs through meaningful connective relationships with others (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Mutual empathy, contribution, and benefit are all characteristics of the relational-cultural model and growth-fostering relationships. More specifically, there are five components that denote growth-fostering relationships, including increased liveliness, increased empowerment, increased sense of self and others, increased self-worth, and the desire to foster and maintain other relationships. There is the belief

that the presence of these factors will prompt individuals to accept more instances of mutuality and connection, as opposed to separation and isolation (Jordan et al.). The absence of them, however, will result in diminished interpersonal connections and increased sense of isolation, well as escalated instances of psychological distress (Frey, Tobin, & Beesley, 2004).

Women's development is affected by Western socio-cultural influences, which in turn affects their relational skills (Frey et al., 2004). The hierarchical nature of Western society encourages individualization and separation from others, which is diametrically opposed to the relational beliefs of relational-cultural theory. Some theorists (Gilligan, 1993; Miller, 1986a) believe that when women feel angry, they perceive the anger to be a threat to their connections with others. Women circumvent their feelings of anger, as they attempt to elude overt expression of anger. As a result, women suppress feelings of anger and opposition in order to protect their relationships.

According to the theoretical tenets of relational-cultural theory, it is likely that the effects of media-influenced relational aggression on female college students' relationships will be negative. Relationships that foster growth are empowering for participants. The components of zest, motivation, knowledge, self-worth, and desire for further connections are likely harmed when the relationship in question is riddled with relationally aggressive behaviors.

Overview

In 2002, 60% of adults attended a movie showing at their neighborhood Cineplex. In 2003, an estimated 61.8% of households reported owning a computer and in 2005, there were 60,162,000 U.S. adults who reported surfing the Internet for means of leisure (United States Census Bureau, 2006). Jean Kilbourne (1999) found that Americans view an average of 3,000 advertisements every day and that we will spend three years of our lives watching television

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commercials. The United States Census Bureau (2006) reported that in 2004, there were an estimated 268 million television sets in U.S. households, equating to 98.2% of homes with at least one television. It is projected that by 2009, each person will spend 1,562 hours yearly watching television (U.S. Census Bureau).

Recently, there has been an increased interest in examining the impact of the mass media on young adults. Specifically, more attention is being paid to the media's influence on female college students in order to answer the question: "How big a role does mass media play in the lives of college women?" Almost eighty-three percent of women between the ages of 18 and 24 attend movies, the highest percentage of all adult age groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). The Nielsen Ratings system, a worldwide research group that determines audience size and organization of television programming, began a program in 2005 to measure television audiences in college dormitories. Nielsen also recently announced plans that were enacted in early 2007 to add college students living away from home in their sample (e.g., students living in off-campus apartments, fraternity and sorority houses). According to Nielsen, college students watch 24.3 hours of TV, on average, weekly. They are speculating that by including college students in the sample, the viewing level in the 18- to 24-year-old age group could rise as much as 12% (Aspan, 2006; Wikipedia, 2007).

In addition to media becoming a growing fascination for researchers, the topic of relational aggression is also burgeoning. Relational aggression refers to psychological antagonism between people. Coined by Crick and Grotpeter (1995), relational aggression occurs when covert tactics are used to damage relationships or social standing of others. Relationships themselves are used as a means of emotional devastation, as the threat of elimination of connections between people is ever-present for those ensnared in relational aggression, a type of

psychological warfare (Dellasega, 2005). Social isolation is a powerful motivator for females, as their relationships are marked by intimacy and disclosure (Underwood, 2004). Relational aggression occurs among both genders, but it has been found to be much more prevalent in female relationships than in males'. Studies (Crick & Grotpeter; Tomada & Schneider, 1997) have examined categories of aggressive expression, including verbal, physical, and relationally aggressive behaviors. Results illustrate that girls are disproportionately represented in the category of relational aggression; therefore, girls' main form of aggression expression is that of subversive means. Boys, however, are represented across all three categories. Underwood found that girls are more likely to engage in nonverbal forms of relational aggression than boys (e.g., making mean faces, rolling one's eyes). When administering an aggression instrument to a female population, participants are more likely to show aggression when relationally aggressive behaviors are measured (McHugh et al., 2005). Due to the substantial proportion of females who utilize relationally aggressive behaviors as their dominant means of expression, they become the focus of interest. Why do some females reject pro-social relationships with other females?

Statement of the Problem

Unlike physical forms of aggression, most forms of relational aggression (e.g., teasing, isolating and excluding, gossiping and rumor spreading) are covert and harder to detect. They often go unnoticed and are not responded to. When relational aggression is recognized it is often attributed to the development of social relationships and is often seen as a female phenomenon. Traditional interventions for relational aggression do not adequately address peer networks or eco-systemic factors. Girls' peer network features enhance the opportunity for and the effectiveness of relational aggression. Interventions need to impact network features that facilitate relationally aggressive behaviors, such as increasing girls' positive peer networks. Also, greater attention must be given to recognizing and understanding relational aggression in

different cultural groups, including aspects such as gender, influences of media consumption, and family values (Flescher, Tortolero, & Markham, 2006; Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006; Ostrov, Gentile, & Crick, 2006).

There is evidence showing that relational aggression escalates during adolescence (Simmons, 2002). The effects of relational aggression are damaging; they include depression, substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, disordered eating, and suicidal ideation (Ophelia Project, 2006). Victims of relational aggression are also associated with poor interpersonal functioning and maladjustment, both psychological and social, during childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Underwood, 2004; Werner & Crick, 1999). Instances of relationally aggressive behaviors can lead to decreased friendships and emotional intimacy, resulting in feelings of emotional deprivation (Crick, Casas, & Nelson, 2002). In recent years, violence in schools and school shootings have drawn attention to student safety and other acts of aggression in schools. Further, it is well known that with many of the high profile school shootings, the perpetrators had a history of peer victimization and peer isolation, which are behaviors that can be characterized as bullying or relational aggression. The U.S. education system has begun to take notice of the devastating effects of relational aggression and has been working to combat it with state-funded policies, programs of prevention and intervention, and specific procedures for addressing bullying and behavior management (Ringrose, 2006). This is occurring across various campuses (e.g., elementary, middle, and high schools, colleges and universities) throughout the country. The majority of programs focuses on physical aggression, as it is the most recognizable and produces immediate visible consequences. Emerging literature suggests that relational aggression is commonly overlooked by these programs and policies, however there is evidence to suggest that relational aggression can be just as damaging, if not

more so, than physical aggression (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). There exists a link between the two, as relational aggression often precedes physical aggression in urban school settings (Talbott, Celinska, Simpson, & Coe, 2002). Children who are victims of physical aggression perpetrated by peers are then likely to develop pejorative attitudes toward others, which can lead to impulsive and oppositional retaliatory behaviors directed back toward their peers, thus creating a cycle of perpetration (Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001).

Need for the Study

In recent years, literature has emerged regarding college students and the associations between relational health, social support, and students' psychological adjustment (Frey, Beesley, & Miller, 2006; Frey, Beesley, & Newman, 2005; Frey et al., 2004). Women in college seek out intimacy through social connections and place importance on interdependence (Lee & Robbins, 2000). Certain all-female environs, such as dormitories and sorority houses, are closely shared spaces that may act as breeding grounds for relational aggression (Dellasega, 2005). Sororities are often deemed as promoting "herd mentalities" (Robbins, 2004, p. 7) that encourage compliance, exclusivity, and subjugation of self to the overarching group. Factors related to relational aggression, such as cohesion, competition, and the assumption of lacking resources, are pervasive in this context. Perhaps there is not such a great divide between females who exhibit relationally aggressive behaviors in their formative years and those who do so in young adulthood. For those women, this is a period of extended adolescence in which they are still denying their authentic selves from public exposure. Some look at sororities as being no different from high school cliques, considering that many females join sororities only months after graduating from high school. Behaviors that were developed in prior academic settings get carried over to college. Just as in high school, women in college may use their friendships as

means of warfare and disobeying the collective social rules can result in ostracism from the group (Robbins).

Purpose of the Study

Much of the research conducted on relational aggression has centered on children and adolescents (Loudin, Loukas, & Robinson, 2003). Many believe that relational aggression peaks during this time period and tapers off with age. However, there is evidence that young adults experience frequent relational aggression, and that the use of these behaviors might even escalate during the college years. As relational aggression entails manipulating relationships, the perpetrator must have the capacity for empathy (e.g., understanding the feelings and motivations of those surrounding her). As females age, their social intelligence increases (Neal, 2007), thus better enabling her to commit manipulative acts such as backstabbing and lying. In adulthood, instances of women acting relationally aggressive against one another by stealing boyfriends and rumor spreading increase (Crick & Rose, 2000). Perhaps as women age, their capacity for relational aggression also increases. With female college students' media habits becoming a growing concern for researchers and covert aggressions among female relationships being a budding interest, this study addresses both of these areas, correlating them and considering how one affects the other.

Rationale for the Approach

Feminist theory takes into consideration how something environmental, such as the media, can have an immense effect on an individual. Relational-cultural theory purports that relationships are healthy when they are empowering. By utilizing these particular approaches, we are able to examine the media's effects on females' relationships by considering their exposure to and perpetuation of relational aggression among female friendships.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

- What are the relationships between the different genres of mass media (including magazines, Internet, movies, and television) and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends?

- What is the relationship between amount of exposure to mass media and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends?

- What is the relationship between female college students' perceptions of the quality of their friendships with one another and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends?

- What is the relationship between female college students' ethnicity and their perceptions of friends' relationally aggressive behaviors?

- What is the relationship between college females' community membership (including dormitory living, sorority membership, dormitory living and sorority membership combined, living with other females in a private apartment or house, no community membership) and their perceptions of friends' relationally aggressive behaviors?

Hypotheses

The following five hypotheses were tested in this study:

Null Hypothesis 1:   There is no significant relationship between types of exposure to mass media and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends.

Null Hypothesis 2:   There is no significant relationship between amount of exposure to mass media and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends.

Null Hypothesis 3:   There is no significant relationship between female college students' perceptions of friendship quality and their perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends.

Null Hypothesis 4:   There is no significant relationship between female college students' ethnicity and their perceptions of friends' relationally aggressive behaviors.

Null Hypothesis 5:   There is no significant relationship between college females' community membership and their perceptions of friends' relationally aggressive behaviors.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this dissertation, the following terms are operationally defined according to how each is used in relation to this study.

Authenticity. Sincere expression of an individual's attributes and beliefs; necessary for both intrapersonal well-being and interpersonal health (Gilligan, 1993).

Cyberbullying. Utilizing the Internet and/or cellular telephones to send or post text or images designed to harass or embarrass another individual (National Crime Prevention Council, 2009).

Eco-systemic. Consideration of multiple avenues of interrelated influence that allow for organization of the world and how the people in it are connected to one another (Mistler & Sherrard, 2009).

Empathy. The capacity to understand another individual's outlook or life experiences. (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

Empowerment. Increasing the strength of individuals and/or communities; can pertain to economic status, spiritual, social, or political condition, as well as personal confidence and authority (Jordan et al., 1991).

Femininity. Qualities deemed by Western culture to be associated with womanliness, such as beauty, patience, quietness, avoidance of confrontation, and self-sacrificing.

Growth-fostering relationships. Healthy, positive relationships that produce increased liveliness, increased empowerment, increased sense of self and others, increased self-worth, and the desire to foster and maintain other relationships (Jordan et al., 1991).

Mass media. Media that is designed to reach large amounts of people; specifically, the Internet, television, films, and magazines.

Peers. Persons of similar age and societal status who share common interests.

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Popular culture. Collection of ideas that are widely agreed upon by a group of people and dictate what is considered acceptable in society; highly influenced by mass media.

Relational aggression. Covert tactics are used to damage another person's social standing (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

Sisterhood. The quality of acting sisterly towards other women and also engaging in female companionship.

Victimization. The act of perpetrating relationally aggressive behaviors against another.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Adolescent girls mature by means of building relationships. Generally, females need to feel as if they are being beneficial and connecting with people around them (Gilligan & Brown, 1993). If a relationship is without mutual empathy, shared empowerment, and balanced power levels, disconnection occurs, resulting in psychological problems (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Researchers have found that the hormone oxytocin seems to encourage the impetus for individuals to seek out relationship ties with others (Knickmeyer, Sexton, & Nishimura, 2002). Oxytocin drives positive social behaviors and bonding within individuals, which then produces more of the hormone within those people. This leads to increased instances of bonding, which in turn, leads to stronger feelings of well-being. In addition to impacting mental health, higher levels of the hormone oxytocin and friendship have an influence on physical health, with research showing that women's friendships may result in decreased instances of stress and such physiological illnesses as heart disease, chronic fatigue syndrome, and premenstrual syndrome (Knickmeyer et al.).

Gilligan (1993) purports that aggression originates when women fail to bond with others. She further states that in adolescence, females tend to disconnect from other females. This phenomenon lends to the perpetuation of a patriarchal society. There is much importance put into the traditional belief that women should be nurturing caretakers. Females are conditioned from very early ages to be connection-focused. Their identities develop in the context of relationships, and those connections are necessary for creating and upholding positive self-concept and identity. Women's social orientation is so prevalent that when their attempts at relational connection are not successful, the results can be long lasting unhealthy relational patterns

(Crothers, Field, & Kolbert, 2005; Dellasega, 2005; Giligan). The importance of friendships has

been documented in the literature: Rayfield, Liabre, and Stokes (1987) found the absence of

networks of friends to be associated with feelings of loneliness, depression, and psychosomatic

disorders. For female college students, the quality of their friendships and social support

networks is associated with positive psychological functioning and diminished distress (Frey et

al., 2004). In adulthood, the magnitude of recurrent supportive attachments to others proves to be

so great that it lends to individuals thriving (Nelson, 1996). This leads to the conclusion that

friendships are imperative for mental health and well-being. The significance of association,

coupled with fear of being alone, may lend itself to women maintaining destructive relationships

and sacrificing their emotional security (Simmons, 2002).

Gender and Relational Aggression

Females' peer social networks illustrate the ease of relational aggression manifestation

among relationships (Neal, 2007). For example, in school settings, female children tend to play

in small groups with emphases on intimacy and collaboration (while boys play in larger groups

focusing on athletic competition). Through engaging in competitive sports, boys become

socialized to not only accept criticism, but also to benefit from it. They are socialized to rely

considerably on hierarchy, competition, and rules that guide behaviors. As a result, competition

comes to be viewed as normal, unavoidable, and controllable. Boys also receive seven times the

amount of criticism as girls do in school, thereby enabling them to be better suited for

confrontation. Girls tend to be more conforming than boys, as well as less confrontational. Their

lack of experience in handling criticism leads to the avoidance of situations where they risk

being criticized, which often delays confrontation of problematic circumstances (McClure,

2003). Young girls have been shown to be more likely to oust a group member (i.e., downsize

from a triad to a dyad), whereas boys are more likely to expand their networks so that they may

include an additional party. Also, adolescent females more often self-identify as being a clique member than do males. Clique membership is viewed as giving social rewards such as popularity or increased status. Due to the limited nature of positions in a clique, membership is lauded and competition for such a spot ensures. Girls ardently yearn for popularity and will manipulate others to get it. However, being overtly mean would impair their ability to do so; thus, females routinely engage in covert ways of expressing negative feelings toward others in order to maintain their status. By existing in an environment defined by social exclusion, relational aggression has a stronger chance of occurring (Neal; Underwood, 2004).

Relationships among Female College Students

When young women enter college and join sororities, much of the time they do so in attempt to narrow down the intimidating number of strangers on their campuses and make friends (Simmons, 2002). This enables a new student away from her family and home for the first time to have a built-in support network amongst a sea of unfamiliarity. College freshman must cope with such stressors as transitioning from living in their parents' houses to living on their own and the feelings of separation that come with doing so, attempting to establish new connections with strangers in the university community, and managing new and difficult academic demands (Frey et al., 2004). These young women look toward their sorority sisters to be their cohorts while attending their university of choice. The draw to be a part of an alliance is a strong one, but it can also have potential problems. Alliance building can lead to relational aggression, as most of this type of behavior occurs in the context of close social networks; girls often aggress as groups. Alliances or cliques create the opportunity for females to act aggressively, as they have learned that one-on-one aggression is considered socially unacceptable (Simmons). At a time when exclusion from social groups proves to be extremely problematic, adolescent girls feel intense pressure to fit in and not deviate from the norm.

Challenging the status quo leaves a person open to victimization. Rather than stick out, girls conform and seek out their place in the social hierarchy, with popularity based on feminine ideals (Dellasega, 2005; Wiseman, 2002). Adolescence marks a time of social demands that encourage females to stifle their true selves, revealing only what will be accepted by their peers and hiding a great portion of their authentic identities. Adolescent girls receive a plethora of conflicting messages regarding feelings and behaviors from their environments and from the media – they attempt to reconcile those contradictions, which proves to be developmentally taxing. The constricting rules that are presented to girls are designed to foster civility among them, but it can become confusing and result in quashing an individual's ability to directly and openly deal with conflict. Suppressing intense emotions felt, such as despair and anger, can lead to projecting those feelings onto others. Some girls lack the capacity to manage feelings like hurt, betrayal, and jealousy, and these emotions fester and intensify, eventually exploding to the surface (McClure, 2003; Pipher, 1994; Simmons).

Just as connection with others contributes to relational aggression, so does competition with others. Many women hold true the general belief that there exists insufficient resources to go around, specifically men, money, status, power, and beauty. Rather than deeming other women as potential foundations for support, women see other women as competition for those sparse quantities. Aggressions emerge as protective mechanisms against perceived threats (i.e., other women competing for the same resources; Dellasega, 2005). This is particularly true for college women in sororities, as many of their activities include male fraternity counterparts. Sisters must compete with one another for escorts to date parties, formal dances, and other sorority functions (Robbins, 2004). Competition, however, violates society's ideals of femininity, and must also be acted out in secrecy. Feelings of jealousy must be muted when one

girl wants what another one has. These sentiments do not disappear, of course; rather, they take on more acceptable forms and are indirectly expressed. The stigma that exists against female competition disallows a healthy outlet for women's feelings and discourages truth telling (Simmons, 2002). Women face great difficulties in striving to meet the feminine ideal, as they internalize their anger against the oppressive society in which they live, and it manifests against themselves and others. This occurs by means of disparaging one's accomplishments and seeking out unrealistic images of female perfection (Horney, 1950). When females' thoughts and evaluations of other women are negative, the stereotype of catty relationships among females is perpetuated. Society promotes the undermining of relationships and the use of hurtful behaviors among women (Dellasega).

There is limited research regarding the quality of close relationships of adults who are relationally aggressive. It is known, however, that the friendships between children in which relational aggression is exhibited tend to be more intimate and marked by privacy and exclusivity (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Lento-Zwolinski, 2007). One study (Lento-Zwolinski) found exclusivity to be the foremost predictor of self-reported relational aggression among females. Individuals who hold high value for exclusive relationships seem more likely to interpret external events as threats to their relationships, and react in manners that preserve the relationship's exclusive nature. For example, a threat-response for a person who acts relationally aggressive might be manifested as gossiping, which serves not only to foster the exclusive connection, but also to demarcate the social group as being an entity. Although some evidence exists that supports the notion that the difficulties associated with children and adolescents who experience relational aggression are similar to those associated with young adults, there are still many unanswered questions. There is a clear gap in the literature and by further investigating

relational aggression among college students, hopefully that void can be filled (Lento-Zwolinski).

Eco-Systemic Factors of Relational Aggression

Why are females not embracing sisterhood? Why, rather, are they becoming one another's own worst enemies? Children learn to embrace society's opinions on gender and they incorporate these views into their everyday lives (Crothers et al., 2005). Traditionally, society's view regarding women has been less than favorable. Feminist theorists purport that women bear the brunt of our society's psychological oppression and constraints on social status delegated for women. The standards for mental health have historically been set using males as the norm; therefore, deviations from the "norm" (as is the case for many females) are often viewed as pathological (Nelson, 1996). It is imperative to consider an individual in relation to her culture and understand what a huge impact society has on a person's development and subsequent problems experienced. Popular media also plays a significant role in this, encouraging relational aggression among women by continually displaying it on the screen; girls are portrayed as mean, which becomes the model for those in the audience (Ringrose, 2006). Just as with men, women are also frequently socialized to view women as inferior; they are not immune from negative societal beliefs just because they happen to fall in the category presented. Societal gender-role assumptions become deeply rooted in individuals, including unrealistic ideals of femininity and girls' disallowance of expressing anger. According to Brown (1998), repressing one's voice, as females often do, is the result of a sexist, racist, oppressive culture that attempts to ward off any challenging of gender roles or femininity. This antiquated way of thinking does not permit for females to directly or overtly confront one another and still maintain their feminine gender identity, thus leading to covert, manipulative means of exhibiting aggressions (Crothers et al.).

As yet to be addressed are the women who use physical means to express their aggression, as opposed to covert, relational methods. How are these groups of females different from one another? Female perpetrators of domestic violence share many characteristics of male offenders, including prior aggression, substance use, and personality disturbances. Women who perpetrate violent acts against others have often been victims of violence themselves, either through partner violence or childhood victimization, ensuing in a cycle of violence. Familial risk factors for intimate abuse also indicate similarities among men and women who abuse in relationships. Both genders that perpetrate violence against partners are likely to have witnessed interparental abuse or been the target of physical abuse by a caregiver. Childhood abuse frequently contributes to domestic violence, as chronic attachment needs are frustrated for those children who have incompetent, negligent, or abusive caregivers. Adolescent victimization has an even stronger link to re-victimization in college than does childhood violence (Carney, Buttell, & Dutton, 2007; McHugh et al., 2005; Woodin & O'Leary, 2006). Research has shown that heterosexual women court referred for partner assault can be described as largely battered women who used violence as self-defense, retaliation, and in response to fears of imminent attack by their partners. Repeated interpersonal trauma may also have implications for women's emotional self-regulation, including anger and aggression. This is especially true in circumstances that may elicit memories of previous abuse; the overall perception of the environment becomes distorted, leaving traumatized women vulnerable to aggressive reaction to threat, either perceived or real (Dutton, Saunders, Starzomski, & Bartolomew, 1994).

In terms of culture, African American females are more likely to describe feeling comfort with regard to forcefulness and direct expression of anger (Cox & St. Clair, 2005). Jewish American women are reportedly more likely than non-Jewish women to engage in emotionally-

charged, intense exchanges and to feel comfortable interrupting one another (Weiner, 2004). European American women are less likely to report feeling ease with such experiences (Cox & St. Clair). In addition to culture, socioeconomic status also affects an individual's sense of entitlement to outwardly express anger. Women who have been oppressed monetarily are likely to develop coping strategies that differ from women who are economically advantaged. Women who fall into lower categories of economic status are more likely to be accepted when expressing anger than if upper-class women were to do so (Bonica, Arnold, Fisher, Zelijo, & Yershova, 2003; Cox & St. Clair). Transgenerational family patterns promote the use of violence, as one generation learns from that which came before it how to behave. If an individual's parents routinely behave in aggressive, angry, or violent manners, that person becomes more likely to use those same forms of anger expression. Being repeatedly exposed to family patterns of violence or anger causes an individual to accept conflict as denoting power, control, and dominance (McHugh et al., 2005). Female patterns of aggression and violence should be considered from a complex, multifaceted perspective, including family, behavioral, and systemic variables.

Utilizing the components of feminist and relational-cultural theories would address these areas of deficient research. Feminist theory and relational-cultural theory both take into account an individual's identity with respect to her surroundings. Therefore, using these paradigms will more wholly represent the problems associated with female aggression, as well as better identify ways of preventing future difficulty.

The Negative Impact of Relational Aggression: Recommendations

With a pervasive socio-cultural problem like relational aggression, it can be difficult to figure out where to begin in terms of looking for solutions. Dianne Schwartz (2000) proposes

that recognizing aggression is the first and most important step toward breaking free from it. This must be coupled with the aspiration to stop victimization and the capability to change one's behavior in order to achieve this goal. Finally, a woman who desires to not be the target of relational aggression must teach others how to treat her – she has to reeducate those around her so that they understand her boundaries and what constitutes acceptable behavior within the confines of maintaining her self-respect (Schwartz). When a woman makes clear her expectations of her peers, as well as what she is willing to tolerate from them, they will treat her more respectfully (Dellasega, 2005).

Civilized Assertiveness

Women must learn how to speak with conviction and decency, something McClure (2003) titled civilized assertiveness (CA). Using nonassertive speech patterns leads to women's competence being undermined, as well as their level of importance in relationships being diminished. Women need to be activists for their own rights and establish their confidence, competencies, and influences – doing so will better enable them to accomplish goals and be taken seriously by those around them. The act of being civil involves ethical behavior toward others; the act of being assertive involves ethical behavior toward oneself. Without civility, individuals behave chiefly out of self-interest; without assertiveness, individuals behave without self-interest. An individual who acts with CA is characterized by courage, perseverance, and generosity (McClure).

The tenets of CA focus on redefining power within relationships, neutralizing the differentials and aiming for individuals to gain self-esteem, rather than approval from others, as a result of the relationship (McClure, 2003). CA purports the importance of equality, which entails defining oneself not in female terms, but in human terms. When women are defined mainly by

their duty and response to and nurturance of others, they find little need for contemplating the scope of their rights. When one automatically reacts to others desires, she tends to ignore her own needs and wants. The three steps of CA will help to counteract this phenomenon, and are as follows: (1) making requests for what is desired while refusing what is not in a manner that is honest, straightforward, and considerate; (2) standing up for one's convictions in situations of conflict, while avoiding aggression, manipulation, and unpleasantness; and (3) setting limits and boundaries without becoming needy or aggressive while declining excessive, inconvenient, and inappropriate requests from others in one's surroundings. CA reframes competition not as a negative factor leading to relational aggression among female friendships, but as the motivation for reaching one's goals. Positive competition can lead an individual to do exceptional work and earn considerable rewards. Toxic competition results through means of sabotage and passive-aggressiveness; disproportionate competitiveness leads to inevitable destruction (McClure).

Feminism: Gender and Power

Feminist counselors place gender and power at the central core of therapy, and clients learn to put more trust into their own power and the power differentials within their relationships. Research has shown that egalitarian friendships, as opposed to those relationships in which there is power inequality, are perceived to be more fulfilling, they provide individuals with feelings of emotional closeness and connection to others, promote more disclosure from the parties involved and result in those individuals feeling more interested and helped by the relationship (Knickmeyer et al., 2002). The therapeutic relationship can serve as a model for other egalitarian relationships for the client outside of counseling. The therapist-client connection can illustrate the possibility for relationships typified by mutual empathy and empowerment. The counseling relationship provides the client with a safe setting in which she can experience and reciprocate equal power (Nelson, 1996).

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Within the feminist and relational-cultural frameworks, individuals strive toward both personal and social change. The latter is important, as connections and disconnections with others frequently occurs on the socio-cultural level (Jordan & Hartling, 2008). Society's impact on relationships comes in the forms of racism, sexism, and classism, which negatively affect an individual's ability to engage in growth-fostering relationships. Oppression of women can only subside if our society transforms, freeing its members from marginalization. Therapists who practice relational-cultural theory must educate their clients on the unjustified advantages and accrual of power that comes with a particular skin tone or gender in our society. Such an imbalance of power harms a relationship's ability to be growth-fostering, as privilege and dominance stifles genuineness and mutuality (Jordan & Hartling). Socio political oppressions on women can be fought against if those individuals seek out positive friendships – antiquated sexist forces attempt to isolate women in order to reduce their capacity for power. By sharing knowledge and resources with friends, women would be better able to contest and overthrow societal oppressions (Knickmeyer et al., 2002).

The Power of Media: Feminist Recommendations

The television shows *Friends* (1994) and *Sex and the City* (1998) chronicled females who were best friends and managed to overcome a multitude of problems. The unifying factor for both shows is that the female characters were very communicative and worked through their problems directly in order to maintain their close friendships. The female characters talked openly and honestly about their concerns, which, if left unaddressed, would pervade the relationship, diminishing its strength and authenticity. Also, the audience rarely, if ever, saw them competing with one another for a supposed lack of resources, such as men or jobs. As opposed to these girlfriends looking at one another as the enemy to be eliminated or stepped on while climbing to the top, rather they supported each other and encouraged one another's

success, happiness, and beauty. They did not permit relational aggression to permeate throughout their relationships and thus serve as examples for how relational aggression need not cause undue strain on female friendships. Had relational aggression been present, it would have likely led to disconnection among friends, as there exists a lack of emotional support; those individuals would have been more likely to report feeling depressed or experiencing other types of psychopathology (Nelson, 1996).

Movies can also provide positive examples for females to observe and learn from, including *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991) and *A League of Their Own* (1992). In these films, women are shown using their relationships as sources of strength and power as they work collaboratively to achieve objectives and goals. These types of images, in which women are directly confrontative and cooperative with one another, should be the norm of what we view in the mass media, as opposed to the exception. Feminist counselors can aid in lessening the media's effects on relational aggression among college women by exposing the unhealthy relational behaviors glorified in the media. Counselors can educate women on how to identify dysfunctional behavioral interactions and how to stop them from recurring in real life. By targeting precise attitudes and belief systems about relational aggression, it is possible to reduce its frequency (Werner & Nixon, 2005). Women should be encouraged to take note of relational aggression when it is occurring, call attention to it and point out its subversive nature, and redirect the interaction, such that conflict is directly addressed. Resistance of oppressive stereotypes can occur through speaking out, exemplifying one's strengths, asserting one's personal agenda, and defying intolerance. By voicing this problem, conflict can be seen as normal within relationships (Underwood, 2004).

Feminist counselors should inspire their clients to educate other women about the damaging effects of relational aggression. Then, women can persuade one another to stop it before it continues and act collectively in a positive way that will benefit all women. Activism among feminist followers should be heavily encouraged. In relation to the media, this can occur by supporting television shows and movies that do not lionize relational aggression among females, and boycotting the ones that do. Letter writing campaigns to movie studios and television producers promoting healthy female interaction (while illustrating the negative influences that relational aggression can have) is another way to encourage societal change. Perhaps there are feminist studio executives, writers, and producers that are willing to support this cause, provided that they are aware of the issues. As previously stated, the subversive nature of relational aggression is easily overlooked or unidentified as being such. Thusly, it is possible that some media heads perpetuate these images unknowingly. If they become aware of the problems associated with showcasing relational aggression in the media in a glorifying manner, they might be willing to address female communication differently.

The Power of Group: Feminist Recommendations

Group work is an integral part of feminist therapy, as this setting can permit for women to experience connectedness and unity with one another. Postmodern feminists recognize the importance of telling one's story in order to work through it. They also consider the significance of aiding women in their language development, such that the complexity of their experience can be more accurately reflected to others. Also, by harnessing more powerful and accurate language, counselors can aid their clients in using their specified energy for making empowered, activist-minded choices (Cox & St. Clair, 2005). Women's ability to connect with others in social settings lends to understanding interpersonal behaviors. Rather than using this capability to manipulate one another, a more positive outcome would be utilizing that strong connective

sense to establish healthy relationships in which individuals are encouraged, inspired, and are given confidence.

Group counseling allows for women to discover that their struggles are not unique to them, and other women can be the source of comfort, support, and warmth (Dellasega, 2005; Enns, Sinacore, Ancis, & Phillips, 2004). Brown (2003) contends that females "need to recognize their commonality of cause with one another", which would allow for them to understand their membership to a greater community. Being members of a counseling group provides the opportunity for women to collaborate with one another in order to conceptualize means of gaining power and status that do not come at the deficit of other women. Together, they can gain perspective and decipher ways in which all women can feel empowered, not merely the select few and subsequently, disseminate the knowledge they acquire. Women need to help one another learn that our strengths can be found in our collectivity; rather than working against one another, we can act cooperatively and find great strength in our numbers. The ability to solicit support from one's social network can prove to be very helpful when coping with the effects of relational aggression. Having a close friend to talk to can prove to be a forum in which painful issues can be explored and the process of entertaining possible resolutions to the problem can begin. This is, of course, provided that the close friend does not act relationally aggressive, thus revictimizing her friend (Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001). Group counseling can serve as a direct means of addressing genuineness and mutuality in relationships, thus expanding relational roles and interpersonal options for those involved (Frey et al., 2006).

Universities' Roles: Recommendations

The period of extended adolescence that applies to incoming college freshmen could be truncated with the help of training on the issues of relational aggression and transitioning to university life. Freshman college curricula should include an introductory class on effective

support strategies for students, such that they learn how positive relationships contribute to increased mental health. By teaching them interpersonal communications skills while encouraging their healthy social connections can facilitate an increased sense of connectedness with their new college communities (Frey et al., 2004). Students should be taught that relational quality must be considered an integral part of their connections with others.

In addition to relationship training, freshmen would benefit from mentoring programs, pairing new female students with more senior students who can help them become acclimated to campus life as well as model positive female relationships for the incoming freshmen. Women seek out and attach great importance to dyadic relationships (Jordan et al., 1991). The opportunity provides for each party involved to engage in an authentic, mutual relationship within the college community. In addition, both mentor and mentee have the chance to explore their own patterns of relations, as well as a partner with whom to navigate through socio cultural stressors and coping mechanisms. The positive impact of mentoring programs is supported by research (Frey et al., 2004) concluding that positive female relationships within the university setting are predictors for diminished psychological distress among female students. Mentoring relationships for female college students have relational characteristics are related to higher self-esteem and more positive social functioning. Feeling connectedness and a sense of belonging within an individual's community aids in decreased occurrences of depression and lessened feelings of loneliness and isolation (Frey et al., 2005; Liang, Tracy, Taylor, & Williams, 2002).

University administration, student affairs, and Greek organizations can aid those college women who live on campus in sorority houses and dormitories that are experiencing relational aggression by requiring that resident advisors and house mothers have training in recognition and resolution of the matter (Frey et al., 2006). By educating those who oversee these groups of

females, the instances of relational aggression can be drawn out, communicated about, and settled, thus educating everyone of the problem as opposed to allowing it to continue unrecognized. In addition to learning how to minimize relationally aggressive behaviors, dormitory resident advisors and sorority house-mothers should also have knowledge of females' tendency to compare and compete with one another, and they should be able to de-escalate the instance of such behaviors. If universities and colleges paid more attention to the relationally aggressive environs in which their female students live, and the negative psychological implications of such, women everywhere might have a better chance of minimizing the unfortunate consequences of relational aggression beyond this period of extended adolescence.

Relational aggression can be combated in the classroom. Teachers in higher education can aid in the resolution of the problem by engaging their students with a feminist pedagogy. This involves drawing attention to the role of academe in changing society and proffering the feminist tenets of collaboration and cooperation in the context of learning. Personal experience is considered to be intertwined with the larger social context. Feminist pedagogy encourages student empowerment, the progression of leadership skills, and developing communities of learners, rather than isolating students from one another. Teachers who practice using this paradigm encourage open dialogue and self-disclosure. Students and teachers both bestow and receive knowledge in a setting that promotes communal learning and collegiality. If tensions arise and conflict brews while in class, the feminist teacher accepts the presence of such and attempts to work through the problem, acknowledging that ignoring it would be emotionally risky (Smith-Adcock, Ropers-Huilman, & Hensley Choate, 2004). In addition to creating a setting in which relational aggression is thwarted, feminist teachers can also prove to be positive examples for the students in their classes. They can serve as models for female students to

survey, spurring on the feminist ideal of relationships as sources of strength and joy, not limitation or anguish.

Culturally-Sensitive Recommendations

It is critical that interventions are specific to students' cultures and community settings in order to be successfully relevant especially when interventions are applied to populations with little empirical investigation (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Few studies have investigated relational aggression and other forms of aggression in low socioeconomic settings with Black, Hispanic, and Jewish females. There is evidence to suggest that persons from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and those with higher cognitive functioning may use relational aggression more than physical aggression. Specifically, young children may internalize gender roles and types of aggression they are exposed to via television programming. This is especially true for young females that demonstrate relational aggression (Ostrov et al., 2006). What is not known is how difference in representation of ethnic minorities in the media may influence the type of aggressive behavior ethnic minorities are likely to exhibit. In particular, how does the media consumed by these individuals correspond to behaviors exhibited in real life?

Lastly, intervention for relational aggression needs to consider the community and family values that individuals are exposed to on a regular basis. As previously discussed, gender roles and societal norms may dictate the types of aggressive behaviors students engage in. For instance, if cultural norms disapprove of physical aggression but tacitly accept relational aggression, it is likely that this will influence how aggression is expressed.

Summary

Our society provides a culture in which female experience is marginalized and the female voice is muted. Women are showcased through television and movies as being relationally

aggressive, indirect with their anger, and covert with their behaviors of manipulation, exclusion, and gossiping. Females in real life are learning how to react to and treat one another by means of watching these models in the mass media and subsequently suppressing their true feelings, which, if publicly stated, would be considered unfeminine. Women come to act out their aggressions secretly, engaging in acts of psychological warfare whereby the relationships themselves are used as weaponry. Females are at risk for being inauthentic people and having incomplete, unsatisfying relationships. By looking through the lens of feminist and relational-cultural theories, the researcher has presented several means of remedying the problem at hand, including utilizing feminist tenets in group therapy and urging both individual and social change. Future research is necessary in order to more wholly understand female college students and their experience of relational aggression.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Overview

With regard to female college students, the association between media exposure,

relational aggression, and the presence of subsequent healthy, supportive friendships (or the lack

thereof) is unclear. This study was designed to expand upon the current body of literature in

counseling as it relates to the experience of friendships among female college students, levels of

relational aggression displayed, and the influence of media exposure. Within this chapter, a

methodological approach to researching the aforementioned variables is presented. The

information provided in this chapter describes the characteristics of the participants, including

demographic information, sample size, research design and data collection, instrumentation, and

data analysis. This chapter concludes with an exploration of potential limitations to the

methodology of the study.

Research Design

A cross-sectional survey design was utilized in this study, which was comprised of one

dependent variable and five independent variables. The outcome variable was relational

aggression perpetrated by female friends of the participants. The independent variables included:

ethnicity, female community membership (i.e., dormitory living, sorority membership), the

quality of female friendships experienced by the participants, the amount of media consumed on

a regular basis, and the participants' choices with regard to television, Internet, film, and

magazines.

Population

The sample was drawn from degree-seeking female undergraduate students enrolled at a

large southeastern Division I university during the 2008-2009 academic year. The university has

52,271 students, 70% of whom are undergraduates. The ratio of males to females on campus is 47:53, making female students the majority on campus (University of Florida, 2008). Twenty-seven percent of the university's student population is comprised of minority enrollment (i.e., African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, and Native American) with an additional 12% consisting of international students. Students eligible for inclusion in this study included those who were female, at least age eighteen, and had undergraduate status.

Sampling Procedures

This study was conducted according to the guidelines set by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the university. Upon obtaining IRB approval, professors of undergraduate classes from various departments (e.g., Journalism and Mass Communications, Psychology, Special Education, Women's Studies) were contacted via email (Appendix A) for assistance in obtaining a sampling frame for this study. The professors were asked to forward a series of emails to the female students in their classes, including the researcher's pre-notice letter (Appendix B), survey email (Appendix C), and follow-up reminder (Appendix D). Participants received the pre-notice email introducing the survey to them. Five days later, the survey link (via Survey Monkey: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=o3WJ7HW_2fTzNBTZdTd3pxdg_3d_3d) was emailed to the same group of students. A follow-up email was sent two weeks after the survey email was sent, thanking participants for their time and reminding those who had not yet completed the survey to do so.

Participation in this study was voluntary in nature. No compensation of any kind was awarded to those who participated; there was also no penalty for those who did not participate. Graduate students and university faculty and staff were excluded from the data collection process. There was no disclosure of any information regarding participation; all surveys and

information were anonymous. The data was recorded and emailed so that there was no way to connect a participant with her responses. Special precautions were taken to uphold the privacy and anonymity of all participants throughout the entire research process by utilizing computer encryption. Survey Monkey (2009) employs Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) encryption, in which the survey link and survey pages were encrypted during transmission to respondents. Their responses were encrypted as they were delivered back. Survey Monkey offers the following level of encryption: Verisign certificate Version 3, 128 bit encryption. This is commonly used for banking sites and other sites that transmit secured information and require data integrity across potentially vulnerabale Internet communications. The informed consent form (Appendix E) was electronic and necessary for completion and transaction of the surveys. Personal identifiers of the participants, such as names or student identification numbers, were not recorded, with the exceptions of ethnicity, age, and academic classification.

The participants were asked to complete the *Relational Aggression, Mass Media, and Female College Students* (RAMMFCS) survey (Appendix F). It is comprised of original questions, as well as survey items from the following questionnaires: *Aggression Questionnaire* (Buss & Perry, 1992), *Peer Assessment of Relational Aggression and Social Adjustment* (Werner & Crick, 1999), *Direct and Indirect Aggression Scale* (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Osterman, 1992), and *Relational Health Indices* (Liang, Tracy, Taylor, Williams, Jordan, & Miller, 2002). The RAMMFCS began with an informed consent form and an introduction explaining the importance and significance of the survey to the participants. The need for students' help in completing the survey was presented. Participants were asked to indicate the types of media they choose to engage in, as well as how often they engage in those media types. Participants also filled out opinion questions regarding relational aggression and quality of friendships. Lastly,

they completed a short demographic questionnaire and read a thank-you letter for their participation.

Research Questions

The research questions considered in this study included:

Question 1. What are the relationships between each of the different genres of mass media (including magazines, Internet, movies, and television) and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends? Analyses of variance were conducted with relational aggression as the dependent variable and types of media exposure as the independent variables.

Question 2. What is the relationship between amount of exposure to mass media and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends? A correlational analysis was conducted between relational aggression and amount of media exposure.

Question 3. What is the relationship between female college students' perceptions of the quality of their friendships with one another and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends? A correlational analysis was conducted between relational aggression and healthy qualities of relationships.

Question 4. What is the relationship between female college students' ethnicity and their perceptions of friends' relationally aggressive behaviors? An analysis of variance was performed with relational aggression as the dependent variable and ethnicity as the independent variable.

Question 5. What is the relationship between college females' community membership and their perceptions of friends' relationally aggressive behaviors? An analysis of variance was performed with relational aggression as the dependent variable and community membership as the independent variable (including dormitory living, sorority membership, dormitory living and

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sorority membership combined, living with other females in a private apartment or house, no community membership).

Hypotheses

The hypotheses tested in this study included:

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between types of exposure to mass media and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between amount of exposure to mass media and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between female college students' perceptions of friendship quality and their perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends.

Null Hypothesis 4: There is no significant relationship between female college students' ethnicity and their perceptions of friends' relationally aggressive behaviors.

Null Hypothesis 5: There is no significant relationship between college females' community membership and their perceptions of friends' relationally aggressive behaviors.

Data Collection Process

Participants were asked to complete the RAMMFCS survey (Appendix F), which includes original questions as well as items from the following questionnaires: *Aggression Questionnaire* (AQ), *Peer Assessment of Relational Aggression and Social Adjustment* (PARASA), *Direct and Indirect Aggression Scale* (DIAS), and *Relational Health Indices* (RHI). Participants answered items from the AQ and indicated their levels of verbal aggression, anger, and hostility. Permission to use items from this questionnaire is not necessary because the purpose of the

instrument is for research, as purported by the authors (Buss & Perry, 1992). Questions were also derived from the PARASA, which determined participants' perceptions of relational aggression, peer rejection, verbal aggression, and nonverbal aggression. Permission to use items was obtained from the first author of the PARASA (Werner & Crick, 1999), Nicole Werner, on July 15, 2008 via email. Participants also completed components of the DIAS, which also assessed their perceptions of relational aggression. The researcher of this manuscript chose to use this instrument in order to comprehensively examine the issue of indirect aggression. Permission to use items from this questionnaire is not necessary because its purpose is for non-commercial means, as purported by the authors (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Osterman, 1992). Lastly, participants responded to items from the RHI, which examined the quality and content of peer female relationships, as well as their relationships within the context of their college communities. Permission to use items was obtained from the first author of the RHI (Liang, Tracy, Taylor, Williams, Jordan, & Miller, 2002), Belle Liang, on August 17, 2008 via email.

Data Analysis

Regarding the data analyses utilized, bivariate analyses were performed comparing each independent variable to the dependent variable in order to determine whether or not associations exist between female college students' friendships, the appearance of relational aggression, types and amount of media exposure, community membership, and ethnicity. Research questions 1, 4, and 5 were examined using analyses of variance and questions 2 and 3 were addressed with correlation. All of the research questions were analyzed using the .05 significance level (Agresti & Finlay, 2008). Statistical analyses were performed using the statistical software package Statistical Analysis Software 8.2 (SAS). The researcher is licensed to use SAS through the Student Home-Use Licensing program at the University of Florida. The data was collected online and stored in an internet database, which the researcher downloaded and transferred into a

Microsoft Excel file and then imported into SAS once data collection was completed.

Additionally, percentages and frequencies were calculated from the data gathered from media choice and demographic questions within the RAMMFCS survey.

Instruments

The RAMMFCS consisted of four established surveys, including the *Aggression Questionnaire* (AQ; Buss & Perry, 1992), *Peer Assessment of Relational Aggression and Social Adjustment* (PARASA; Werner & Crick, 1999), *Direct and Indirect Aggression Scale* (DIAS; Bkorkqvist et al., 1992), and the *Relational Health Indices* (RHI; Liang et al., 2002). The RAMMFCS also included a demographic questionnaire and items related to media patterns and amount of exposure.

Aggression Questionnaire

The AQ reveals that anger is the bridge between verbal aggression and hostility (Buss & Perry, 1992). It is a 29-item self-report instrument that includes a 9-item Physical Aggression Scale (AQ-P), a 5-item Verbal Aggression Scale (AQ-VA), a 7-item Anger Scale (AQ-A), and an 8-item Hostility Scale (AQ-H). Participants were asked to rate each item on a scale from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 5 *(completely like me).* In this study, the psychometric properties of the AQ were examined and norms established on 1,253 college students enrolled in introductory psychology classes. The participants ranged from 18 to 20 years old, and there were 612 men and 641 women (Buss & Perry). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for internal consistency of the AQ are .85 for the physical aggression scale, .72 for the verbal aggression scale, .83 for the anger scale, and .77 for the hostility scale; these numbers indicate considerable internal consistency. The test-retest correlations are .80 for physical aggression, .76 for verbal aggression, .72 for anger, and .72 for hostility; these numbers indicate adequate stability over time (Buss & Perry).

Peer Assessment of Relational Aggression and Social Adjustment

The PARASA assesses aggression and social adjustment (Werner & Crick, 1999). It is a 29-item peer-nomination instrument that includes a 7-item Relational Aggression Scale (PARASA-RA), a 9-item Pro-social Behavior Scale (PARASA-PB), a 1-item Peer Acceptance Scale (PARASA-PA), and a 1-item Peer Rejection Scale (PARASA-PR). In this study, the psychometric properties of the PARASA were examined and norms established on 225 undergraduate students that ranged in age from 18 to 23 years old. The ethnic makeup of the sample was mainly European-American (94%). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for internal consistency of the PARASA are .87 for the relational aggression scale and .91 for the pro-social behavior scale, making this instrument highly reliable (Werner & Crick). The PARASA has proven to be valid for measuring relational aggression, which has meaningful correlations to both gender and social-psychological adjustment (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

Direct and Indirect Aggression Scale

The DIAS is a peer-nomination instrument that assesses different styles of aggression (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992). It has 24 items with a 7-item Physical Aggression Scale (DIAS-PA), a 5-item Verbal Aggression Scale (DIAS-VA), and a 12-item Indirect Aggression Scale (DIAS-IA). Participants rate each item on a scale from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*very often*). The psychometric properties of the DIAS were examined and norms established on 5500 school children from eight countries: Finland, India, Israel, Italy, Poland, Puerto Rico, Russia, and the United States (Bjorkqvist et al.). The participants were either 8-, 11-, 15-, or 18-years old and the internal consistency (Cronbach's alphas) for the instrument included .85 for physical aggression, and .86 for indirect aggression, making this instrument highly reliable (Bjorkqvist et al.). The construct validity of the DIAS has been supported, confirming its applicability to survey both gender and

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culture differences in aggressive expression with regard to three types of aggression (physical, verbal, and indirect) (Toldos, 2005).

Relational Health Indices

The RHI was created to examine the content and quality of females' relationships with one another (Liang et al., 2002). It is a 37-item self-report instrument that is comprised of three subscales: a 12-item Peer Relationship Scale (RHI-P), an 11-item Mentor Relationship Scale (RHI-M), and a 14-item Community Relationship Scale (RHI-C). The RHI has a response format of the Likert scale; scores range from 0 to 148, with higher scores denoting higher quality of relational health (i.e., engagement, authenticity, and empowerment). Participants rate each item on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 *(always).* The psychometric properties of the RHI were examined and norms established on 450 female college students. The ethnic makeup of the participants was as follows: 58% White, 28% Asians/Pacific Islander, 4.3% Black, 4.3% Hispanic, 1% Native American, and 4% other. The alpha coefficients were .89 for the peer relationship scale, .92 for the mentor relationship scale, and .86 for the community relationship scale. Convergent and concurrent validity were established through correlations between the RHI and the *Quality of Relationships Questionnaire* (Pierce, Sarason, Sarason, Solky-Butzel, & Nagle, 1997) and the *Perceived Stress Scale* (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). The RHI has proven to be successful in measuring the relational qualities of engagement, authenticity, and empowerment as they occur in peer and community relationship domains for females. More research is needed to evaluate the success of using this instrument with a mixed-sex or males-only population.

Demographic Questionnaire

The researcher designed a demographic questionnaire in order to gather information regarding personal characteristics of the study's participants. The questions addressed

participants' age, ethnicity, current student classification (i.e., freshman, sophomore), current living situation (i.e., dormitory, sorority, private apartment), whether or not they resided with other females, and current sorority status (i.e., pledge, sorority sister) (Appendix G).

Media Exposure Questionnaire

The researcher created a series of questions designed to measure the study's participants' types and amount of exposure to mass media. One such item read, "Please rank the media types (television, Internet, movies, and magazines) in the order of importance to you (1=most important to me, 4=least important to me)." Questions regarding amount of exposure addressed hours per day spent engaging in the four types of media, average number of movies watched on a monthly basis, occurrence of reading magazines, and the amount of time spent using the Internet on a weekly basis. Questions addressing participants' patterns of media choices included listing up to three television shows most commonly watched, three movies favored by the participants, the magazine most commonly read, and three websites most commonly visited by participants.

With regard to determining the different levels of television and film choices, the titles of the participants' responses were entered into the Internet Movie Database (IMDB; 2008: http://www.imdb.com), an online catalog with data regarding thousands of television shows and films. The information available includes cast lists, production details (e.g., filming location, distribution company, director, writers), release date, plot information, and genre, among copious amounts of other data. The genre listed by IMDB was used to place participants' responses into the following categories for television: (1) news/talk show; (2) comedy/drama; (3) documentary/reality television; (4) comedy; (5) drama; (6) fantasy/science fiction; and (7) other, which was comprised of sports, game shows, and family/animation. With regard to the participants' movie choices, the following levels were created using IMDB: (1) family/animated;

(2) adventure/fantasy/thriller; (3) comedy; (4) drama/comedy; (5) drama; and (6) musical. In order to determine the categories of magazines read by the participants, the researcher created the following levels: (1) lifestyle/women's interests; (2) celebrity/human interest; (3) entertainment; (4) health/fitness; (5) news/information; and (6) food. In order to determine the categories of Internet websites most frequently visited, the researcher created the following levels: (1) networking/blogging; (2) email; (3) education; (4) entertainment/shopping; (5) news/information; and (6) search engines.

Potential Limitations of the Measurement Instruments

A potential limitation to this methodology includes minor modifications made to clarify the wording of instructions and items from the RHI and PARASA (i.e., changing pronouns from gender neutral to gender specific, such as "friend" to "female friend"), AQ, and DIAS (i.e., changing context in item instructions from "classmate" to "female friend").

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology utilized to examine relational aggression among female college students. A sample of female undergraduate students was derived by soliciting professors of various undergraduate classes and requesting that they forward the online survey to their female students. The online survey, called the Relational Aggression, Mass Media, and Female College Students (RAMMFCS), was comprised of items from the *Aggression Questionnaire* (AQ; Buss & Perry, 1992), *Peer Assessment of Relational Aggression and Social Adjustment* (PARASA; Werner & Crick, 1999), *Direct and Indirect Aggression Scales* (DIAS; Bjorkqvist et al., 1992), and the *Relational Health Indices* (RHI; Liang et al., 2002), as well as original demographic questions and a short survey regarding participants' media choices and amount of exposure. Data analyses were completed using

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients and analyses of variance. The study's results

are presented in Chapter 4 and conclusions derived from the results are presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

The results from the completed *Relational Aggression, Mass Media, and Female College Students* (RAMMFCS) survey are presented in this chapter. The RAMMFCS assessed female undergraduate students' choices and amounts of media exposure, their perceptions of quality of friendships with other females, and their experience of relational aggression as a bystander or victim, as well as demographic information. The sample demographics and descriptive statistics for the variables of this study are presented first. Lastly, the data analyses for the study's research questions are addressed.

Sample Demographics

A total of 265 women participated in this study. Of this sample, nine participants were eliminated because they did not meet the inclusion criteria: five were graduate or law students and one was seventeen. Additionally, the researcher excluded fifty-four participants because they failed to complete more than half of the questions in one or more parts of the survey. The final sample included 202 undergraduate female students. Table 4-1 reports frequencies and percentages for the study's sample demographics. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 29 years old: 16% were 18 years old ($n = 33$), 14% were 19 years old ($n = 27$), 32% were 20 years old ($n = 65$), 22% were 21 years old ($n = 45$), 9% were 22 years old ($n = 17$), 2% was 23 years old ($n = 3$), 2% was 24 years old ($n = 3$), 2% were 26 years old ($n = 4$), and 1% was 29 years old ($n = 1$). Four participants did not indicate their age. Only undergraduate students were included in the survey: 17% were freshmen ($n = 34$), 14% were sophomores ($n = 29$), 40% were juniors ($n = 80$), and 29% were seniors ($n = 58$). One participant did not indicate her academic class status. The majority of the participants, 64.85%, reported being European American ($n = 131$), 5.45% were African American ($n = 11$), 4.45% were Asian American ($n = 9$), 14.85% were

Hispanic/Latina American (*n* = 30), 6.44% were Jewish American (*n* = 13), and 3.96% were

biracial or multiracial (*n* = 8).

Descriptive Statistics

The survey packet utilized in this study was comprised of four established measures, a

demographic questionnaire, and items related to patterns and amount of media exposure. Table

4-2 presents the means and standard deviations for the study's categorical variables (including

media types, ethnicity, and female community membership) and table 4-3 presents the study's

means, standard deviations, and ranges for the study's continuous variables (including relational

aggression, media amount, and relational health).

Level of relational aggression perceived by participants was measured using items from

the *Direct and Indirect Aggression Scales* (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992), *Aggression Questionnaire*

(Buss & Perry, 1992), and *Peer Assessment of Relational Aggression and Social Adjustment*

(Werner & Crick, 1999). The questions ranged in value from 1 (*extremely uncharacteristic*) to 4

(*extremely characteristic*), as well as 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*); final scores were computed by

adding all of the values together for each participant. The mean score was *M* = 60.06 with a

standard deviation of *SD* = 18.54. The minimum possible score was 24 with a maximum of 114.

Survey questions related to participants' choices of media types were created by the

researcher and included information related to television, film, Internet, and magazines.

Television choices were separated into genres with the use of the Internet Movie Database

(IMDB; 2008), and included the following levels: (1) news/talk show; (2) comedy/drama; (3)

documentary/reality television; (4) comedy; (5) drama; (6) fantasy/science fiction; and (7) other,

which was comprised of sports, game shows, and family/animation. The number of participants

who reported favoring news/talk shows was *N* = 14, with a mean of *M* = 60.93 and a standard

deviation of *SD* = 21.66. The number of participants who reported favoring comedy/drama was

$N = 77$, with a mean of $M = 58.43$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 19.64$. The number of participants who reported favoring documentary/reality television was $N = 40$, with a mean of $M = 59.38$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 17.93$. The number of participants who reported favoring comedy was $N = 23$, with a mean of $M = 63.13$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 17.13$. The number of participants who reported favoring drama was $N = 27$, with a mean of $M = 63.67$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 17.49$. The number of participants who reported favoring fantasy/science fiction was $N = 10$, with a mean of 61.60 and a standard deviation of $SD = 20.61$. The number of participants who reported favoring other categories was $N = 8$, with a mean of $M = 56.63$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 15.84$.

Participants' film choices were also separated into genres according to IMDB (2008) and included the following levels: (1) family/animated; (2) adventure/thriller/fantasy; (3) comedy; (4) drama/comedy; (5) drama; and (6) musical. The number of participants who reported favoring family/animated was $N = 9$, with a mean of $M = 62.33$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 19.33$. The number of participants who reported favoring adventure/thriller/fantasy was $N = 31$, with a mean of $M = 58.58$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 18.76$. The number of participants who reported favoring comedy was $N = 43$, with a mean of $M = 61.28$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 18.09$. The number of participants who reported favoring drama/comedy was $N = 35$, with a mean of $M = 61.60$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 20.19$. The number of participants who reported favoring drama was $N = 68$, with a mean of $M = 58.04$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 18.56$. The number of participants who reported favoring musicals was $N = 12$, with a mean of $M = 68.92$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 14.68$.

Participants' responses regarding Internet choice were separated into the following levels: (1) networking/blogging; (2) email; (3) education; (4) entertainment/shopping; (5)

news/information; and (6) search engines. The number of participants who reported that they frequented networking/blogging websites was $N = 109$, with a mean of $M = 60.22$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 18.11$. The number of participants who reported that they frequented email websites was $N = 24$, with a mean of $M = 57.04$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 23.87$. The number of participants who reported that they frequented education websites was $N = 30$, with a mean of $M = 58.33$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 18.75$. The number of participants who reported that they frequented entertainment/shopping websites was $N = 20$, with a mean of $M = 60.55$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 16.33$. The number of participants who reported that they frequented news/information websites was $N = 10$, with a mean of $M = 62.70$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 18.33$. The number of participants who reported that they frequented search engine websites was $N = 9$, with a mean of $M = 68.00$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 12.88$.

Participants' responses regarding magazine choice were separated into the following levels: (1) lifestyle/women's interests; (2) celebrity/human interest; (3) entertainment; (4) health/fitness; (5) news/information; and (6) food. The number of participants who reported favoring lifestyle/women's interests was $N = 97$, with a mean of $M = 60.09$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 18.56$. The number of participants who reported favoring celebrity/human interest was $N = 37$, with a mean of $M = 59.38$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 17.04$. The number of participants who reported favoring entertainment was $N = 14$, with a mean of $M = 60.36$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 19.69$. The number of participants who reported favoring health/fitness was $N = 10$, with a mean of $M = 67.20$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 20.06$. The number of participants who reported favoring news/information was $N = 18$, with a mean of $M = 67.94$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 22.89$. The number of participants who reported favoring food was $N = 5$, with a mean of $M = 48.00$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 15.80$.

Participants' amount of media exposure was evaluated using questions in the *Relational Aggression, Mass Media, and Female College Students* survey that pertained to daily, weekly, and monthly media intake of television, magazines, movies, and the Internet. Each question was assigned values with higher numbers equating to higher amounts of media intake. The individual values for each participant were added together to create a sum that made up the final calculation for data entry. For example, the question "How often do you read magazines?" was coded from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*daily*). The mean score for amount of participants' media exposure was $M = 16.00$ with a standard deviation of $SD = 2.70$. The possible range of scores was from 7 to 35.

The survey questions relating to relationship quality were measured using items from the *Relational Health Indices* (Liang et al., 2002). Scores ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*) with a mean score of $M = 63.05$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 9.39$. The possible range of scores was 17 to 85 with higher scores indicating higher levels of relational health and friendship quality.

The survey question relating to participants' ethnicity was within the demographic questionnaire in the RAMMFCS. The researcher utilized the following levels of ethnicity: (1) European American; (2) African American; (3) Asian American; (4) Hispanic/Latina American; (5) Jewish American; and (6) Biracial/Multiracial. The number of participants who reported being European American students was $N = 131$, with a mean of $M = 60.58$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 18.87$. The number of participants who reported being African American students was $N = 11$, with a mean of $M = 54.00$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 22.02$. The number of participants who reported being Asian American students was $N = 9$, with a mean of $M = 60.33$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 23.05$. The number of participants who reported being Hispanic/Latina American students was $N = 30$, with a mean of $M = 60.23$ and a standard

deviation of $SD = 17.26$. The number of participants who reported being Jewish American

students was $N = 13$, with a mean of $M = 58.69$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 13.09$. The

number of participants who reported being Biracial/Multiracial students was $N = 8$, with a mean

of $M = 61.25$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 19.10$.

Survey questions related to female community membership were also within the

demographic questionnaire in the RAMMFCS. Based on the participants' responses, the

researcher created the following levels of community membership: (1) dormitory living; (2)

sorority membership; (3) dormitory living and sorority membership; (4) no female community

membership; and (5) private living (e.g., apartment, house) with other females. The number of

participants who reported dormitory living was $N = 36$, with a mean of $M = 63.64$ and a standard

deviation of $SD = 17.22$. The number of participants who reported sorority membership was $N = 33$, with a mean of $M = 56.33$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 19.17$. The number of

participants who reported both dormitory living and sorority membership was $N = 8$, with a

mean of $M = 49.88$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 18.73$. The number of participants who

reported no community membership was $N = 39$, with a mean of $M = 57.77$ and a standard

deviation of $SD = 18.78$. The number of participants who reported privately living with other

females was $N = 86$, with a mean of $M = 61.99$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 18.42$.

Results

For the purposes of this study, the probability level for rejection of hypotheses was $p = .05$ for all tests (Agresti & Finlay, 2008). Research questions 1, 4, and 5 were analyzed with

analyses of variance (see Table 4-4) and research questions 2 and 3 were tested using Pearson

Product Moment correlations (see Table 4-5). All research questions were analyzed using

Statistical Analysis Software (SAS), version 8.2.

Question 1: What are the relationships between each of the different genres of mass media (including magazines, Internet, movies, and television) and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends? The null hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between types of exposure to mass media and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends.

To test the first research question, analyses of variance were performed with types of media exposure (including television, film, Internet, and magazines) as the independent variables and relational aggression as the outcome variable. Participants' answers from the media exposure items in the RAMMFCS were categorized according to genres indicated by the IMDB (2008) and entered into the SAS software as the independent variables in order to conduct ANOVAs. Participants' scores entered as the dependent variable were calculated from items taken from the *Direct and Indirect* Aggression Scales (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992), *Aggression Questionnaire* (Buss & Perry, 1992), and *Peer Assessment of Relational Aggression and Social Adjustment* (Werner & Crick, 1999); the items were summed to create a final score, which was entered into the SAS software as the dependent variable. One way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were calculated to compare media types with perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors. For these analyses, non-significant associations were found for television (F (6,192) = .430, p = .856), films (F (5,192) = .850, p = .519), Internet (F (5,196) = .550, p = .740), and magazines (F (5,175) = 1.280, p = .274); therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected for research question 1. This indicates that there was no relationship between types of exposure to media and female college students' perceptions of the experience of relational aggression among their female college friends.

Magazines: Of the 202 female college students who participated in the RAMMFCS survey, only 181 completed the question regarding preference of magazine type. The mean scores for participants' perceptions of relational aggression among their female college friends ranged quite broadly: students who reported reading magazines about news/information (e.g., *Time* (Stengel, 1923-2009), *The New Yorker* (Remnick, 1925-2009)) had the highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 67.94$; students who reported reading magazines about health/fitness (e.g., *Self* (Danziger, 1979-2009), *Health* (Kunes, 1981-2009)) had the second highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 67.20$; students who reported reading magazines about entertainment (e.g., *Sports Illustrated* (McDonell, 1954-2009), *Rolling Stone* (Wenner, 1967-2009)) had the third highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 60.36$; students who reported reading magazines about lifestyle/women's interests (e.g., *Cosmopolitan* (White, 1886-2009), *Glamour* (Leive, 1939-2009)) had the fourth highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 60.09$; students who reported reading magazines about celebrity/human interests (e.g., *People* (Hackett, 1974-2009)*, Us Weekly* (Min, 1977-2009)) had the fifth highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 59.38$; students who reported reading magazines about food (e.g., *Gourmet* (Reichl, 1941-2009), *Everyday with Rachael Ray* (Ray, 2005-2009)) had the lowest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 48.00$. There were also wide differences in the numbers of participants who responded to each of the various magazine categories: 97 students (53.59%) reported that they most often read magazines about lifestyle/women's interests; 37 students (20.44%) reported that they most often read magazines about celebrity/human interests; 18 students (9.94%) reported that they most often read magazines about news/information; 14 students (7.74%) reported that they most often read magazines about entertainment; 10 students (5.53%) reported that they most often read

magazines about health/fitness; 5 students (2.76%) reported that they most often read magazines about food. With such inconsistencies between the numbers of respondents in each category, it is difficult to accurately reflect how genres of magazines might be related to perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among female college friends.

Internet: With regard to types of Internet sites most frequently used, the mean scores for participants' perceptions of relational aggression among their female friends ranged as follows: students who reported visiting websites that serve as search engines (e.g., www.google.com, www.yahoo.com) had the highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 68.00$; students who reported visiting websites about news/information (e.g., www.cnn.com, www.nytimes.com) had the second highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 62.70$; students who reported visiting websites designed for entertainment/shopping (e.g., www.youtube.com, www.perezhilton.com) had the third highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 60.55$; students who reported visiting websites designed for networking/blogging (e.g., www.facebook.com, www.myspace.com) had the fourth highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 60.22$; students who reported visiting websites designed for educational purposes (e.g., www.ufl.edu, http://lss.at.ufl.edu) had the fifth highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 58.33$; students who reported visiting websites for email purposes (e.g., http://webmail.ufl.edu, www.aol.com) had the lowest mean score on the dependent variable. There were also broad differences in the numbers of participants who responded to each of the various Internet categories: 109 students (53.96%) reported that they most frequently visit websites devoted to networking/blogging; 30 students (14.85%) reported that they most frequently visit websites designed for educational purposes; 24 students (11.88%) reported that they most frequently visit websites for email purposes; 20 students (9.90%) reported that they

most frequently visit websites designed for entertainment/shopping; 10 students (4.95%) reported that they most frequently visit websites about news/information; 9 students (4.46%) reported that they most frequently visit websites designated as search engines. With such inconsistencies between the numbers of respondents in each category, it is difficult to reflect accurately how different types of websites may be related to perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among female college friends.

Movies: Of the 202 female college students who participated in the RAMMFCS survey, 198 completed the question regarding movies most frequently watched. The mean scores for participants' perceptions of relational aggression among their female friends ranged as follows: students who reported watching musical movies (e.g., *Across the Universe* (Taymor, 2007), *Grease* (Kleiser, 1978)) had the highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 68.92$; students who reported watching family/animated movies (e.g., *Finding Nemo* (Stanton & Unkrich, 2003), *The Little Mermaid* (Clements & Musker, 1989)) had the second highest score on the dependent variable at $M = 62.33$; students who reported watching drama/comedy movies (e.g., *Sex and the City* (King, 2008), *Ever After* (Tennant, 1998)) had the third highest score on the dependent variable at $M = 61.60$; students who reported watching comedy movies (e.g., *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* (Petrie, 2003), *Wedding Crashers* (Dobkin, 2005)) had the fourth highest score on the dependent variable at $M = 61.28$; students who reported watching adventure/thriller/fantasy movies (e.g., *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Columbus, 2001), *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Jackson, 2001)) had the fifth highest score on the dependent variable at $M = 58.58$; students who reported watching drama movies (e.g., *The Notebook* (Cassavetes, 2004), *Pride and Prejudice* (Wright, 2005)) had the lowest scores on the dependent variable at $M = 58.04$. There were also differences in the numbers of participants who

responded to each of the various movie categories: 68 students (34.34%) reported that that they most frequently watch drama movies; 43 students (21.72%) reported that they most frequently watch comedy movies; 35 students (17.68%) reported that they most frequently watch drama/comedy movies; 31 students (15.65%) reported that they most frequently watch adventure/thriller/fantasy movies; 12 students (6.06%) reported that they most frequently watch musical movies; 9 students (4.55%) reported that they most frequently watch family/animated movies. With such inconsistencies between the numbers of respondents in each category, it is difficult to reflect accurately how different genres of movies may be related to perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among female college friends.

Television: Of the 202 female college students who participated in the RAMMFCS survey, 199 completed the question regarding television shows most frequently watched. The mean scores for participants' perceptions of relational aggression among their female friends ranged as follows: students who reported watching drama television shows (e.g., *One Tree Hill* (Prange, 2003), *90210* (Cecil & Sachs, 2008)) had the highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 63.67$; students who reported watching comedy television shows (e.g., *Family Guy* (MacFarlane, 1999), *Entourage* (Wahlberg, Ellin, & Levinson, 2004)) had the second highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 63.13$; students who reported watching fantasy/science fiction television shows (e.g., *True Blood* (Ball, 2008), *Lost* (Abrams, Burk, & Lindelof, 2004)) had the third highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 61.60$; students who reported watching news/talk shows (e.g., *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (Stewart & Karlin, 1996), *The Colbert Report* (Colbert, Stewart, & Karlin, 2005)) had the fourth highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 60.93$; students who reported watching documentary/reality television shows (e.g., *The Hills* (DiVello, 2006), *America's Next Top*

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Model (Banks & Mok, 2003)) had the fifth highest mean score on the dependent variable at *M* = 59.38; students who reported watching comedy/drama television shows (e.g., *The Office* (Daniels, Gervais, & Merchant, 2005), *Desperate Housewives* (Cherry & Perkins, 2004)) had the sixth highest mean score on the dependent variable at *M* = 58.43; students who reported watching shows that fall into a miscellaneous category, including sports, game shows, and family/animation (e.g., *Sports Center* (Bowen, 1979), *Full House* (Franklin, 1987)), had the lowest mean score on the dependent variable at *M* = 56.63.

There were also vast differences in the numbers of participants who responded to each of the various television categories: 77 students (38.69%) reported that that they most frequently watch comedy/drama television shows; 40 students (20.10%) reported that they most frequently watch documentary/reality television shows; 27 students (13.57%) reported that they most frequently watch drama television shows; 23 students (11.56%) reported that they most frequently watch comedy television shows; 14 students (7.04%) reported that they most frequently watch news/talk shows; 10 students (5.02%) reported that they most frequently watch fantasy/science fiction television shows; 8 students (4.02%) reported that they most frequently watch television shows that fell into the miscellaneous category. With such inconsistencies between the numbers of respondents in each category, it is difficult to reflect accurately how different categories of television shows may be related to perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among female college friends.

Question 2: What is the relationship between amount of exposure to mass media and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends? The null hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between

amount of exposure to mass media and female college students' perceptions of relationally

aggressive behaviors among their female college friends.

To test the second research question, a Pearson Product Moment correlation was

calculated between amount of media exposure and relational aggression. Participants' scores

from the media exposure items in the RAMMFCS were entered into the SAS software as the

independent variables in order to conduct a correlational analysis. Participants' scores entered as

the dependent variable were calculated from items taken from the *Direct and Indirect*

Aggression Scales (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992), *Aggression Questionnaire* (Buss & Perry, 1992), and

Peer Assessment of Relational Aggression and Social Adjustment (Werner & Crick, 1999); the

items were summed to create a final score, which was entered into the SAS software as the

dependent variable. There was a non-significant association found ($r = .057$, $p = .419$); therefore,

the null hypothesis is not rejected for research question 2. This indicates that there was no

relationship between amount of time spent engaging in media and female college students'

perceptions of the experience of relational aggression among their female college friends.

Question 3: What is the relationship between female college students' perceptions of the

quality of their friendships with one another and female college students' perceptions of

relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends? The null hypothesis stated

that there is no significant relationship between female college students' perceptions of

friendship quality and their perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female

college friends.

To test the third research question, a Pearson Product Moment correlation was calculated

between relational health and relational aggression. Participants' scores from the *Relational*

Health Indices (Liang et al., 2002) were entered into the SAS software as the independent

variables in order to conduct correlational analyses. Participants' scores entered as the dependent variable were calculated from items taken from the *Direct and Indirect* Aggression Scales (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992), *Aggression Questionnaire* (Buss & Perry, 1992), and *Peer Assessment of Relational Aggression and Social Adjustment* (Werner & Crick, 1999); the items were summed to create a final score, which was entered into the SAS software as the dependent variable. There was a significant, inverse relationship found ($r = -.294$, $p < .0001$) with a medium or moderate effect size of $r^2 = .313$ (Huck, 2008); therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected for research question 3. This indicates that as perception of female college students' friendship quality increases, their perception of relationally aggressive behaviors among female college students and their friends decreases.

Question 4: What is the relationship between female college students' ethnicity and their perceptions of friends' relationally aggressive behaviors? The null hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between female college students' ethnicity and their perceptions of friends' relationally aggressive behaviors.

To test the fourth research question, an analysis of variance was performed with ethnicity as the independent variable and relational aggression as the outcome variable. Participants' answers from the demographic questionnaire in the RAMMFCS were entered into the SAS software as the independent variables in order to conduct an ANOVA. Participants' scores entered as the dependent variable were calculated from items taken from the *Direct and Indirect* Aggression Scales (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992), *Aggression Questionnaire* (Buss & Perry, 1992), and *Peer Assessment of Relational Aggression and Social Adjustment* (Werner & Crick, 1999); the items were summed to create a final score, which was entered into the SAS software as the dependent variable. An ANOVA was conducted to compare ethnicity with perceptions of

relationally aggressive behaviors. For this analysis, a non-significant association was found (F (5,196) = .270, p = .928); therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected for research question 4. This indicates that there was no relationship between ethnicity and female college students' perceptions of the experience of relational aggression among their female college friends.

With regard to differences among female college students' ethnicities, the mean scores for participants' perceptions of relational aggression among their female friends ranged as follows: students who identified themselves as biracial/multiracial had the highest mean score on the dependent variable at M = 61.25; students who identified themselves as European American had the second highest mean score on the dependent variable at M = 60.58; students who identified themselves as Asian American had the third highest mean score on the dependent variable at M = 60.33; students who identified themselves as Hispanic/Latina American had the fourth highest mean score on the dependent variable at M = 60.23; students who identified themselves as Jewish American had the fifth highest mean score on the dependent variable at M = 58.69; students who identified themselves as African American had the lowest score on the dependent variable at M = 54.00. There were also vast differences in the numbers of participants who responded as identifying themselves within each of the categories of ethnicity: 131 students (64.85%) reported that that they were European American; 30 students (14.85%) reported that they were Hispanic/Latina American; 13 students (6.44%) reported that they were Jewish American; 11 students (5.45%) reported that they were African American; 9 students (4.45%) reported that they were Asian American; 8 students (3.96%) reported that they were biracial/multiracial. With such inconsistencies between the numbers of respondents in each category, it is difficult to reflect accurately how different ethnicities may be related to perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among female college friends.

Question 5: What is the relationship between college females' community membership and their perceptions of friends' relationally aggressive behaviors? The null hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between college females' community membership and their perceptions of friends' relationally aggressive behaviors.

To test the fifth research question, an analysis of variance was performed with female community membership (including dormitory living, sorority membership, dormitory living and sorority membership combined, living with other females in a private apartment or house, no community membership) as the independent variable and relational aggression as the outcome variable. Participants' answers from the demographic questionnaire in the RAMMFCS were entered into the SAS software as the independent variables in order to conduct an ANOVA. Participants' scores entered as the dependent variable were calculated from items taken from the *Direct and Indirect* Aggression Scales (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992), *Aggression Questionnaire* (Buss & Perry, 1992), and *Peer Assessment of Relational Aggression and Social Adjustment* (Werner & Crick, 1999); the items were summed to create a final score, which was entered into the SAS software as the dependent variable. An ANOVA was conducted to compare female community membership with perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among female college students. For this analysis, a non-significant association was found (F (4,197) = 1.680, p = .157); therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected for research question 5. This indicates that there was no relationship between female community membership and female college students' perceptions of the experience of relational aggression among their female college friends.

With regard to differences among college students' female community membership, the mean scores for participants' perceptions of relational aggression among their female friends ranged quite broadly: students who reported living on-campus in dormitories had the highest

mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 63.64$; students who reported living with other females in off-campus private houses or apartments had the second highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 61.99$; students who reported no female community membership (i.e., they do not live with other females are not members of sororities) had the third highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 57.77$; students who reported that they were members of sororities had the fourth highest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 56.33$; students who reported simultaneously living on-campus in dormitories and being members of sororities had the lowest mean score on the dependent variable at $M = 49.88$. There were also vast differences in the numbers of participants who responded as identifying themselves within each of the categories of female community membership: 86 students (42.57%) reported that that they live with other females in off-campus private houses or apartments; 39 students (19.31%) reported no female community membership; 36 students (17.82%) reported living on-campus in a dormitory; 33 students (16.34%) reported being members of a sorority; 8 students (3.96%) reported simultaneously living on-campus in dormitories and being members of sororities. With such inconsistencies between the numbers of respondents in each category, it is difficult to reflect accurately how different categories of female community membership may be related to perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among female college friends.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the results from the RAMMFCS survey, which was administered to undergraduate female students at a large southeastern university. Descriptive statistics and relationships between research variables were presented. Results for the research questions and hypotheses were provided. Within the next chapter, the researcher will examine the results and offer implications for counseling practice and counselor education. Recommendations for future research will also be presented.

Table 4-1. Descriptive Statistics for the Study's Demographic Information

Variable	Frequency f	Percentage %
Age		
18	33	16
19	27	14
20	65	32
21	45	22
22	17	9
23	3	2
24	3	2
26	4	2
29	1	1
Student Classification		
Freshman	34	17
Sophomore	29	14
Junior	80	40
Senior	58	29

Table 4-2. Descriptive Statistics for the Study's Categorical Variables

Variable	Sample Size N	Mean M	Std. Deviation SD
Media Type: Television			
News/Talk Show	14	60.93	21.66
Comedy/Drama	77	58.43	19.64
Documentary/Reality Television	40	59.38	17.93
Comedy	23	63.13	17.13
Drama	27	63.67	17.49
Fantasy/Science Fiction	10	61.60	20.61
Other	8	56.63	15.84
Media Type: Film			
Family/Animated	9	62.33	19.33
Adventure/Thriller/Fantasy	31	58.58	18.76
Comedy	43	61.28	18.09
Drama/Comedy	35	61.60	20.19
Drama	68	58.04	18.56
Musical	12	68.92	14.68

Table 4-2. Continued

	Sample Size N	Mean M	Std. Deviation SD
Media Type: Internet			
Networking/Blogging	109	60.22	18.11
Email	24	57.04	23.87
Education	30	58.33	18.75
Entertainment/Shopping	20	60.55	16.33
News/Information	10	62.70	18.33
Search Engines	9	68.00	12.88
Media Type: Magazines			
Lifestyle/Women's Interests	97	60.09	18.56
Celebrity/Human Interest	37	59.38	17.04
Entertainment	14	60.36	19.69
Health/Fitness	10	67.20	20.06
News/Information	18	67.94	22.89
Food	5	48.00	15.80
Ethnicity			
European American	131	60.58	18.87
African American	11	54.00	22.02
Asian American	9	60.33	23.05
Hispanic/Latina American	30	60.23	17.26
Jewish American	13	58.69	13.09
Biracial/Multiracial	8	61.25	19.10
Female Community Membership			
Dormitory Living	36	63.64	17.22
Sorority Membership	33	56.33	19.17
Both Dorm and Sorority	8	49.88	18.73
No Membership	39	57.77	18.78
Private Living with Females	86	61.99	18.42

Table 4-3. Descriptive Statistics for the Study's Continuous Variables

Variable	Sample Size N	Mean M	Std. Deviation SD	Range	
				Low	High
Relational Aggression	202	60.06	18.54	24	114
Media Amount	202	16.00	2.70	7	35
Relational Health	202	63.05	9.39	17	85

Table 4-4. Pearson Product Moment Correlations among the Study's Variables

Variables	RA	RH	AME
RA	——		
RH	-.294	——	
AME	.057		——

Note: N = 202; RA = Relational Aggression; RH = Relational Health; AME = Amount of Media Exposure; p-value = .05.

Table 4-5. One Way Analysis of Variance Results for the Study's Variables

Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Media Type: Television					
Between Groups	919.292	6	153.215	.430	.856
Within Groups	67946.044	192	353.886		
Total	68865.337	198			
Media Type: Film					
Between Groups	1466.202	5	293.240	.850	.519
Within Groups	66594.384	192	346.846		
Total	68060.586	197			
Media Type: Internet					
Between Groups	952.773	5	190.555	.550	.740
Within Groups	68153.391	196	347.721		
Total	69106.163	201			
Media Type: Magazines					
Between Groups	2273.606	5	454.721	1.280	.274
Within Groups	62092.626	175	354.815		
Total	64366.232	180			
Ethnicity					
Between Groups	476.619	5	95.324	.270	.928
Within Groups	68629.544	196	350.151		
Total	69106.163	201			
Female Community Membership					
Between Groups	2273.738	4	568.435	1.680	.157
Within Groups	66832.425	197	339.251		
Total	69106.163	201			

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Past research has examined relational aggression mainly in the context of children and adolescents (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Simmons, 2002; Underwood, 2004). Less attention has been paid to the phenomenon among adult females, although some researchers believe that relationally aggressive behaviors might increase with age (Dellasega, 2005; Lento-Zwolinksi, 2007; Loudin, Loukas, & Robinson, 2003). The present study examined the associations between the perceived presence of relational aggression among female college students and their media habits, ethnicity, perceived relational health or relationship quality with female friends, and female community membership. The main goal of this study was to further establish the burgeoning belief that relational aggression does not end with adolescence; rather, its appearance and effects can amplify as women get older. Furthermore, the researcher hoped to examine some potential factors that may contribute to or exacerbate the occurrence of relational aggression.

In Chapter 4, the results of a study investigating media habits, ethnicity, female community membership, relationship quality, and the presence of relational aggression among female college students were presented. In this chapter, an overview of the research study and its findings are presented. Implications for theory, practice, and research in counseling are also discussed. The chapter concludes with the limitations and an overall summary of the study.

Overview of Study and Summary of Research Findings

This study included 202 female undergraduate students enrolled at a large southeastern university. The participants in the sample ranged in age from 18 to 29 years old and were predominantly European American (66%). Each participant filled out the RAMMFCS survey, which was comprised of items from pre-existing instruments measuring relational aggression and relationship quality. The RAMMFCS also included original items measuring participants'

choices regarding type and quantity of media intake, as well as demographic data. Research hypotheses were examined using correlational analyses and analyses of variance; all were tested at the .05 significance level.

Media Habits and Relational Aggression

The first research question examined the relationship between each of the types of exposure to mass media and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends. Analyses of variance were performed with relational aggression as the dependent variable and types of media exposure as the independent variables (including magazines, Internet, movies, and television). The results indicated that, for this sample, there was a non-significant relationship between types of exposure to media and female college students' perceptions of relational aggression among their female college friends.

Internet: The reasonably low mean scores for participants who reported frequenting blogging/networking and email websites are contrary to recent reports that indicate the severity and prevalence of cyberbullying (Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use, 2009; National Crime Prevention Council, 2009). Roughly half of American teens report being victimized via the Internet, with cellular telephones, and through other interactive, digital communication technologies. When using technology to communicate, as opposed to face-to-face exchanges, individuals experience disinhibition and are more likely to say and do things that they would not usually say and do in interpersonal relations (Willard, 2004). "Technology creates the illusion that we are invisible or anonymous" (Willard, p. 6). Perpetrators of cyberbullying often use public forums, such as MySpace or Facebook, in order to spread rumors and tell lies about their victims with the intent of damaging reputations and isolating their victims from friendly support systems. Cyberbulling also includes pretending to be someone else with the aim of tricking others (National Crime Prevention Council). In other words, individuals create pseudonymous

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email accounts and often have multiple online identities which they use to enhance their invisibility and further perpetrate acts of relational aggression among their peers. The feeling of anonymity allows them to rationalize the harmful acts they commit because there is lesser potential for exposure and reprimand (Willard).

Movies: Students who reported favoring family/animated films had the second highst mean score on the dependent variable. This finding is supported by new research showing that relational aggression appears more regularly in family-oriented films than previosuly considered. Coyne and Whitehead (2008) found that Disney films, such as *Aladdin* (Clements & Musker, 1992), *Cinderella* (Geronimi, Jackson, & Luske, 1950), and *Pinocchio* (Luske & Sharpsteen, 1940), displayed relationally aggressive acts between its animated characters an average of 9.23 times per hour. It was interesting to find that both male and female characters exhibited relational aggression in equal amounts. Similar to other research findings (Bonica et al., 2003; Cox & St. Clair, 2005), Coyne and Whitehead discovered that characters of higher socioeconomic status perpetrated relationally aggressive acts more frequently than characters of lower socioeconomic statuses, who were more likely to act overtly or physically aggressive toward others. Of the forty-seven animated Disney films viewed for Coyne's and Whitehead's research, they recorded 584 separate acts of relational aggression, some of the most frequent behaviors exhibited being characters giving one another dirty looks, secretly plotting against someone behind his or her back, making rude gestures toward another character when he or she is not looking, making fun of another in a public setting, and gossiping about others. An interesting point to note is that the researchers found that human characters more frequently exhibited relationally aggressive acts than animal characters, even though both are portrayed regularly throughout animated Disney films. The most common relationally aggressive act that Coyne and Whitehead found displayed

by animal characters was that of social exclusion of other animals. These findings indicate that relational aggression is a more far-reaching component in media entertainment than previously known and therefore deserves further attention.

Television: Coyne and Archer (2004) examined frequency of relational aggression in 29 television shows aimed at adolescents, which consisted of 402 episodes and 228 hours of programming. Many of the programs sampled also are watched by adults as well, making the data applicable to groups other than adolescents. They found relationally aggressive behavior displays in 92.04% of episodes viewed; these negative acts were portrayed an average of 9.34 times per hour. The television shows were separated into the following categories: cartoons, soap operas, sitcoms, dramas, and sitcom-cartoons. Coyne and Archer found that soap operas and sitcoms portrayed the highest frequencies of relationally aggressive acts. Specifically, the shows that displayed higher percentages of relational aggression included *Saved by the Bell* (Bario, 1989) and *South Park* (Garefino, Stone, & Parker, 1997), while lower percentages were found in such shows as *Friends* (Bright, Crane, & Kauffman, 1994) and *Sex and the City* (Star & King, 1998). The most common behavior exhibited was gossiping, which accounted for one-third of the relationally aggressive acts that were coded by the researchers. Not surprisingly, females were most often displayed as the aggressors. What was interesting, however, was that the researchers found that males were more likely to be shown as victims of females' relational aggression. Coyne and Archer also found that the television relationships in which relational aggression occurred most frequently included intimate partnerships, ex-romantic relationships, and friendships. This finding corroborates other research (Linder, Crick, & Collins, 2002; Simmons, 2002) that illustrated the high frequency of relational aggression among individuals who purport to be close to one another, as the goal of such behavior is to threaten or damage the

relationships and social supports of the victims. This becomes difficult to do if the perpetrator is not already in the victim's social circle. Clearly, evidence suggests the prevalence of relational aggression in television shows; however, more research is needed to examine the effects of watching such programs on the viewer's experience of relational aggression in her own life.

The second research question focused on the relationship between participants' amount of exposure to mass media and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends. A correlational analysis was performed between relational aggression and amount of media exposure. The results indicated that, for this sample, there was a non-significant relationship between amount of exposure to media and female college students' perceptions of relational aggression among their female college friends.

Relational Health and Relational Aggression

The third research question focused on the relationship between female college students' perceptions of the quality of their friendships with one another and female college students' perceptions of relationally aggressive behaviors among their female college friends. A correlational analysis was performed between relational aggression and relationship quality. The results indicated that, for this sample, there was a moderate, inverse relationship between female college students' relationship quality and their perceptions of relational aggression among their female college friends. In other words, as relationship quality increases, relationally aggressive behaviors decrease; similarly, as relationally aggressive behaviors increase, relationship quality decreases.

Although much research has indicated the association between perpetrating relational aggression and social popularity (Hawley, Little, & Card, 2007; Hensley Choate, 2008; Neal, 2007; Underwood, 2004), this does not necessarily indicate that individuals experience satisfaction with their relationships when relational aggression is present. Relational-cultural

theorists (Brown, 2003; Jordan et al., 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997) have extensively studied

female relationships and collectively found the nature of relationships to be more significant than

the number or stucture of relationships. In other words, quality of relationships has shown to be

more meaningful than quantity of relationships. Relationships that are defined by participants'

expression of intimacy and empathy are likely to result in mutual self-disclosure, shared

emotional and social support, and exploration of resilience and coping strategies (Liang et al.,

2002). This is in direct contradiction to relationships which are rife with relational aggression, in

which mutual resources and alliances as well as group approval do not equate to relational health

or satisfaction. Peer groups that form around a basis of relationally aggressive interactions are

comprised of individuals that are attracted to one another due to the collective control they have

over resources (i.e., perpetrators' effectiveness at attaining goals; Hawley et al.). Relationships

that are characterized by the engagament and closeness of the parties involved are more likely to

result in stress and depression being reconciled, as well as increased self-esteem, self-awareness,

cooperation, and overall relationship satisfaction (Liang et al.).

Ethnicity and Relational Aggression

The fourth research question focused on the relationship between female college

students' ethnicity and their perceptions of female college friends' relationally aggressive

behaviors. The researcher conducted an analysis of variance with relational aggression as the

dependent variable and students' ethnicity as the independent variable. The results indicated that,

for this sample, there was a non-significant relationship between ethnicity and perceptions of

relational aggression among female college students.

Not surprisingly, European American students reported one of the highest mean scores on

the dependent variable, supporting the research that indicates relational aggression has mainly

been observed in White females (Hensley Choate, 2008; Pipher, 1995; Ringrose, 2006;

Simmons, 2002). However, since White females formed the largest group within the sample for this research study, the data is automatically skewed in that groups's direction. Also in corroboration with established research were the findings that Jewish American and African American females reported the lowest mean scores on the dependent variable, indicating that relational aggression is a lesser problem for these groups of females (Cox & St. Clair, 2005; Weiner, 2004; Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). Communication between Jewish Americans is often viewed by non-Jews as intense and conflictual, even when conflicts are not occurring (Weiner, 2004). Jewish American women, as comparted to non-Jews, more frequently talk over one another and engage in emotionally expressive dialogues (Weiner), which is contrary to the behaviors associated with relational aggression. Jewish American females are not socialized to be quiet and submissive, which is in direct opposition to the dominant culture's ideal of femininity. Similarly, parents and caregivers of African American females are likely to socialize their daughters to embrace independence and self-confidence as ways of resisting potential oppressions and discrimination (Hensley Choate; Simmons). Furthermore, many African American girls are encouraged to confront their problems directly, including those surrounding aggression, anger, and conflict, making them less likely to engage in the covert acts associated with relational aggression.

One unexpected finding was that biracial/multiracial female college students reported the highest mean on the dependent variable, relational aggression. Researchers (Gillem, 2004; Sanchez & Bonam, 2009) indicate that biracial females face multiple discriminations that come with being members of two or more racial/ethnic groups (i.e., racial ambiguity), as well as the sexism they suffer as a result of their gender. These compounded oppressions experienced by biracial women have shown to negatively impact their self-esteem, identity formation, and social

relations (Gillem). For example, a female who is both Black and White is often rejected by both communities for not being enough of either race. Reactions from individuals of a single race/ethnicity to biracial/multiracial individuals might include invalidation, unfavorable attitudes, distrust, hostility, and social rejection (Gillem; Sanchez & Bonam). Monoracial individuals are considered to be more socially competent and are less socially isolated than biracial/multiracial individuals (Jackman, Wagner, & Johnson, 2001). More research is needed to adequately address how these factors might affect the biracial/multiracial woman's experience of relational aggression.

Female Community Membership and Relational Aggression

The fifth research question focused on the relationship between college females' community membership and their perceptions of female college friends' relationally aggressive behaviors. The researcher performed an analysis of variance with relational aggression as the dependent variable and female community membership as the independent variable (including dormitory living, sorority membership, dormitory living and sorority membership combined, living with other females in a private apartment or house, and no community membership). The results indicated that, for this sample, there was a non-significant relationship between female community membership and perceptions of relational aggression among female college students.

As referenced in the literature (Dellasega, 2005; Hensley Choate, 2008; Robbins, 2004; Simmons, 2002), certain settings provide opportunity for females to form cliques and aggress against one another, such as schools (i.e., elementary, secondary, post-secondary) and all-female living environments (i.e., dormitories, sorority houses, boarding schools). Conversely, community relationships that engender authenticity and empowerment have shown to be a significant predictor of relational health for college women (Frey et al., 2006). However, females' individual peer relationships also play an important role in relational health; if female

college students experience distress within their community, their personal relationships should be a haven from relational aggression. Likewise, if female college students experience relational aggression in their peer relationships, they should be able to rely on their greater communities for support (Frey et al.). Further research is needed to examine female college students' community relationships as contributors to both relational aggression and relationship quality.

Theoretical Implications

The results of research question 3 (i.e., as relational aggression increases, relationship quality decreases) are consistent with the feminist tenets of relational-cultural theory. Women's strong sense of connection with one another is grounded in satifsaction with one's relationships, receiving pleasure from those relationships, and feeling a sense of worth as a result of their relationships (Miller, 1986b). Relational aggression has shown to predict increased peer rejection and decreased peer acceptance for females (Crick, 1996), so it is not surprising that the presence of relational aggression is associated with lower levels of relationship quality and satisfaction. The five-components of growth-fostering relationships (i.e., feeling a sense of vitality, gaining personal empowerment, having increased sense of knowing oneself, gaining greater self-worth, wanting to seek connections and relationships with others) are crucial for healthy interactions (Miller). The efforts to make a relationship satisfying must come from all involved parties. In other words, all individuals who desire healthy connections with others must engage in ongoing mutual empathy and supportive interactions.

Counselor Education Implications

Graduate students enrolled in counselor education programs would greatly benefit from training with regard to relational aggression, specifically how it relates to the experience of females. Students in all three tracks of counselor education (i.e., mental health, marriage and family, and school and guidance counseling) interact with clients whose lives are somehow

affected by relational aggression (either as perpetrator, victim, or bystander). This includes individual clients, groups of clients, family members, or child/adolescent students. All counselor education trainees need to be exposed to the characteristics of relational aggression, including behavioral indicators, prevention and intervention techniques, and the negative consequences associated with the presence of relationally aggressive behaviors among relationships. An eco-systemic approach should be used to examine relational aggression, considering such factors as peer interaction, media exposure, and family influence, in order to enhance the understanding of counselors-in-training. This can best be done via implementation of curricular infusion (Massy, Graham, & Short, 2007) as opposed to one specific course addressing the aforementioned topic.

By presenting issues surrounding relational aggression throughout all relevant curricula, counselor education programs will produce more competent and skilled counselors in all tracks, thus helping to ensure the welfare of clients and students. Curricular infusion would address issues that expose all counseling students to relational aggression, as well as implications for practice. Such classes this topic might be addressed within include Women's Studies, Family Violence, Counseling of Children and Adolescents, and Advanced Family Clinic. Training methods should include a combination of heavy reading, discussion materials including personal experiences, critical thinking and communication, exploring clinically diverse experiences, and journaling to reflect one's reactions to readings and discussions. In order to prepare counselors for working with individuals affected by relational aggression in a manner that is both ethical and responsible, counselor education programs must address issues pertinent to relational aggression.

Implications for Practice

Recommendations for College Counselors

College counselors would greatly benefit from education regarding relational aggression; more specifically, how relational aggression relates to the experiences of females. All college counselors interact with clients whose lives are somehow affected by relational aggression, including individual clients, groups of clients, and family members who experience forms of relational aggression. College counselors faced with client complaints surrounding relational aggression should consider implementation of media into their work. Using negative examples from television shows and movies can aid clients in identifying what relational aggression looks like and the problematic effects it can have. Some examples of media a college counselor might consider using include the previously noted movies *Mean Girls* (Waters, 2004) and *Heathers* (Lehmann, 1989), in which female characters are routinely shown exhibiting relationally aggressive behaviors. Other films in which these behaviors are routinely exhibited include *Legally Blonde* (Luketic, 2001) and *Jawbreaker* (Stein, 1999). The counselor and client can then process how the media clips apply to the client's life. A college counselor might ask such questions as: "How do the relationally aggressive behaviors depicted in this media clip appear in your everyday life?" "Can you identify with the different roles that people play (i.e., perpetrator, victim, bystander) when relational aggression arises?" And, "What would you do to deflate a situation involving relational aggression?" Together, the client and college counselor can devise means of successfully identifying relationally aggressive behaviors and brainstorm ways to deflect the client's involvement in them.

College counselors might also consider the use of positive media images as a means of working with clients who experience relational aggression. Through exposure of healthy images of female relationships in the media, counselors can encourage female clients to note the level of

satisfaction and quality related to different types of relationships (i.e., juxtaposition of healthy and growth-promoting relationships vs. dysfunctional and growth-stunting relationships). Examples of media in which positive female-female interactions are celebrated include the television shows already considered, *Sex and the City* (Star & King, 1998) and *Friends* (Bright, Crane, & Kauffman, 1994). Additional resources include *Charmed* (Kern, 1998) and the movie *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (Kwapis, 2005). Subsequent to viewing positive clips with female clients, college counselors can process the experience of beneficial relationships: "What positive qualities did you view in these clips that you experience in your own life?" and "What aspects of healthy relationships would you like to see more of in your life?" Then, the counselor and client can collaborate to decipher ways in which the client can increase positive interactions and avert negative ones.

Preventing Relational Aggression in Females

Prevention is a function of the wellness model in counseling, which places emphasis on life enrichment with the goal of increasing general functioning and satisfaction (Hensley Choate, 2008). Prevention must become a focus of efforts concerning relational aggression. In order to do this, young girls should be exposed to seven components that will aid in their preventative efforts: (1) education regarding the manifestation of relational aggression and the negative effects it has on its victims; (2) assertiveness training encouraging girls to straightforwardly voice concerns and negative feelings, directly communicate what they want, and articulate anger in an healthy manner; (3) promotion of empathy during development; (4) promotion of sisterhood and females as allies rather than enemies; (5) facilitation of productive leadership development and pro-social community involvement; (6) encouragement of participation in a variety of activities, such as athletics, arts programs, and community service organizations, so

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that girls can develop a sense of personal accomplishment and self-esteem; and (7) development of authentic friendships that are characterized by support, loyalty, and common interests without regard for popularity or social status (Hensley Choate).

Interventions for Relational Aggression in Females

While prevention of relational aggression is the ultimate goal for counselors, interventions must be available to counselors who work with females currently experiencing the negative ramifications of being victimized. Negative dynamics within groups of girls need to be addressed in a manner that focuses on positive interpersonal communication skills, as well as enhancement of social and emotional development (Taylor, 2005). Females should be introduced to appropriate means of directing their anger, such as talking directly to the persons with whom they are angry as opposed to talking about them with a third party. Taylor's curriculum for group therapy with relationally aggressive girls aims for teaching them how to agree to disagree without hating each other in the process. It also provides participants with resources leading to the acquisition of problem-solving and decision-making skills, goal-setting and action plans, knowledge of safety skills (i.e., healthy boundaries, personal privacy), and self-awareness with regard to values, beliefs, and attitudes. Taylor's recommendations for increasing positive communication and decreasing the occurrence of relational aggression between female friends include creating a personal definition of what makes a real friend, differentiating between destructive and constructive criticism, utilizing positive affirmations, and focusing on sisterhood. A large part of Taylor's curriculum is comprised of journaling assignments for the group participants. Girls are encouraged to confess instances in which they victimized other girls in a relationally aggressive manner in their journals. Then, the group discusses the journal entries, allowing participants the chance for feedback and personal reflection on their actions.

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Focusing on eco-systemic factors, such as the media (i.e., movies and television), oppression and power differentials, ethnicitym, and the roles of all parties within a system, is crucial when considering interventions to relational aggression (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2006). Addressing relational aggression in this manner takes into account the numerous factors that affect its presence in women's lives and allows for better understanding of the phenomenon. When individuals are victimized in a school setting, they are more likely to exact revenge on their perpetrators, which leads to unhealthy relational patterns of vengeance (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan). This is exacerbated by the media's glamorization of revenge and power dynamics between individuals of varying social status. Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan recommend a zero-tolerance approach with regard to relational aggression, asserting that interventions for perpetrators should include confronting and naming the negative behaviors exhibited without justifying or discounting them, as well as discussion of the use of power to intimidate, dominate, or control another individual.

The focus of intervention does not lie solely on punishing the perpetrator; rather, educational means are used to help those somehow engaged in relational aggression (i.e., victimizer, prey, and bystander) gain understanding of its negative effects while learning to empathize with, rather than aggress against, others. Those who are victimized through relational aggression often feel defenseless and insecure in their surroundings, so in order for interventions to be successful, they must also include the cooperation of various members of individuals' systems (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2006). The participation of teachers, administrators, and counselors in a school setting, for example, is essential in order to ensure the safety of all students and promote a pro-social community in which they can learn acceptance for one another and develop healthy relationships in the process. "Systemwide change" (Hensley

Choate, 2008, p. 76) is necessary because addressing it on an individual level is not sufficient to combat relational aggression. School administrators must be aware of state policies addressing relational aggression, including stipulations of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Teachers, school counselors, and other school staff members need training in relational aggression so that they can properly identify its occurrence and intervene accordingly. Parents of females would benefit from learning about the negative effects relational aggression has on its victims, as well as identifying ways in which they are possibly encouraging or perpetuating relationally aggressive behaviors within their own families (Hensley Choate).

Future Directions for Research

With the introduction of Internet access through cellular telephones (e.g., Blackberry, iPhone), coupled with a rate of occurrence totaling 65.84% of networking/blogging (53.96%) and email websites (11.88%) patronized by the female college students who participated in this study, it is this researcher's belief that consideration of cyberbullying should be an aim of future research regarding relational aggression and female college students. Cyberbullying made news when a 49 year-old Missouri woman created a phony MySpace account in order to electronically harass a 13 year-old girl with whom her own adolescent daughter was feuding (Steinhauer, 2008). The woman and her daughter created a MySpace identity for "Josh Evans," a 13 year-old boy who spent weeks courting the daughter's nemesis. In October 2006, the girl emailed "Josh" and expressed feeling distressed, to which "Josh" replied, "The world would be a better place without you." The girl wrote back, "You're the kind of boy a girl would kill herself over" and hanged herself in her bedroom that same afternoon. The woman now faces a sentence of up to three years in prison and $300,000 in fines (Steinhauer). Even more recently, a New York teenager filed a lawsuit against Facebook and four of her classmates (as well as their parents) for allegedly traumatizing her through cyberbullying on the networking website (Jones, 2009). The

girl claims that her classmates created a chat group on Facebook designed to exclude, mock, and humiliate her and is seeking $3 million in damages. The girl's classmates used the Facebook chat group to commit libel, claiming that the girl was an intravenous drug user, engaged in beastiality, and had AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections; after which, the girl began having a difficult time functioning in school (Jones). The severity and prevalence of cyberbullying is becoming more apparent and deserves more attention in future research.

Another area of this study that requires future attention involves movies that reflect high amounts of relational aggression between characters. Animated Disney films have recently been examined and show an alarming rate of relationally aggressive acts at 9.23 times per hour (Coyne & Whitehead, 2008). These films appeal to a wide range of audiences, from the very young to older adult populations. If the true goal of addressing relational aggression is to prevent difficulties associated with its presence, rather than intevene upon them, then perhaps looking at very young children (e.g., ages 3-6) could be an important factor. Toddlers and young children are watching films that routinely display covert acts of aggression. Future research needs to address how this exposure affects an individual's lifelong means of communicating his or her own aggressions.

If movies designed for young audiences are regularly showing acts of relational aggression, perhaps children's television shows are doing the same. Coyne, Archer, and Eslea (2004) surveyed 199 adolescents between the ages of 11 and 14, and found that the children who viewed relationally aggressive behaviors on television (as opposed to those who watched television shows without aggressive behaviors) subsequently had increased levels of relationally aggressive responses in their own lives. One longitudinal study with 329 participants, ages 6-9 (Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003), conducted over the span of 15 years found

that, for female participants, viewing television violence as children predicted the expression of relationally aggressive behaviors in adulthood. Children's cartoons show, on average, about three times as much violence as non-children's programs (Wilson, Smith, Potter, Kunkel, Linz, Colvin, & Donnerstein, 2002). Future research must further address the link between children's television programming and the subsequent expression of relationally aggressive behaviors either in childhood or adulthood.

It is clear that relational aggression and relationship quality have an inverse relationship with one another. However, an area that deserves more attention in future research is the social popularity and peer acceptance associated with perpetrators of relationally aggressive behaviors. Although literature produced from relational-cultural theory (Brown, 2003; Jordan et al., 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997) indicates that satisfying, healthy friendships cannot form in the presence of such unhealthy interactions, perpetrators of relational aggression are among the most popular with their peers (Hawley et al., 2007; Hensley Choate, 2008; Neal, 2007; Underwood, 2004). Individuals who are relationally aggressive are often admired by peers for their social dominance and control over their resources (Hawley et al.). More research is necessary in order to better understand this phenomenon.

Researchers of relational aggression (Hensley Choate, 2008; Pipher, 1995; Ringrose, 2006; Simmons, 2002) have mainly observed its presence among White females. Since the biracial/multiracial participants in the present study reported the highest average score of relational aggresison, this presents an intriguing opportunity for future research. Jackman et al. (2001) reported that individuals of a single race are thought of as being more socially adept than their biracial/multiracial counterparts. Additionally, monoracial individuals frequently exclude and hold unfavorable, even hostile, attitudes toward their biracial/multiracial peers (Gillem,

2004; Sanchez & Bonam, 2009). The relationship between biracial/multiracial individuals and their experience of relational aggression in a society that favors persons of a single race/ethnicity should be further addressed in future research.

Relational health for female college students has been linked to positive interpersonal relationships, as well as community engagement that facilitates empowerment and genuineness for its members (Frey et al., 2006). In order to address adequately the relational health and issues surrounding relational aggression among college females, community membership and individual peer relationships must be considered in conjunction with one another. Ideally, females engage in positive community involvement as well as healthy personal interactions; however, this is often not the case. Future research might involve comparing how the absence of either positive interpersonal relationships or positive community engagement affects the appearance of relational aggression among female college students.

Limitations of the Study

The research design that was employed is one limitation of the current study. The procedure utilized to obtain participants was that of nonprobability sampling, more specifically, convenience sampling. This makes generalization of the sample to the greater population of female college students more limited than if the sample had been randomized (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Professors of undergraduate courses from various departments at a large southeastern university were emailed by the researcher and asked to forward the RAMMFCS survey link to their female students. Participation was voluntary, which is also representative of nonprobability sampling (Agresti & Finlay, 2008). Because individuals volunteered to take part in the study, there is the risk that interest in the presented subject of relational aggression could have biased the results. If misleading conclusions were generated, then the current sample may not adequately represent a larger population.

Another notable limitation of the current study is the large discrepancy between the number of individuals who began the survey ($N = 265$) and the number of participants that were actually included in the study sample ($N = 202$). Of these sixty-three participants who were not a part of the final sample, six were excluded because they did not meet the criteria set for the study's participants (i.e., female undergraduate students at least age eighteen). Five of these students indicated that they were enrolled in either graduate or law school, and one was seventeen years old. In order to avoid this problem, the qualifications for study participants could have been stated in greater detail within the survey itself. For example, the demographic question addressing participants' student classifications was: "Please indicate your current student classification." This statement could be enhanced so that students who do not have undergraduate status do not submit their survey for consideration: "Please indicate your current student classification. NOTE: If you are not an undergraduate student (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior), your participation is not permitted for this study." Additionally, the demographic question regarding participants' age was: "Please tell us your current age in years." This could be clarified to highlight the minimum age allowed for study participants: "Please tell us your current age in years. NOTE: If you are under the age of eighteen, your participation is not permitted for this study." The other fifty-seven students who were excluded from the study failed to answer more than half of the items in one or more parts of the survey. Since the survey was administered online via Survey Monkey, it is possible that failed Internet connections could have resulted in students not being able to complete the survey. This could be rectified by printing hard copies of the RAMMFCS and offering that format to participants with faulty Internet connections.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between perceptions of relational aggression and female college students' patterns of media exposure, level of perceived relationship quality, ethnicity, and female community membership. This chapter has presented an overview of the current study and a summary of its research findings, implications for theory and practice, recommendations for future research, and limitations of the study. Findings indicated an inverse relationship between healthy relationships and the presence of relational aggression, which has been documented in relational-cultural theory literature. The effects of relational aggression, although sometimes difficult to observe, are severe and warrant attention. Individuals who are victimized by relationally aggressive perpetrators experience a plethora of negative reactions, such as diminshed self-esteem and self-worth, increased instances of depression, loneliness, and anxiety, and in extreme cases, suicidal and homicidal ideations (Coyne & Whitehead, 2008). Future research should address problems associated with cyberbullying, the presence of relational aggression in children's movies and television shows, social popularity as a function of relational aggression, the experience of biracial/multiracial college females with regard to relationally aggressive behaviors, and how interpersonal relationships and community engagement collectively affect female college students' experience of relational aggression.

APPENDIX A
EMAIL TO UNDERGRADUATE PROFESSORS

Greetings fellow Gator educator!

My name is Rebecca Goldberg and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counselor Education at the University of Florida. My dissertation project is titled "Psychological Warfare: Media and Relational Aggression Among Female College Students," IRB approved protocol #2008-U-772. I am writing you because I am in need of your help.

The purpose of my study is to examine the relationship between exposure to the mass media and acts of relational aggression among friendships of female college students. Relational aggression refers to the covert ways in which some females treat one another. Some examples of relational aggression include gossiping, exclusion of others, name-calling, and rumor-spreading.

I am emailing professors of undergraduate classes, like you, in the hopes that you will assist me in gaining upwards of 200 participants for my project. Upon your approval, I will email you a pre-notice letter, survey letter, and follow-up thank you letter to forward to the female students enrolled in your course. The pre-notice letter will introduce them to the project and the need for their participation. Five days later, the survey email will be sent out, which contains the link to the survey. Upon receipt of the survey email, students will be linked to my survey via Survey Monkey and complete the 15-minute questionnaire, with their responses encrypted during transmission. One to two weeks later, you will receive and forward the thank-you letter, which not only thanks students for their participation, but also reminds those who have not completed the survey yet to do so.

Participation of students is voluntary and anonymous. There are no anticipated risks associated with completing this survey; if a student feels uncomfortable answering any question, she may choose to skip it. Students may withdraw from the survey at any time.

If you have any further questions or require clarification, don't hesitate to email (rivka@ufl.edu) or call me (352) 337-2835, or either of my directing professors, Dr. Peter Sherrard, at psherrard@coe.ufl.edu, (352) 392-0731 ext. 357 and Dr. Andrea Dixon, at adixon@coe.ufl.edu, (352) 392-0731 ext. 354.

Professionally,

Rebecca Goldberg

APPENDIX B
PRE-NOTICE EMAIL TO STUDENTS

Greetings Gator ladies!

My name is Rebecca Goldberg and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counselor Education at the University of Florida. My dissertation project is titled "Psychological Warfare: Media and Relational Aggression Among Female College Students," IRB approved protocol #2008-U-772. I am writing you because I am in need of your help.

The purpose of my study is to examine the relationship between exposure to the mass media and acts of relational aggression among friendships of female college students. Relational aggression refers to the covert ways in which some females treat one another. Some examples of relational aggression include gossiping, exclusion of others, name-calling, and rumor-spreading.

I am emailing you in the hopes that you are willing to participate in my project. In five days, you will receive an email containing an Internet link to my survey, which you are requested to complete. The survey will be administered via Survey Monkey and will take about 15 minutes to complete. Your responses will be encrypted during transmission.

Participation is voluntary and anonymous. There are no anticipated risks associated with completing this survey; if you feel uncomfortable answering any question, you may choose to skip it. You may withdraw from the survey at any time.

If you have any further questions or require clarification, don't hesitate to email (rivka@ufl.edu) or call me (352) 337-2835, or either of my directing professors, Dr. Peter Sherrard, at psherrard@coe.ufl.edu, (352) 392-0731 ext. 357 and Dr. Andrea Dixon, at adixon@coe.ufl.edu, (352) 392-0731 ext. 354.

Professionally,

Rebecca Goldberg

APPENDIX C
SURVEY EMAIL TO STUDENTS

Hello again Gator ladies!

This email contains the link to my survey, entitled "Psychological Warfare: Media and Relational Aggression Among Female College Students," of which you were notified via email five days ago. The survey will take about 15 minutes to complete and all of your responses will be anonymous. Please click the web link below or cut and paste it into your Internet browser.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=o3WJ7HW_2fTzNBTZdTd3pxdg_3d_3d

Your participation is essential to gain more understanding of the phenomenon of relational aggression. Thank you so much for your help with my research.

Professionally,

Rebecca Goldberg

Hi Gator Ladies!

This email is to thank you very much for your participation in my survey, "Psychological Warfare: Media and Relational Aggression Among Female College Students" – I would not be able to engage in this research without your help and support.

My journey to exploring relational aggression is enhanced by your participation, so if you have **not** yet completed the survey, **please** do so at your earliest convenience. I cannot accurately investigate this phenomenon without more participants than I have right now. Please either click the embedded survey link or cut and paste it into your Internet browser to be redirected to the survey, which will only take about 15 minutes to complete.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=o3WJ7HW_2fTzNBTZdTd3pxdg_3d_3d

If you have difficulties or questions of any kind, please do not hesitate to contact me at rivka@ufl.edu. Thanks again for your participation. Go Gators!

Very truly yours,

Rebecca Goldberg

Protocol Title: Psychological Warfare: Media and Relational Aggression Among Female College Students

Purpose of the research study:
The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between exposure to the mass media and acts of relational aggression among friendships of female college students. Relational aggression refers to the covert ways in which some females treat one another. Some examples of relational aggression include gossiping, exclusion of others, name-calling, and rumor-spreading.

What you will be asked to do in this study:
You will be asked to complete a mass media questionnaire in which you will indicate your levels of media exposure, two short surveys about relational aggression and the quality of your female friendships, and a demographics questionnaire.

Time requirement:
The entire survey should take about 15 minutes.

Risks and Benefits:
In this survey, you do not have to answer a question if you do not want to or if it makes you feel uncomfortable. I do not anticipate that you should have any adverse reactions while completing this survey.

Compensation:
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Anonymity:
Your participation in this study will be completely anonymous.

Voluntary participation:
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study:
You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without consequence.

Level of security protections:
This study will be administered via SurveyMonkey, whereby SSL encryption is employed. The survey link and survey pages will be encrypted during transmission both to and from your computer. Your responses will be encrypted as they are delivered back to SurveyMonkey, which offers the following level of encryption: Verisign certificate Version 3, 128 bit encryption. This is commonly used for banking sites and other sites that transmit secured information.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:
Rebecca Goldberg, EdS, NCC, RMHCI
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Counselor Education, (352) 392-0731

Peter A. D. Sherrard, EdD, LMFT, LMHC, ABPP, NCC
Associate Professor, Department of Counselor Education, (352) 392-0731 ext. 357

Andrea L. Dixon, PhD, LAC, NCC
Associate Professor, Department of Counselor Education, (352) 392-0731 ext. 354

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in this study:
UF IRB Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250; (352) 392-0433

If you do not wish to participate in this study after reading the informed consent, please click the Exit link at the top of the page to leave this web page.

If you would like to continue and you give your informed consent to do so, please click YES below.

❑ YES

RELATIONAL AGGRESSION, MASS MEDIA, AND FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS
SURVEY

Thank you for participating in this survey.

The purpose of this exercise is to consider the friendships of female college students, the mass media, and relational aggression in conjunction with one another. Mass media refers to exposure to television, Internet, movies, and magazines, while relational aggression refers to the covert ways in which some females treat one another. Some examples of relational aggression include gossiping, exclusion of others, name-calling, and rumor-spreading.

Your participation is important so that we can learn more about how the media and relational aggression affect the friendships of female college students, a growing problem of concern.

1. Please rank the media types in the order of importance to you (1=most important to me, 4=least important to me).

Television   _____
Internet   _____
Movies   _____
Magazines   _____

2. Please indicate, on average, how many hours per day you spend engaging in each of the following types of media (0-1 hour daily, 1-3 hours daily, 4-6 hours daily, 6-8 hours daily, or 8-10 hours daily):

Television   _____
Internet   _____
Movies   _____
Magazines   _____

3. Please list up to three television shows that you most frequently watch.

4. In an average month, how many times do you watch movies?

- ❑ 0
- ❑ 1-2
- ❑ 3-4
- ❑ 5-6
- ❑ 7+

5. Please list up to three of your favorite movies.

6. How often do you read magazines?

- ❏ Never
- ❏ Monthly
- ❏ Weekly
- ❏ Daily

7. Please list the magazine you most commonly read.

8. Please indicate the amount of time you spend on the Internet during an average week.

- ❏ 0-2 hours
- ❏ 2-5 hours
- ❏ 5-8 hours
- ❏ 8-11 hours
- ❏ 11-14 hours
- ❏ 14+ hours

9. Please list up to three websites that you most commonly visit.

10. Tell us if you have a female friend who fits these descriptions. Answer the questions by checking the option that seems to indicate the extent of your friend's behaviors in the closest way (Extremely Uncharacteristic, Somewhat Uncharacteristic, Somewhat Characteristic, Extremely Characteristic).

When angry, gives others the silent treatment.

- ❏ Extremely Uncharacteristic
- ❏ Somewhat Uncharacteristic
- ❏ Somewhat Characteristic
- ❏ Extremely Characteristic

When mad, tries to damage others' reputations by passing on negative information.

- ❏ Extremely Uncharacteristic
- ❏ Somewhat Uncharacteristic
- ❏ Somewhat Characteristic
- ❏ Extremely Characteristic

When mad, retaliates by excluding others from activities.

- ❏ Extremely Uncharacteristic
- ❏ Somewhat Uncharacteristic
- ❏ Somewhat Characteristic
- ❏ Extremely Characteristic

Makes it clear to her friends that she will think less of them unless they do what she wants.

- ❑ Extremely Uncharacteristic
- ❑ Somewhat Uncharacteristic
- ❑ Somewhat Characteristic
- ❑ Extremely Characteristic

Threatens to share private information with others in order to get them to comply with her wishes.

- ❑ Extremely Uncharacteristic
- ❑ Somewhat Uncharacteristic
- ❑ Somewhat Characteristic
- ❑ Extremely Characteristic

When angry with a female peer, tries to steal her dating partner.

- ❑ Extremely Uncharacteristic
- ❑ Somewhat Uncharacteristic
- ❑ Somewhat Characteristic
- ❑ Extremely Characteristic

11. Tell us how a female friend acts when she has problems with or gets angry with another female friend (Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Quite Often, or Very Often). Answer the questions by checking the option that seems to indicate the extent of your friend's behaviors in the closest way.

Shuts the other one out of the group.

- ❑ Never
- ❑ Seldom
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Quite Often
- ❑ Very Often

Yells at or argues with the other one.

- ❑ Never
- ❑ Seldom
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Quite Often
- ❑ Very Often

Becomes friends with another as a kind of revenge.

- ❑ Never
- ❑ Seldom
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Quite Often
- ❑ Very Often

Ignores the other one.

- ❑ Never
- ❑ Seldom
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Quite Often
- ❑ Very Often

Insults the other one.

- ❑ Never
- ❑ Seldom
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Quite Often
- ❑ Very Often

Gossips about the one she is angry with.

- ❑ Never
- ❑ Seldom
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Quite Often
- ❑ Very Often

Tells bad or false stories about the other one.

- ❑ Never
- ❑ Seldom
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Quite Often
- ❑ Very Often

Plans to secretly bother the other one.

- ❏ Never
- ❏ Seldom
- ❏ Sometimes
- ❏ Quite Often
- ❏ Very Often

Says bad things behind the other one's back.

- ❏ Never
- ❏ Seldom
- ❏ Sometimes
- ❏ Quite Often
- ❏ Very Often

Calls the other one names.

- ❏ Never
- ❏ Seldom
- ❏ Sometimes
- ❏ Quite Often
- ❏ Very Often

Says to others "Let's not be with her!"

- ❏ Never
- ❏ Seldom
- ❏ Sometimes
- ❏ Quite Often
- ❏ Very Often

Tells the other one's secrets to a third person.

- ❏ Never
- ❏ Seldom
- ❏ Sometimes
- ❏ Quite Often
- ❏ Very Often

Teases the other one.

- ❑ Never
- ❑ Seldom
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Quite Often
- ❑ Very Often

Criticizes the other one's hair or clothing.

- ❑ Never
- ❑ Seldom
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Quite Often
- ❑ Very Often

Tries to get others to dislike the person she is angry with.

- ❑ Never
- ❑ Seldom
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Quite Often
- ❑ Very Often

12. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that each statement applies to you (Not At All Like Me, Somewhat Unlike Me, Neutral, Somewhat Like Me, Completely Like Me).

I tell my friends openly when I disagree with them.

- ❑ Not At All Like Me
- ❑ Somewhat Unlike Me
- ❑ Neutral
- ❑ Somewhat Like Me
- ❑ Completely Like Me

I often find myself disagreeing with people.

- ❑ Not At All Like Me
- ❑ Somewhat Unlike Me
- ❑ Neutral
- ❑ Somewhat Like Me
- ❑ Completely Like Me

I can't help getting into arguments when people disagree with me.

- ❑ Not At All Like Me
- ❑ Somewhat Unlike Me
- ❑ Neutral
- ❑ Somewhat Like Me
- ❑ Completely Like Me

My friends say that I'm somewhat argumentative.

- ❑ Not At All Like Me
- ❑ Somewhat Unlike Me
- ❑ Neutral
- ❑ Somewhat Like Me
- ❑ Completely Like Me

When frustrated, I let my irritation show.

- ❑ Not At All Like Me
- ❑ Somewhat Unlike Me
- ❑ Neutral
- ❑ Somewhat Like Me
- ❑ Completely Like Me

I am an even-tempered person.

- ❑ Not At All Like Me
- ❑ Somewhat Unlike Me
- ❑ Neutral
- ❑ Somewhat Like Me
- ❑ Completely Like Me

Some of my friends think I'm a hothead.

- ❑ Not At All Like Me
- ❑ Somewhat Unlike Me
- ❑ Neutral
- ❑ Somewhat Like Me
- ❑ Completely Like Me

I have trouble controlling my temper.

- ❑ Not At All Like Me
- ❑ Somewhat Unlike Me
- ❑ Neutral
- ❑ Somewhat Like Me
- ❑ Completely Like Me

I wonder why sometimes I feel so bitter about things.

- ❑ Not At All Like Me
- ❑ Somewhat Unlike Me
- ❑ Neutral
- ❑ Somewhat Like Me
- ❑ Completely Like Me

I know that "friends" talk about me behind my back.

- ❑ Not At All Like Me
- ❑ Somewhat Unlike Me
- ❑ Neutral
- ❑ Somewhat Like Me
- ❑ Completely Like Me

I sometimes feel that people are laughing at me behind my back.

- ❑ Not At All Like Me
- ❑ Somewhat Unlike Me
- ❑ Neutral
- ❑ Somewhat Like Me
- ❑ Completely Like Me

When people are especially nice, I wonder what they want.

- ❑ Not At All Like Me
- ❑ Somewhat Unlike Me
- ❑ Neutral
- ❑ Somewhat Like Me
- ❑ Completely Like Me

13. Next to each statement below, please indicate the number that best applies to your relationship with a close female friend (1=Never, 2=Seldom, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always). Consider the term "friend" as referring to a female whom you feel attached to through respect, affection, and/or common interests, someone you can depend on for support and who depends on you.

Even when I have difficult things to share, I can be honest and real with my friend.

- ❑ 1=Never
- ❑ 2=Seldom
- ❑ 3=Sometimes
- ❑ 4=Often
- ❑ 5=Always

After a conversation with my friend, I feel uplifted.

- ❑ 1=Never
- ❑ 2=Seldom
- ❑ 3=Sometimes
- ❑ 4=Often
- ❑ 5=Always

I feel understood by my friend.

- ❑ 1=Never
- ❑ 2=Seldom
- ❑ 3=Sometimes
- ❑ 4=Often
- ❑ 5=Always

I can talk to my friend about our disagreements without feeling judged.

- ❑ 1=Never
- ❑ 2=Seldom
- ❑ 3=Sometimes
- ❑ 4=Often
- ❑ 5=Always

My friendship inspires me to seek other friendships like this one.

- ❑ 1=Never
- ❑ 2=Seldom
- ❑ 3=Sometimes
- ❑ 4=Often
- ❑ 5=Always

I am uncomfortable sharing my deepest feelings and thoughts with my friend.

- ❑ 1=Never
- ❑ 2=Seldom
- ❑ 3=Sometimes
- ❑ 4=Often
- ❑ 5=Always

I have a greater sense of self-worth through my relationship with my friend.

- ❑ 1=Never
- ❑ 2=Seldom
- ❑ 3=Sometimes
- ❑ 4=Often
- ❑ 5=Always

I can tell my friend when she has hurt my feelings.

- ❑ 1=Never
- ❑ 2=Seldom
- ❑ 3=Sometimes
- ❑ 4=Often
- ❑ 5=Always

14. Next to each statement below, please indicate the number that best applies to your relationship with or involvement in this community (1=Never, 2=Seldom, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always). Consider the term "community" as referring to the group of females that you feel influences you the most within your college community.

I feel a sense of belonging to this community.

- ❑ 1=Never
- ❑ 2=Seldom
- ❑ 3=Sometimes
- ❑ 4=Often
- ❑ 5=Always

I feel better about myself after my interactions with this community.

- ❑ 1=Never
- ❑ 2=Seldom
- ❑ 3=Sometimes
- ❑ 4=Often
- ❑ 5=Always

Members of this community are not free to just be themselves.

- ❏ 1=Never
- ❏ 2=Seldom
- ❏ 3=Sometimes
- ❏ 4=Often
- ❏ 5=Always

I feel understood by members of this community.

- ❏ 1=Never
- ❏ 2=Seldom
- ❏ 3=Sometimes
- ❏ 4=Often
- ❏ 5=Always

There are parts of myself I feel I must hide from this community.

- ❏ 1=Never
- ❏ 2=Seldom
- ❏ 3=Sometimes
- ❏ 4=Often
- ❏ 5=Always

There is a lot of backbiting and gossiping in this community.

- ❏ 1=Never
- ❏ 2=Seldom
- ❏ 3=Sometimes
- ❏ 4=Often
- ❏ 5=Always

Members of this community are very competitive with each other.

- ❏ 1=Never
- ❏ 2=Seldom
- ❏ 3=Sometimes
- ❏ 4=Often
- ❏ 5=Always

I have a greater sense of self-worth through my connections with this community.

- ❑ 1=Never
- ❑ 2=Seldom
- ❑ 3=Sometimes
- ❑ 4=Often
- ❑ 5=Always

This community provides me with emotional support.

- ❑ 1=Never
- ❑ 2=Seldom
- ❑ 3=Sometimes
- ❑ 4=Often
- ❑ 5=Always

Thank you so much for your participation in this survey. We greatly appreciate the time and effort that you have taken in order to further our knowledge on the experience of female college students.

If you have any questions or comments that need to be addressed, please contact the primary researcher, Rebecca Goldberg via email at: rivka@ufl.edu.

APPENDIX G
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Please tell us your current age in years.

2. Please indicate the race/culture/ethnicity that most accurately describes you.

- ❑ European American
- ❑ African American
- ❑ Asian American
- ❑ Hispanic/Latina American
- ❑ Native American/Alaskan
- ❑ Jewish American
- ❑ Biracial/Multi-racial
- ❑ International Student
- ❑ Other (please specify)

3. Please indicate your current student classification.

- ❑ Freshman
- ❑ Sophomore
- ❑ Junior
- ❑ Senior
- ❑ Other (please specify)

4. Please indicate your current living situation.

- ❑ On-campus, Sorority House
- ❑ On-campus, Dormitory
- ❑ Off-campus, Private Apartment or House
- ❑ Off-campus, Parents' House
- ❑ Other (please specify)

5. Please indicate whether or not you live with peer females.

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

6. Please indicate whether or not you are currently pledging a sorority house.

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

7. Please indicate whether or not you are currently a member of a sorority.
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rebecca M. Goldberg was born in September 1981 in Boston, Massachusetts to parents Lori and Steven. The younger sister of Rachel and Sarah Goldberg, Rebecca moved to Boca Raton, Florida at age seven. While in middle and high school, her family fostered thirteen children, aged three months to thirteen years, and they adopted three: Nicholas, Hannah, and Samuel. Rebecca graduated from Spanish River Community High School in 1999 and received her Bachelor of Science degree in psychology with a minor in classical civilization from the Florida State University in 2003. She completed her Master of Education and Specialist in Education degrees in mental health counseling in 2006, and her Doctor of Philosophy in mental health counseling in 2009 from the University of Florida. After graduation, she will work as an Assistant Professor of Community Counseling at Mississippi State University in the Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology.