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## A Psychoanalytic Inquiry into Social Aggression as a Form of Bullying among Female Students

Tina Martin Debevec

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# A PSYCHOANALYTIC INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL AGGRESSION AS A FORM OF BULLYING AMONG FEMALE STUDENTS

by

TINA MARTIN DEBEVEC

(Under the Direction of Marla Morris)

## ABSTRACT

Bullying among children and adolescents, particularly within the school setting, has drawn much attention in recent years as a reaction to an onslaught of high profile school violence in the 1990s. While much attention and research focused upon physical violence that was prevalent among male students, very little research covered indirect, relational, and social forms of aggression. Research into the covert manners of aggression that involved the manipulation of relationships revealed them to be salient among female students, demonstrating that female students were predominantly aggressive in a different manner than their male counterparts.

Psychoanalytic theories of attachment and aggression guide this research as a theoretical framework for interpreting social aggression as a form of bullying among adolescent female students. To better understand the influences of society upon the developing psyches of young females, which also encompass the influence of mothers, social media, and the hidden curriculum of schooling, psychoanalytic theories of attachment and aggression offer insight to the following questions: How do societal perceptions of the female gender lead to a prevalence of social aggression? What perpetuates social aggression as a form of bullying among female students? A detailed exploration of the conflicting societal perceptions and expectations placed upon female

students is included. In addition, the increased use of social media adds another method of covert aggression to the repertoire of adolescent girls via cyberbullying. Finally, a look at the hidden curriculum in schools indicates a reiteration of societal expectations for females, as well as a diminished focus upon relationships with students as teachers struggle to meet increasing academic demands.

The developing psyches of adolescent females are challenged by the conflicting societal perceptions of females, cyber-communications, as well as the hidden curriculum of schooling, all of which function as impediments to relationships among adolescent females. Through socially aggressive means, girls have found an inconspicuous outlet through which to channel their aggression toward one another. Suggestions for facilitating change with the involvement of parents, bystanders, and educators are included for improving the relational attachments of adolescent female students in an effort to reduce the prevalence and impact of social aggression.

INDEX WORDS: Psychoanalysis, Social aggression, Relational aggression, Indirect aggression, Bullying, Female students, Cyberbullying, Hidden curriculum

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BULLYING AMONG FEMALE STUDENTS

by

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## DEDICATION

To my husband, Austin Debevec, for his encouragement, unwavering support, and  
love throughout this journey

And to my precious children, Jake and Eli, for your unconditional love that  
constantly reminds me of the importance of being a  
“good enough mother”

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welcoming place for them. As we continue our careers in education, I am grateful that we are alike enough to get along so well, yet diverse enough to keep it fun and interesting as we begin each day with a new adventure.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Aggression and violence within the schools took front and center stage in the mid to late 1990s as a rash of school shootings shocked the nation. Since our children began shooting one another within the perceived safe haven of schools, and particularly since the Columbine massacre, a preponderance of literature has been devoted to school violence. Julie Webber (2003) tells us in *Failure to Hold: the Politics of School Violence* that “Aggression is something that we assume, in ideological form, to be a part of human life. True enough, but it does not spring from an abyss, it has causes and forces that bring it into the open” (p. 60). These forces described by Webber are what prompt many to study school violence. Many researchers are driven by the notion that if we know why students have been violent in the past, perhaps we can analyze the root causes and prevent future incidents.

The quest to better understand aggression has prompted a vast amount of research, particularly research focused upon physical aggression. The nature of physical aggression is often visible, or leaves behind identifiable wounds which provide evidence that it occurred, lending itself to research. Less visible, but just as detrimental, are covert forms of aggression. This research is more specifically narrowed from school violence to a different type of aggression- one that predominantly surfaces and wreaks havoc among female students. Psychologically detrimental, as well as physiologically at times, the aggression of which I refer is the phenomenon of social aggression, also referred to as indirect or relational aggression, as a form of bullying among female students.

Cullerton-Sen and Crick (2005) tell us that “Researchers have found that assessing only overt and more general forms of peer harassment results in the failure to identify sub-groups of victimized children, particularly relationally victimized girls” (p. 148). An exploration of social aggression, including the psychoanalytic and societal influences that contribute to its existence among female students, is the focus of this research.

### Social Aggression and Her Sisters: Commonly Used Terms

Conceptualizing physical aggression as the intent to physically harm others through direct means is a common thread in bullying research; however, dissension exists in studies of other forms of aggression. Indirect, relational, and social aggression are all terms that have similar meanings, but have been defined with subtle nuances among researchers (Archer & Coyne, 2005). While this research predominantly uses the term social aggression, it is important to note the variations and stances of other researchers who have empirically studied manners of covert aggression.

Indirect aggression as a term has been used to encompass covert forms of aggression as opposed to the overt nature of physical aggression. With indirect aggression, aggressors inflict harm circuitously and often maintain anonymity in the process. The nature of indirect aggression is sneaky and inconspicuous. Archer and Coyne (2005) provide such examples as “gossiping, spreading rumors, writing nasty notes to others, and trying to get others to exclude a group member” (p. 294). The overriding concept is the covert manner in which the harm is inflicted upon the victim.

Relational aggression is another term that is commonly used in research to describe an alternative to physical aggression. Similar to acts of indirect aggression, relational aggressors may also spread rumors or gossip in an effort to harm the victim. As

it is distinguished from other forms of aggression, relational aggression particularly focuses upon the manner in which relationships are manipulated by the aggressor and, in the case of adolescent females, subtly devours their emotional security with peers.

Mullin-Rindler (2003) provides a detailed definition of this phenomenon:

Relational aggression includes both overt name-calling and verbal attacks and such indirect strategies as spreading gossip and rumors, manipulating friendships, or intentionally excluding or isolating someone. (p. 10)

A similar explanation of relational aggression that focuses specifically upon the intention to harm through the relationship itself is provided by Cullerton-Sen and Crick (2005) who add that “relational victimization is the experience of being directly or indirectly excluded or socially manipulated by individuals who intentionally use their relationship with the victim as the vehicle for harm” (p.148). The playing field in relational aggression can become muddled as aggressors vary the manner in which they attack peers. While some will directly confront and verbally assault the victim, others may be very sneaky and use subtle means of manipulating friendships to socially isolate a peer. One such example of subtle aggression is demonstrated by an aggressor threatening to take away one’s friendship. The friendship itself then becomes contingent upon whatever the aggressor wants the victim to do or not do, and the aggressor exerts the power in the relationship by threatening to withdraw the relationship to hurt the victim.

Understanding the imbalance of power within relationships in peer groups is a key concept in understanding relational aggression. To further explain relational aggression and how power is used among students to relationally aggress, Mullin-Rindler (2003) states that:



It is characterized by a power imbalance involving a combination of direct and indirect methods to damage someone's reputation, relationships, or sense of inclusion in a peer group. Students may use direct confrontation or involve emissaries to do this. Also, groups of students may gang up against others and use this form of bullying to establish social rank or reinforce their position of power within a peer group. (p.10)

The concept of power and how it is used plays an important role in relational aggression. The person with the power, the bully or aggressor, is the one who holds control over the situation and exerts control over the one who is weaker in the relationship, the victim. Wiseman (2002) uses the term "Queen Bee" to describe this position of power and dominance that socially aggressive females have over other females within their peer groups. To better understand the concept of power in socially aggressive relationships, it is beneficial to explore its meaning in depth. In *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, Jean Baker Miller (1986) explains:

Power has generally meant the ability to advance oneself and, simultaneously, to control, limit, and if possible, destroy the power of others. That is, power, so far, has had at least two components: power *for* oneself and power *over* others.

(p. 116)

A "Queen Bee" must have some control or power over others to wield them vulnerable to her relational bullying tactics. On the contrary, a student who has difficulty maintaining friendships and status within a group would struggle with becoming relationally aggressive if others did not follow suit in the quest to socially ostracize a peer. The support of others is the actual power imbalance in instances of relational aggression

because that is where the aggressor gains status and control, even if the status and control are only temporary.

Like relational aggression, Archer and Coyne (2005) point out that social aggression “is defined in terms of intended endpoints” (p. 212). With acts of social aggression, the intended endpoint is to manipulate the social standing of others by damaging their acceptance by a group of peers. Both overt and covert acts are encompassed as social forms of aggression. Coyne, Archer, and Eslea (2006) posit, “It appears that social aggression encompasses all the behaviors in relational and indirect aggression, while adding harmful non-verbal behaviors (e.g., rolling eyes, giving dirty looks) to the construct” (p. 295). The inclusion of non-verbal behaviors that are hurtful to others is an important factor to consider when it comes to covert aggression among female students. It is very easy for girls to flash disapproving looks at another girl across the classroom without being noticed by a teacher. Subtle it may be; however, bullies rely upon their power to harm others. A group of girls can easily create a sense of exclusion toward another student when they all begin to use these covert techniques against the victim. By including these seemingly harmless behaviors in their definition of social aggression, Coyne et al. lend credence to the need for educators to be aware of and address these techniques as bullying behaviors.

While the terms indirect, relational, and social aggression have all been used to describe mostly covert behaviors that are used as an alternative to physical aggression, social aggression is the preferred term for the purposes of this research. All three terms are used throughout the research in the field and provide insightful perspectives; however, the three terms heavily overlap in concept. Because social aggression is a

broader term and encompasses a wider variety of behaviors than indirect or relational aggression, it best suits the aim of this research to predominantly use this term. Noting the differences in indirect, relational, and social aggression as indicated in the field of research is necessary; however, the terms are similar enough in describing the phenomenon associated with female aggression that they are often used interchangeably.

The subtle nuances that exist in the differing definitions of these forms of aggression are insignificant and obscure the goal of understanding the overarching phenomenon. Having researched the variations of these terms in depth, Archer and Coyne (2005) establish that:

Regardless of the terms that are used and the way the definitions are constructed, it is imperative that the major researchers in this field put aside their differences and acknowledge that they are dealing with essentially the same phenomenon but with minor differences of emphasis. Without this realization, research in this important area of aggression will become further confused, and researchers will go on duplicating findings under different names. (p. 226)

In concurrence with Archer and Coyne's reasoning, the goal of this research is not to prove the existence of the phenomenon of indirect, relational, or social aggression, nor is it to argue the differences or significance of one term over the other, but instead to explore psychological theories to interpret the existence of this phenomenon among female students, as well as explore the societal influences that perpetuate it predominantly among female students. Although social aggression is often covert, it is also very widespread among females. Having experienced social aggression firsthand as an adolescent female, this journey begins with my story.

## My Cathartic Journey

Like many others who work with students, I am strangely curious about those who direct such anger and aggression toward their peers, as well as that which prompts their aggressive outbursts to the magnitude of destroying human lives. It was while serving as a middle school counselor that my interest was narrowed from school violence in general to relational aggression as a form of bullying among female students. Having served as a middle school counselor for six years vastly influenced my interest in the field of curriculum studies as it pertains to the experiences of female students. Within the confines and privacy of my office, many adolescent females painfully struggled to tell their stories. Recounting excruciating experiences of social exclusion, name-calling, and gossip became a constant interaction between the students and me. Because of the humiliation and degradation that accompany such aggression, many of those young girls had great difficulty putting into words the feelings they had experienced and the resulting subjugation, becoming hostages to their stories.

My interest in social aggression grew and became the focus of my research as a result of my daily interactions with middle school girls. Together we sorted through their emotional anguish as they constantly hurt their friends and enemies alike. As their school counselor, I listened as they relayed their pain. While tormenting one's nemesis is easy enough to fathom, my quest is to better understand why social aggression is salient among female students who commonly direct aggression at some of their closest peers, including their female friends. Having an extremely close-knit group of friends, some of whom I have been friends with for thirty five years – practically my entire life – has made this journey very personal for me. I can remember the pain and devastation of my

eccentric best friend who was a victim of bullying for years, specifically by another friend of ours. In the group dynamics of that friendship, I was occasionally the victim of social aggression; however, I would categorize myself predominantly as a bystander who mostly ignored, but sometimes participated in, the social aggression. Dellasega (2005) describes a bystander as “a girl in between who watches aggression occur but may or may not intervene” (p. 11). While the role of bystander may seem like a safe role to occupy, it was a conflicting and emotional position that vastly influenced my ability to empathize with adolescent females involved in social aggression.

Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I was best friends with a victim and her primary bully. Being sandwiched between the two of them during an episode of drama was a miserable feeling that still surfaces in my mind decades later. It is interesting how the psyche evokes senses of past hurts and brings them to the forefront of the mind when triggered by a memory. The feelings of frustration, anger, embarrassment, and above all, helplessness, return at times, and I feel like an adolescent again- trapped between knowing that intervention was the correct response, yet choosing the path of least resistance by looking the other way during most of the bullying episodes. As a young child and adolescent, my behavior was self-serving and self-protecting. As an adult and educator, the shame of it is overwhelming at times.

My friendship with Leah began at age three at our babysitter’s house. We were always close friends and enjoyed our childhood playing dolls or hiding from our younger brothers. The drama began in second grade when Dawn moved into my neighborhood. She and I also became fast friends and had a lot in common, including the same birthday. Dawn was immediately welcomed as our friend. The three of us got along well for the

most part, but Dawn soon became jealous of the strong friendship that Leah and I had shared for years. By inviting only one of us at a time to spend the night at her house, Dawn tried to hurt whomever she excluded through taunting phone calls or by temporarily withdrawing her friendship. Relational aggression did not have a name in the 1970s, but that's exactly what we experienced. Dawn exuded smugness as she manipulated us through relational bullying.

On most occasions, I chose to ignore Dawn. During rare instances, I stood up to her. Leah, on the other hand, did not. Our early adolescent years in middle school were hell for Leah. I can recall an incident at 4-H camp one summer when Dawn stole Leah's bra and hung it on the flag pole outside of our cabin and later told everyone that it belonged to Leah. This incident would have been embarrassing for anyone, but was especially brutal for a self-conscious adolescent to endure. Beyond that, Dawn took a picture of Leah while she was changing clothes and bare-chested. Thankfully pictures had to be developed in those days and could not be instantly forwarded as they can with today's technology. A couple of weeks later, Dawn took her camp pictures to Leah's house to tease her with the half-nude picture. Leah's mom confiscated and destroyed the photo before it was shared with others. While the damage could have been worse had the pictures made it into the hands of others, Leah was humiliated nonetheless.

Most episodes of Dawn's bullying consisted of her degrading Leah in front of others. There were times when I stood up for Leah, as well as times when I laughed along with the others at her naïveté, but most often I kept my mouth shut. I remember feeling that it was too risky to put myself in the middle. Dawn was not very popular, but I was fully aware that it did not take much to fan the flames of rumors at our small school. It

was much safer to stay out of it as often as possible. My frustration with Dawn's bullying was coupled with my frustration at Leah who rarely stood up for herself. Being a bystander was a conflicting position and one that I struggled with for years.

Looking back, I can recognize now that ironically both Dawn and Leah battled poor self-esteem. I believe that Dawn found herself in constant competition with Leah and me. She competed for grades, though mine and Leah's were higher. She competed for our friendship, though Leah and I had a longer and stronger friendship. Later, she competed for boyfriends and popularity. Everything became a competition, and Dawn was determined to establish a power of her own over others. While it sounds as if Leah had the definite advantage against Dawn, she did not. Leah struggled with her weight and motivation, and both caused her emotional stress. She was an easy prey to devour. As a "sometimes" friend, Dawn knew this about Leah and used it to demean her, thus feeding Dawn's competitive desire to be better by making Leah appear to be less.

While these recounts of Dawn's behavior portray her in a negative light, I would bet that our former teachers would be shocked to know of these incidents. Simmons (2002) tells us that "Girls, ever respectful, tend to aggress quietly. They flash looks, pass notes, and spread rumors. Their actions, though sometimes physical, are typically more psychological and thus invisible to even an observant classroom eye" (p. 10). This describes Dawn's actions perfectly. Dawn knew that her behaviors were unacceptable and she was skilled at hiding them. She presented herself as a good student, kind, and somewhat quiet. Leah and I knew that another side of her existed. We had both spent a great deal of time with Dawn, especially in her home. Dawn's manner of hurting was modeled after what she had learned from her own mother, a woman who blatantly treated

Dawn with a lack of respect in front of her friends. Dellasega (2005) explains that “Girls form friendships that mirror their relationships with their mothers, based on conformity rather than self-expression” (p. 21). Dawn’s mother embarrassed Dawn by pointing out her flaws and degrading her in the presence of others. The cycle was vicious, and Dawn followed in her mother’s footsteps, consequently contributing to the pattern of social aggression that wreaked havoc in all of our lives.

Thinking back now, I can only speculate about the past. I often wonder why I allowed myself to remain involved without actively speaking out against the bullying. Perhaps I had blinders on in order to fit in, or to ensure my temporary security in the group. Yet, the most poignant question remains, why did Leah and I remain friends with Dawn for so long? Naively, I believe that we desired to help or change her behaviors for the better. Honestly, I think it’s because we really liked her most of the time. We knew about her home life and justified to ourselves why she bullied. Perhaps we thought she would conform to our expectations. That never happened while we were in school. Since high school graduation, my contact with Dawn has been rare. Fortunately for me, Leah has remained my best friend, a lifelong friend, and a supporter of my research into the phenomenon of social aggression among females.

Several years ago I left the middle school counseling position to become an administrator at the same elementary school where my friends and I were students so long ago. I catch glimpses of little girls whispering and giggling as they dart around the corner and time is blurred between the past and present. Madeleine Grumet (1988) affirms, “But the present is hardly more transparent to our inquiring gaze than the past. We have all come to form within the very forms we wish to study. And so it is difficult to



separate the well-taught consciousness from the consciousness that teaches” (p. 59). I now realize that this journey has come full circle for me. As an adult and school administrator, I am now able to research and gain insight into social aggression in a way that I could not thirty years ago. Now it has a name. It can no longer be denied. And so, this journey becomes cathartic, allowing me to understand and share with others the torment that encompasses social aggression as a form of bullying among females.

### General Overview of Study

As a spoof about social aggression among girls, the movie *Mean Girls* debuted in 2004 as a popular comedy. In the movie, “The Plastics” were mocked as a group of popular high school girls who were portrayed as physically beautiful, yet their personalities were deceitful, backstabbing, and unintelligent. Their relationships were shallow as they blatantly used social aggression to fulfill their own selfish desires. Further, “The Plastics” were not very discreet in their exclusionary and bullying tactics, unlike the actual experiences of many adolescent female students. While the movie is comical and mocks the idiocy of “The Plastics,” the silliness of it detracts from the significance of the emotional devastation caused by social aggression in reality.

When asked by others what I am researching and writing on, my general response is “mean girls.” Many people are familiar with the movie *Mean Girls* (2004) and will often ask that I elaborate, at which time I explain my interest in indirect forms of aggression and how they are commonly used among female students as methods of bullying. While these responses capture the basic premise of my research, they fail to encompass the complexities involved in deriving an understanding of female aggression. Through this research, I explore the psychological and societal influences upon the

developing female psyche and consider the influence of these factors in the prevalence of social aggression as a bullying tactic common among female students. The school setting is most often the social arena where adolescents encounter one another and exercise their aggression; however, cyber communication has added another dimension to bullying that is worthy of exploration. This research is further intended to inform educators and parents of the societal expectations which pervade the daily lives of female students and pressure them to aggress covertly. Gaining an understanding of their experiences is empowering as a means of helping adolescent girls to make sense of it all.

Research that presently exists on social aggression and victimization has been approached from many perspectives. Quantitative methods, such as rating scales and surveys, have been utilized to gather empirical data to support the existence of covert forms of aggression. Qualitative methods, such as interviews and/or observations of those involved in incidents of social or relational aggression, have sought to recount the experiences of bullies and victims in an effort to seek understanding on a personal level. This research differs by drawing upon psychoanalytic theories to interpret socially aggressive behaviors among female students. Rather than simply offer support of the existence of social aggression as provided by empirical research, a psychoanalytic framework offers insight into the psyche of the adolescent female as it is influenced by the mother, society expectations for the female gender, and schooling. I contend that these factors predominantly influence how young girls learn to relate to others, and ultimately, influence how they demonstrate aggression.

The American Psychoanalytic Association (2010) states, “Psychoanalysis has a double identity. It is a comprehensive *theory* about human nature, motivation, behavior,

development and experience. And it is a method of *treatment* for psychological problems and difficulties in living a successful life.” In utilizing psychoanalysis in research, Chodorow (1978) aptly states that “The fundamental contribution of psychoanalysis lies in its demonstration of the existence and mode of operation of unconscious mental processes” (p. 41). Psychoanalytic theories of attachment and aggression guide this research and serve as the theoretical framework for interpreting social aggression as adolescent females manipulate their relationships with others in covert ways in the context of bullying. The impact of social aggression is often an interference with a young girl’s ability to relate to others, thus negatively affecting her opportunities for success. This research utilizes psychoanalytic theories to look at the role of the relationships between adolescent girls and their mothers and how that impacts their relationships with others. Further, the conflicting roles of females in society are included to gain insight into the lived experiences of female students in their school environments and social settings.

In premising this research, I must state that I am not suggesting that only females bully through social aggression, nor am I implying that social aggression is the only manner in which females bully. Vail (2002) asserts that “some boys are relationally aggressive, of course, just as some girls are physically aggressive. On the whole, though, girls are more likely than boys to use withholding friendship as an act of aggression” (p. 11). Research into aggression among children has traditionally been studied in terms of physical aggression, resulting in the conclusion that boys were more aggressive than girls. This conclusion was largely due to a lack of research on the types of aggression common among girls rather than boys actually being more aggressive (Crick &

Grottpeter, 1995). By way of observational research, empirical support refuted such conclusions:

That consensus began to change in the early 90's, after a team of researchers led by a Finnish professor named Kaj Björkqvist started interviewing 11- and 12-year-old girls about their behavior toward one another. The team's conclusion was that girls were, in fact, just as aggressive as boys, though in a different way. (Talbot, 2002, p. 3)

Subsequent research also noted that while boys tend to be more physically aggressive, girls more often engage in indirect forms of aggression through social assaults and isolation of peers (Olweus, 1993; Pipher, 1994; Crick & Grottpeter, 1995; Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002; Chesler, 2003).

Having been a victim of social aggression herself, Rachel Simmons spent a year interviewing and becoming acquainted with adolescent female students and faculty at ten different schools across the United States. Simmons had researched and been unable to find much information on female bullying. The predominant literature on bullying focused upon physical aggression, not social aggression, thus prompting Simmons to embark on her own journey to understand this phenomenon and to tell the stories of those she interviewed. In her book, *Odd Girl Out*, Simmons (2002) tells us that:

The desire for connection propels children into friendship, while the need for recognition and power ignites competition and conflict. My point is that if all children desire these things, they will come to them, and into learning how to acquire them, on the culture's terms, that is, by the rules of how girls and boys are supposed to behave. (p. 9)

Simmons' statements point out that girls and boys are expected to behave differently according to cultural rules specific to their gender as they strive for power among their peers. The overriding questions that arise from these statements and guide this research are: What perpetuates social aggression as a form of bullying among female students? And, how do societal and cultural perceptions of the female gender lead to a prevalence of social aggression? This dissertation seeks to gain meaning and understanding in the quest to answer these questions by using a psychoanalytic framework. The methodology of this dissertation is theoretical in nature, utilizing texts to draw upon psychoanalytic theories to interpret socially aggressive behaviors among female students and seek answers to the research questions. Psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott provides the major backdrop for this study as his research on babies, their mothers, and society is woven throughout. The research of others such as John Bowlby and Nancy Chodorow is utilized to further explain the importance of the attachment between mother and baby, as well as the developing personality of the infant in the process. Carl Jung's concept of the Shadow (characteristics of oneself that are rejected and hidden away in the unconscious mind because of denial) is also considered in looking at social aggression among females, as well as interpreting bullying as collective shadow energy which Olson (2008) argues "can be regarded as the shadow side of compulsory schooling" (p. 9).

### Curriculum Studies and the Feminine Voice

In looking back at the role of females in the field of curriculum studies, as well as bullying research, one will notice paralleling timelines. By paralleling the two, it is interesting to see how females were overlooked for so long and then the visibility of

female roles emerged at around the same time in both curriculum studies and studies of bullying behaviors.

Within the white, male-dominated American society in which we live, females as an oppressed Other, have been granted less of a voice than their male counterparts. Petra Munro (1998) tells us that “repression is the history that has no voice. My knowledge that women’s experiencing of the world is invisible is a painful reminder that history, and in this case specifically curriculum history, is predicated on subjugation and erasure” (p. 264). As educators of female students, we must empower them to tell their stories, to share a peek into their socially aggressive nature of bullying and victimization. Madeleine Grumet (1980) states that “students have little practice in finding and telling their own stories” (p. 28). Yet, these are stories that need to be told, must be told, to arrive at any understanding of the gender differences in aggression and bullying behavior.

While the general topic of school violence is centered on overt physical aggression, I contend that social aggression is commonly used as a form of bullying among adolescent female students and presents its own form of hostility within the arena of school violence. Prior to delving into this critically important topic, it is necessary to note that the scope of research available on the separate topics of bullying, aggression, violence, and gender are overwhelming, and are too extensive to be covered in depth for the purposes of this research. Further, factors such as a female’s race, social class, and sexuality may also play a role in social aggression; however, such factors are also too broad to include in the present research. Consequently, this research into social aggression has been narrowed as much as possible to the context of the female psyche as it is shaped by societal influences, to include the influence of the mother, societal

expectations for the female gender, cyber-socialization, and the hidden curriculum of schooling. It is through the vein of psychoanalysis that this research on aggression is situated as it relates to the experiences of adolescent females within the discourse of school violence.

Others within the field of curriculum have used psychoanalytic theories as an interpretive aspect to inform their various works (Grumet, 1988; Doll, 1995; Doll, 2000; Pinar, 2001; Morris, 2001; Webber, 2003). I, too, find psychoanalysis to be an appropriate theoretical framework for situating this research study on relational aggression. In an attempt to understand the underlying factors that contribute to aggression among students, particularly relational aggression among female students, it is necessary for me to seek an understanding of aggression, as well as the basic human need for closeness, attachment to, and behavior with others. Psychoanalysis lends itself to interpretation as it pertains to this research by offering an understanding of both aggression, and the psychological development of girls in our society.

#### Characterizing Gender within the Changing Field of Curriculum

To establish an understanding of how female students have been marginalized within the field of education, a brief historical overview is helpful in premising the present research. By looking into female social aggression as it relates to the broader context of females in schools and society, one can see the gradual changes over time as gender differences have been studied and exposed. This is significant to the current study as I contend that societal expectations for girls and the hidden curriculum of schools contribute to social aggression among female students.

Historically, males and females have been viewed differently by society, and ultimately by the educational system. Initially, only boys were privy to educational opportunities. However, academies for girls began to crop up in the early nineteenth century. Advocates of equality in education at that time proposed that girls be exposed to the same challenging academics taught to boys. Soon after, coeducation came to be (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). While coeducation offered the same academics to both males and females, societal expectations continued to play a role in what was deemed acceptable behavior by both genders.

The twentieth century brought with it numerous changes in curriculum, education, and the regulation of gender. The Tyler rationale gained prominence in the field of curriculum with a prescribed design that focused upon the implementation and evaluation of defined objectives. Focusing on the design of curriculum functioned to maintain order within the educational arena, which mirrored the maintenance of societal norms of gender within the school environment. Classes that were considered feminine, such as home economics, were established with girls in mind to prepare them for the traditional role of wife and mother. On the other hand, boys had classes, such as shop, that were designed to reinforce their masculine role within society. Organized sports were also introduced in schools where males were active participants in the sports and females supported them as cheerleaders or spectators (Pinar et al., 1995). The female role as the submissive, male supporter was staunchly reiterated to young girls during their quest for an education.

By the 1960s and 1970s, the women's liberation movement was in full swing. In education during this time, gender stereotyping pervaded curriculum and was obviously at the male advantage through the common depiction of passive, dependent females in



comparison to dominant male figures. Frazier and Sadker (1973) describe the gender stereotypes that were conveyed to students during that time. Boys were depicted in textbooks as physically strong, engaged in outdoor activities, or earning money. Girls, on the other hand, were depicted as helping with household chores such as cooking, sewing, or shopping. History books were also heavily concentrated in the biographies of white American males, with a scarcity of information, if any at all, on their female counterparts. In addition, teachers of children were predominantly women, and administrators were usually men. The structure of the school and the classroom setting paralleled that of the home whereby mothers were primarily responsible for the tasks of childrearing, though it was fathers who were in charge of the family.

Women began to question and resist dominance of the white male and fought for equal rights and independence, just as civil rights activists had done. The cultural upheaval that transpired during this period did not go unnoticed by curriculum theorists, but rather depicted Grumet's (1980) statement that "curriculum is the child of culture, and the relation is as complex and reciprocal as are any that bonds the generations" (p. 24). During this time, women and other oppressed groups were restless for change and equality. The struggle of oppressed groups to have their voices heard prompted a shift in the field of curriculum from a focus upon design to one focused upon understanding. This period of time marked a movement in the field known as the Reconceptualization, whereby the dialogue within the field of curriculum worked to create understanding. Discourse regarding the relationship between gender and curriculum during the Reconceptualization paved the way for social and political discussions that sparked debate about the prevailing system of gender. The construction of gender became a topic

of research and discussion with regard to the role of females in society, as well as within the schools.

Seeking to better understand the gender gap in education was necessary to promote equality among female and male students in schools. This became the mission of The American Association of University Women, the organization which commissioned the first national survey of its kind in 1990 to examine educational experiences of both girls and boys and how their different experiences, particularly their interest in math and science, impact self-esteem and career aspirations. The Greenberg-Lake research firm conducted the survey by interviewing approximately 3,000 girls and boys between the ages of 9 and 15. A variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds from 12 different locations nationwide were included in the study. Their findings, entitled *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America* (1991, 1994) took America by storm. The poll revealed that the self-esteem of young girls gets deflated by cultural perceptions which marginalize them into stereotypical female roles. Schools were identified as major contributors in this process by steering young girls away from math and science, including their aspirations to have careers in these fields. In studying female aggression, this research is important and will consider that the marginalization of females which has been instilled by society and cultivated in the school setting reinforces the message to young girls that they are to be seen and not heard. As such, the covert manner of relational aggression becomes the primary way in which young girls learn to exercise their dominance among female peers.

Myra and David Sadker's book, *Failing at Fairness: How Our Schools Cheat Girls* (1994), pointed out the covert silencing of female students that tends to take place

in the classroom as male students monopolize the attention of teachers. Gender bias in textbooks was also exposed as an issue of concern. In addition, it was discovered that while girls begin school making higher grades than boys, ironically the boys scored higher on standardized tests. When called upon to answer questions in the classroom, male students are given more wait time than female students to think of an answer. Sadker and Sadker (1994) contend that “today’s schoolgirls face subtle and insidious gender lessons, micro-inequities that appear seemingly insignificant when looked at individually but that have a powerful cumulative impact” (ix). In regards to aggression, Sadker and Sadker (1994) discovered that:

The quality on which women and men differ most is aggression. But even here, the extent of difference depends on the situation and the interpretation. For example, in studies of young children, girls behave assertively when they play with other girls but become more passive when paired with boys; they are more likely to stand on the sidelines and let the males take over. (p. 229)

The self-esteem and aspirations of young girls decline as they are faced with the culmination of bias that is experienced at school and in society. “Few people realize that today’s girls continue a three-hundred-year-old struggle for full participation in America’s educational system” (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 15). Consequently, this struggle wreaks havoc on the young female psyche and may play an insidious role in contributing to social aggression.

#### Caring: The Feminine Voice Emerges

A further look into gender differences is beneficial in understanding the moral development of female students in relation to their male counterparts. In examining the

societal influences of social aggression, a look at the moral development of females plays a role in this research by addressing interpersonal relationships and the concept of care. Around the mid to late 1970s, during the Reconceptualization of the curriculum field, Nel Noddings and Carol Gilligan, began to look at caring in education and the moral development of women and situate them within the context of gender. While both addressed caring as being characteristically feminine, Gilligan further contended that the moral voice of women differed from that of men.

Throughout her works, Noddings places great emphasis on the relationships of females with others. Further, Noddings (1984) posits that “women, in particular, seem to approach moral problems by placing themselves as nearly as possible in concrete situations and assuming personal responsibility for the choices to be made” (p.8). Just as caring for others has long been associated with women and has traditionally been considered a feminine trait, the ethical position of justice has been considered a masculine trait associated with men (Tong, 1993). Noddings (1984) points out that:

An ethic built on caring is, I think, characteristically and essentially feminine – which is not to say, of course, that it cannot be shared by men, any more than we should care to say that traditional moral systems cannot be embraced by women. But an ethic of caring arises, I believe, out of our experiences as women, just as the traditional logical approach to ethical problems arises more obviously from masculine experience. (p. 8)

Challenging her former mentor, Lawrence Kohlberg’s, views on moral development as a six- stage process, Carol Gilligan questioned the relationship between morality and gender in her groundbreaking book, *In a Different Voice*, written in 1982.

Gilligan (1982) claimed that overall women make moral judgments based upon relationships while men are more likely to focus on rules and rights in making moral decisions. Gilligan (1982) stated that “women not only define themselves in a context of human relationship but also judge themselves in terms of ability to care” whereas men tend to “assume or devalue that care” (p. 17). While serving as a school counselor, I found that Gilligan’s ideas in this regard were an accurate representation of what I experienced with my students. An overwhelming majority of my female students had been socialized differently and tended to be more socially aggressive, engaging in negative gossip and social exclusion, whereas the male students more frequently engaged in physical aggression. My experiences in working with middle school students lend support to Gilligan’s claims that females tend to focus on and place great importance upon relationships. I have observed how keenly aware female students are of the impact that social isolation has on their peers. The need to be socially connected to others may help to explain this phenomenon of social aggression among adolescent girls. If, as females, we define ourselves through our relationships with others, our epistemological belief would be an emotional knowledge (Tong, 1993). This emotional way of knowing that is predominantly feminine renders us vulnerable to attack through social isolation.

#### *Reactions to the Feminine Voice*

Not surprisingly, the emergence of the “feminine voice” was met with criticism. As a critic of Gilligan’s work, Bill Puka (1990) argues that women care simply because that is the role that women have been given by society. Further, Puka contends that the women’s voices of which Gilligan refers are simply coping strategies that women develop as a result of a sexist society. “Care is not a general course of moral

development, primarily, but a set of coping strategies for dealing with sexist oppression in particular” (Puka, 1990, p. 59). Puka’s argument thus implies that the voices portrayed by Gilligan are not worthy of being classified as moral development as he dismisses her thoughts on caring. To do so fails “to recognize both the political value and the nuance” of Gilligan’s work (Heyes, 1997, p. 143).

While I do believe that our culture socializes females to be nurturers and care for others, I disagree with Puka’s claim that women only care because sexist oppression places us in that role. To assume as much insinuates that women would not care for others if society placed women within a dominant role, and further devalues caring. Peeples (1991) reminds us that “on the contrary, to accommodate herself to the power structure’s values would be to mindlessly throw care out the window as soon as the choice is given because that is what the prevailing value system would have her do (p. 198). By minimizing the importance of caring, the vulnerability of females within the context of relationships becomes obscured by the argument of whether or not females care out of obligation. More importantly, Martusewicz (2001) explains “just as boys’ subjective lives are anything but unified around domination, girls’ lives should not be read reductively in terms of simple reactions to masculinity” (p. 92). Instead, educators and scholars must acknowledge the powerful social influences that resonate with perceived gender norms, as well as the psychoanalytic explanations, of why females tend to value relationships with others differently than males.

While Gilligan and Noddings have met criticism on their ideas of caring and the vulnerable position that caring for others places women in, Tong (1993) professes that:

...there are serious problems with women abandoning all of their nurturant

activities. The world would be a much worse place tomorrow than it is today if women suddenly stop meeting the physical and psychological needs of those who depend on them. (p. 103)

The psychoanalytic works of D.W. Winnicott (1964, 1965a, 1965b, 1986, 1987), John Bowlby (1982, 1988) and Nancy Chodorow (1978) also support Tong's statement and attest to the importance of nurturing qualities, particularly by mothers in caring for and developing attachments with their infants. Winnicott (1986) emphasizes the magnitude of a mother's contribution to society through caring for her infant by stating that "every man or woman who has the feeling of being a person in the world, and for whom the world means something, every happy person, is in infinite debt to a woman" (p. 125). As mothers, the influence of women is significant in the psychosocial development of the next generation, though this is not highly esteemed by society.

Regardless of these scholarly influences who reiterate the importance of valuing the contribution of women to society, the experiences of females are dismissed or reduced in importance compared to those of males. Jack (1999) concurs, "Since the discourse about aggression has always occurred in the male voice, the possibilities for understanding this critical issue from the female perspective have been severely limited" (p. 57). The patriarchal society prevails. Just as females have struggled for equal access to the opportunities afforded to males, females have also struggled to share their experiences. Studies into the phenomenon of school bullying have been no different in ignoring the female experience of social aggression.

## Outline of Chapters

A review of relevant literature regarding female aggression is compiled in Chapter 2, beginning with a brief history of school violence in the United States. As highly publicized cases of school shootings drew national attention, the focus turned to bullying in schools as a predominant precursor to such acts of violence (Seals & Young, 2003). Consequently, the attention upon bullying prevention within schools specifically considered the physical aggression prevalent among male students, placing very little focus upon the socially aggressive tendencies of female students. To establish a background of research findings specific to social aggression, a review of the empirical research is included.

Literature specific to the adolescent female experience is also shared to preface the research with a better understanding of the influence of schools and society upon the development of the adolescent female psyche. The works of Peggy Orenstein and Mary Pipher are reviewed in this section. Following this is the review of literature specific to social aggression among adolescent females, covering the works of Rachel Simmons, Rosalind Wiseman, and Nicki Crick, all forerunners in research on covert aggression among female students. Further literature on social aggression among women is presented to show the continued cycle of social aggression into adulthood. A commonality from the reviewed literature on social aggression among females indicates the significance of relationships to females.

Chapter 3 focuses upon psychoanalytic theories on attachment and aggression, particularly utilizing the works of D.W. Winnicott, with support from the works of John



Bowlby and Nancy Chodorow. Their theories on relationships, beginning with that of mother and baby, form the basis by which the research questions are answered. The works of Carl Jung are also incorporated as his theories of the Shadow are utilized in understanding social aggression.

The theoretical framework of this research, a psychoanalytic analysis, is presented in Chapter 3. An overview of the psychoanalytic theories utilized in this research are reviewed. A brief look at how others in the field of curriculum studies have utilized a psychoanalytic lens in their works are included to situate this research in the field of curriculum studies through the vein of psychoanalysis. Rather than drawing upon one theory, this research draws from a variety of psychoanalytic theories, specifically utilizing object relations theory and Jung's Shadow to argue that the societal influences of family, school, and technology perpetuate female social aggression. An overriding focus upon human relationships and the need to connect with others is a common theme that premises the research.

Chapter 4 specifically addresses how societal influences perpetuate social aggression among female students. As established in Chapter 3, with the support of psychoanalytic theories, the role of the mother is foundational in how young girls learn to socialize and establish relationships. While researching this topic, a surprising, underlying theme of the fear of women has surfaced. Winnicott (1964) mentions in *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World* that society has an unconscious fear of dependence on women. With mothers most often being the first woman with whom a human infant establishes a relationship, much is prefaced on an individual's view of other women based upon the initial relationship with their own mother. "Traced to its root in

the history of each individual, this fear of woman turns out to be a fear of recognizing the fact of dependence, the initial dependence of earliest infancy” (Winnicott, 1964, p. 11).

How the fear of women influences the role of women in society is explored.

Further, Chapter 4 points out the conflicting societal perceptions of women. Society has different expectations for how males and females ought to think, act, and respond. Beginning in early childhood, boys and girls are socialized differently through play. In *Failing at Fairness: How our Schools Cheat Girls*, Myra and David Sadker (1994) establish that:

Playing with building blocks and transportation toys increases spatial skills, an area where boys later excel. Meanwhile, doll play encourages nurturance, interpersonal skills, and caring for babies- traditionally female domains. (p. 255)

Not only does research establish that playthings later contribute to educational interests and performance in school as discussed by the Sadkers, but how children are socialized to play also reifies society’s expectations for males and females. Through nurturing play, young girls are taught that they are expected to be quiet, passive, and caring. To be otherwise is unladylike. Consequently, I argue that it is through the societal expectations that females are to remain passive and docile that insinuates to young girls that they must attack one another through covert means to maintain a proper societal image, thus contributing to the salience of socially aggressive trends among female students.

Also explored in Chapter 4 is the role of social media in today’s society as it contributes to social aggression. Text messaging and cyberbullying have become popular

in our age of technological advances, adding to the repertoire of young girls more advanced methods of attacking their peers. Beale and Hall (2007) point out that:

Cyberbullying is emerging as one of the most challenging issues facing parents and school personnel as students embrace the Internet and other mobile communication technologies. Believing they are free from attribution, cyberbullies engage in cruel and harmful practices that demean, embarrass, and hurt fellow students without the fear of facing the consequences for their actions. (p. 12)

The instantaneous nature of text messaging and internet social networks allows hurtful comments to spew without precaution. The wait time that used to linger and create an opportunity for feelings to mend after a cross exchange of words between young girls has become obsolete. Now, anger and aggression are perpetuated by exacerbating the hurt through hateful and ostracizing means of technological tools which create an opportunity to react immediately without considering the impending damage. Chat room avatars conceal identities. Such anonymity emboldens aggressors to act inconspicuously, even those who would not aggress publically. Victims are dehumanized in cyber world, though the hurt is real and has even led to suicide. Since female students use their relationships with others as weapons to bully, they are more likely than male students to engage in cyberbullying where social networking has become a popular tool for communicating with their peers (Keith & Martin, 2005).

Chapter 5 explores the influence of schools on social aggression, discussing in particular how the hidden curriculum of schools contributes to aggression within the school setting by the limitation of relationships between teachers and students while

under the pressure of high stakes testing. Julie Webber (2003) tells us that many fail to recognize the hidden curriculum, “an abstract term that describes the real conditions of acting and thinking in consumerist and democratic society” (p. 3). The pressure of high stakes tests and teacher accountability, notably influenced by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, reduce the amount of social interactions allowed by students in the school setting. Consequently, many students miss the opportunity to develop meaningful personal relationships with others.

In conclusion, Chapter 5 culminates the study by addressing the educational implications of social aggression and offers suggestions for lessening its occurrence in the school setting by fostering personal attachments among female students with their peers and teachers. In addition, questions raised from this research are discussed as potential topics for further research on the topic of social aggression among female students. Perhaps the best method for educators in combating social aggression is to see beyond the state mandates that stifle relationships with their students. It is imperative that our youth establish relationships with adults whom they can trust. Through mentoring, talking with, and establishing rapport with students, educators develop a level of trust which encourages students to seek help with social aggression. To see beyond the daily demands of teaching the curriculum is vital. Taubman (2009) tells us that while standardization is intended to render groups with diversities as similar, it actually creates a hierarchy of differences and inequalities due to many disparities among students. When student identities are reduced to test scores, students are dehumanized, undervalued, and lack the personal relationships that they crave. Accountability in education drives

competition and squelches relationships, thus serving as a catalyst in the school setting for influencing socially aggressive tendencies.

Within the school setting, educators must establish bonds with students for them to thrive. According to Winnicott (1964) relating to others is foundational and begins with one's mother in the womb. I contend that relationships between teachers and students are necessary in the school setting, as well, for continued success. Winnicott (1986) states that "what must be emphasized, however, is the absolute difference that there is in your attitude when you are responsible for general management and when you are in a personal relationship with a child" (p. 96). The mindset of teachers must move beyond simply managing their classes to getting to know and establishing relationships with their students. Such bonds pave the way for conversations about social aggression, allowing adolescent girls permission to openly engage in conflict resolution in a constructive manner.

## CHAPTER II

### RESEARCH ON BULLYING AND SOCIAL AGGRESSION

Discourse revolving around bullying within the school setting has predominantly focused upon physical aggression. Early researchers of bullying believed that boys were more aggressive than girls; however, this perception was skewed by the lack of research into the covert forms of aggression commonly employed by girls (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). The overt nature of physical aggression causes it to be more visible than social forms of victimization which are frequently subtle and go unnoticed. Consequently, the vast majority of research and literature devoted to bullying have been specific to physical aggression that is more often visible among male students, attracting even more attention to the means of physical aggression. Further, highly publicized cases of school violence most often involve physical harm or death of those involved. Empirical studies lend support to the prevalence of physical aggression among male students, whereas relational aggression is more prevalent among female students (Olweus, 1993; Pipher, 1994; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002, Crick, Casas & Nelson, 2002). By focusing upon the physical, that which is easier to observe, much has been left undiscovered about the forces that perpetuate alternative forms of aggression. Furthermore, the limited research into social aggression among female students has been forced to take a backseat to the physical aggression and school violence which have taken front and center stage within the context of bullying.

The review of related literature begins with a brief history of school violence in the United States to provide a historical context for this research. Next, research on bullying is presented as it is often encountered within the school setting and is commonly

attributed to cases of school violence. Notably, differences in bullying tendencies among male and female students more specifically narrow the focus of this literature review to that of the adolescent female experience. The literature further indicates that relational aggression does not stop once a female becomes an adult. Instead, relational aggression continues beyond childhood and adolescence into adulthood and often has a negative impact upon the lives of women, thus perpetuating a societal trend that began in their early childhood during the formative years of psyche development. The review of literature identifies several common themes in studies of female aggression: biological factors, female relationships, and societal influences. Finally, the culmination of the review of relevant literature distinguishes the significance of studying social aggression among females separately from studies of aggression among males.

### History of School Violence in the United States

School violence is a vast and complex topic which encompasses the extremes of aggression. Most often school violence refers to serious injury or death on school property. While violence on school grounds has been closely linked to incidents of bullying that garnered national attention, such was not always the case. Documented cases of school violence in the United States date back to 1927 when the Bath Consolidated School in Bath Township, Michigan was bombed with dynamite by a school board member, Andrew Kehoe. Upset that his property taxes had increased to pay for the new school, Kehoe's violence took the lives of 45 people that day, most of them children. Eighty four years later, this case remains the worst act of school violence in American history. Although this incident was not student initiated, it was directed at

students within the school setting, thus paving the way for future incidents of violence to take place on school grounds. The perception of safe school environments was forever disrupted. Believed to be an isolated incident, measures were not taken in those days to prevent further violence on school property (ProQuest Staff, 2010).

While sporadic incidents of school violence continued in the years following the Bath tragedy, it was not until American schools suffered a rash of shootings in the 1990's that public concern was ignited in the United States. The Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990 was passed to make the possession or discharge of a firearm within 1000 feet of school property a crime. Sadly, school violence itself had yet to peek in the United States at that time. The late 1990's brought one school shooting after another to American schools. Incidents in Pearl, Mississippi, West Paducah, Kentucky, and Jonesboro, Arkansas were just a few cases of students shooting their peers and teachers at school and raising public insecurity with regard to school safety. On April 20, 1999, two students at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado shot and killed twelve students, one teacher, and later themselves (ProQuest Staff, 2010). This act of violence had an unprecedented influence upon school security and zero tolerance policies across the nation.

The Columbine High School massacre, as well as other cases of school shootings, became widely publicized. Americans wrought with grief, fear, and outrage questioned why students were killing their peers. A number of possible explanations were proposed in search of an answer. "The motives gave the public and outside target onto which it could transfer its distress" (Webber, 2003, p. 18). Violence in video games and music



were questioned as causes of desensitization to violence which was believed to have led to school shootings. Also linked to school violence was a common wearing of Goth attire and trench coats by some of the school shooters, prompting speculation of this subculture of youth. In some cases, it was reported that the school shooters had been bullied themselves and acted in retaliation for their own victimization at school. While all of these explanations satisfied the media frenzy for answers, alleviating bullying in schools became a major focus for preventing acts of school violence.

The rampage of school shooters shed a new light on bullying among students. Profiles of school shooters were studied to determine whether or not their own victimization had prompted such violence against peers. According to Webber (2003), “After Columbine, the school became the locus of intervention, but when the critical gaze turned inward it was not the school that was examined, it was the student body” (p. 189). During that time, bullying became a topic of interest for parents, educators, and legislators. The bloodshed and shock associated with school shootings and physical violence puts into perspective the reasons why indirect aggression has been overlooked as a form of bullying. Nonetheless, the catastrophic effects of indirect aggression demand our attention as well, as young girls have fallen victim to social aggression and have taken their own lives. Much like the suicides of the young boys that prompted Olweus’ initial study of bullying, we have seen tragedies and high profile cases associated with social aggression come to the forefront of the media.

## Social Aggression in the Media

Perhaps one of the most shocking cases of social aggression took place in cyber world and resulted in the suicide of Megan Meier in October 2006. Meier was a 13 year-old student who was a victim of cyberbullying at the hands of an adult female, Lori Drew. Drew posed as a teenage boy to gain the affection of Meier, but later Drew turned on Meier, telling her on the social networking website MySpace that the world would be a better place without her. Meier killed herself soon after. Miners (2009) explained that “During the trial, prosecutors portrayed Drew as working in concert with her daughter, who was characterized as Meier’s nemesis” (p. 12). Drew’s daughter, Sarah, was not charged in the case. Consequently, Drew was only charged with three misdemeanor charges of computer fraud for misrepresenting herself in the online profile which violated MySpace’s terms of service. The case brought national attention to the detrimental effects of cyberbullying and social aggression.

While Goth culture was linked to school violence in the media, it was the “Oprichniki” of Miss Porter’s School who garnered national attention on female cliques in the media. Well known as the exclusive all-girls boarding school in Farmington, Connecticut, Miss Porter’s School is revered for having such elite graduates as Jacqueline Kennedy and Gloria Vanderbilt. In 2008, Miss Porter’s School received attention of a different kind when student Tatum Bass, a South Carolina native, and her parents filed a federal lawsuit against the school when the school threatened to expel her for cheating. Bass claimed that the cheating was a result of emotional distress related from being bullied. “The bullying came at school dances and in class, on Facebook and back at the

dorm by girls who called themselves ‘Oprichniki,’ a Russian attack squad notorious for torturing suspected enemies of a 16<sup>th</sup> –century czar” (Reitz, 2008, ¶ 1). Bass reported that the girls called her names and insulted her because of her attention-deficit disorder. The bullying began as a result of her proposing that the school’s senior prom be held with other nearby schools. Many in opposition to the idea began to taunt and tease Bass, even putting a “For Rent” sign on her bed. Bass was advised by doctors to take a break due to the emotional stress caused by the taunting. Fortunately, Bass sought the help of her parents rather than taking her own life.

The cases of Megan Meier and Tatum Bass are only two incidents of social aggression that shocked our nation and gained media attention. The fact that an adult, specifically a mother of teenage girls, was behind the Megan Meier case is beyond comprehension, yet it serves as a powerful example of the continuation of social aggression into adulthood. The “Oprichniki” of Miss Porter’s School demonstrated that the prestige and heritage of the 165-year-old school did not exclude it from social aggression, even among students whose affluent parents pay nearly \$43,000 annually for tuition (Reitz, 2008). These and other cases of aggression affirm that bullying knows no boundaries and implores the necessity of further research. A closer look at bullying research, which began with studies of physical aggression, will better situate our understanding and bring us to the relatively new field of research into social aggression.

### Bullying Research

Bullying among children and adolescents is not a new occurrence. “Themes in classic literature and memories of students throughout the decades attest to the common

presence of intimidation, threat, abuse, and bullying of students by other peers” (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999, p. 341). While bullying has been around for ages, little attention was focused on it until relatively recently. Psychologist Dan Olweus orchestrated a systematic study of the bully phenomenon in his native Sweden in the 1970s (Juvonen & Graham, 2001). Although pivotal in studies of bullying behaviors, Olweus’ research was limited to male subjects. Olweus (1978) recorded the results of his study in his popular book entitled *Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys*. Soon after, Olweus expanded his research to include Norway and other Scandinavian countries that had taken interest in regaining a peaceful educational environment for their youth. Unfortunately, it was tragedy that prompted action. Following the suicides of three 10 to 14-year-old boys in Norway in 1982 as a result of bullying by peers, a national campaign against bullying ensued in Norwegian schools (Olweus, 1993). With attention turned to the outward aggression of males, females were overlooked and excluded from these studies.

In comparison to other nations, the United States lags behind in the battle against bullying in our schools. Marano (1995) suggests that:

It’s possible that bullying is not the same in all the world’s cultures and that American children suffer more severely at the hands of bullies—a suggestion borne out of the fact that bullies register less popular with peers here, especially as they get older, than they do in Scandinavia. There may be an intensity to bullying here that does not exist elsewhere. Dominance may be more valued; competition more accepted. Victimization may be more extreme. This intensity

has many observers worried because violence is worsening in the U.S. and other countries. (p. 54)

The prevalence of physical aggression and school violence in the United States has become a hot topic in recent years. Just as the suicides of the three teenage boys in Norway prompted action, highly publicized cases of school violence in the United States drew attention to bullying and Americans could no longer overlook it. The unsettling fact that our students had resorted to killing each other in cold blood within their own school settings was a testament to the pressures that students felt by peers. However, little had been done proactively to protect them from one another. Harachi, Catalano, and Hawkins (1999) attested at that time that “while the media and literature have focused specifically on the topic of bullying, bullying has not received widespread attention in educational programming or in the scientific literature as a specific problem issue to address” (p. 282). All of that changed post-Columbine as attention turned to violence within the schools. Whether or not bullying had played a role in school shootings became a widely debated topic that increased public awareness (Seals & Young, 2003). America took notice and began to seek answers.

As a nation, Americans seemed to be in denial of the severity of bullying and aggression among our youth. This denial was evidenced in part by the fact that our nation lacked a standard definition of bullying. Olweus’ (1978) original definition of a bully was “a boy who fairly often oppresses or harasses somebody else; the target may be boys or girls, the harassment physical or mental” (p. 35). Olweus (1993) has since modified this definition to include both males and females as aggressors by concluding that “a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and

over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students”(p. 9). Harachi et al. (1999) remind us that most references to bullying by Americans have hinged on work by Olweus, but few include two key elements of Olweus’ definition: “(1) that bullying behavior occurs repeatedly over time, and (2) that there is a power imbalance between the bully and the victim” (p. 281). In regard to varying definitions, “most converge on the notion that bullying behavior can be either physical or psychological” (Bosworth, et al, 1999, p. 342). However, without a clear and consistent definition of bullying, many bullying incidents go unrecognized by educators as such, particularly the guile method of socially isolating peers that is more common among most female aggressors. Meanwhile, our students suffer the consequences.

In the 1970s when Olweus and other Scandinavian researchers began looking at bullying issues, the social aggression displayed among young girls was not deemed as important as the physical aggression common among the male students. The suicide cases that prompted Olweus to embark on his research all involved young males, creating a whirlwind around the psychological effects of male aggression. In recent years, bullying has come to the forefront of educational discussions in the United States as a reported factor in incidents of school violence. Much literature dedicated to bullying is presented as a how-to guide in bullying prevention and is intended to serve as a tool for educators in reducing the predominance of bullying within the school setting. Even with the vast amount of bullying literature available, the information devoted specifically to social aggression of female students is limited. Cullerton-Sen and Crick (2005) acknowledge the need to look more closely at aggression among female students by stating that “Researchers have found that assessing only overt and more general forms of peer

harassment results in the failure to identify subgroups of victimized children, particularly relationally victimized girls” (p. 148). By focusing upon experiences common to female students, the review of empirical research and relevant literature points out the reality of relational victimization among female students and attests to the need for further research.

### Empirical Research on Indirect Aggression

Studies on relational aggression and victimization have been examined from a variety of perspectives. Some studies have researched bullying and/or relational victimization by utilizing quantitative methods that involve surveys, questionnaires, and/or rating scales to report statistical findings (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Grotpeter & Crick, 1996; Cullerton-Sen & Crick, 2005). Others researchers have examined aggression through qualitative methods consisting of observations or interviews with victims, aggressors, teachers, and/or any combination of these. In some studies, a mixed methods approach which combined both quantitative and qualitative research designs was utilized (Cairns & Cairns, 1984; Crothers, Field & Kolbert, 2005; Ostrov, Gentile & Crick, 2006). In most cases, such studies were conducted to establish that differences in female and male aggression do, in fact, exist. A number of studies on bullying among students have indicated the prevalence of covert or indirect aggression among female students as opposed to the overt physical aggression common among male students. While the findings and limitations of these studies are explored in greater detail to establish a background for the field of research in indirect aggression, the methodology of this study is theoretical in nature and differs by using psychoanalytic theories as a lens for interpreting the phenomenon of socially aggressive behaviors among female students.

### *Quantitative Research*

As the Director of the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota, Nicki Crick is a forerunner in the field of research on relational and physical peer victimization. Crick and her peers have written a variety of articles to share the findings of their empirical research. Some of the earliest research conducted on relational aggression by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) found that relational aggression was salient among girls in middle childhood. Prior to their study, most research into aggression indicated that boys were more aggressive than girls. Crick and Grotpeter hypothesized that boys appeared to be more aggressive because prior research had not studied the covert forms of aggression that are common among girls, causing girls to appear less aggressive. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) explain “the paucity of research on girls’ aggression may exist partly because of the complexity and subtleness of the behaviors involved, characteristics that make them more difficult to study than overt aggression” (p. 719). Consequently, they studied gender differences in relational aggression with a sample of 491 third through sixth grade students. Along with a peer nomination instrument, a variety of rating scales were also utilized to look at the correlations among relational aggression, gender, and social-psychological adjustment. The results of this study provided supporting evidence that relational aggression is more salient among girls. In addition, Crick and Grotpeter (1995) pointed out that:

Findings from the self-report social-psychological adjustment instruments provide further evidence that relational aggression is significantly related to maladjustment (e.g., depression, loneliness, social isolation). These findings indicate that relationally aggressive children feel unhappy and distressed about



their peer relationships. (p. 720)

Because of the significance of social-psychological maladjustments as related to relational aggression, Crick and Grotpeter indicated the need for future longitudinal studies in this area. Due to the linking of social-psychological maladjustments to relational aggression, this research is particularly insightful to the present psychoanalytic study into social aggression among female students as it lends support to its detrimental effects.

Additional research by Grotpeter and Crick (1996) utilized quantitative measures to study the qualities of children's friendships in conjunction with relational and overt aggression through self-report instruments with 315 nine to twelve year-olds. They found stark differences between relationally and overtly aggressive children as it pertains to friendships. Grotpeter and Crick (1996) found that:

Unlike relationally aggressive children, who reported relatively high levels of aggression *within* the dyadic, friendship context, overtly aggressive children (regardless of whether their friends were nonaggressive) reported using aggression together with their friends to harm those *outside* the friendship.

(p. 2337)

Friendships among children may not provide satisfaction in the relationship if friends are the victims of relational aggression, or if they are pulled into aggressive acts as established among those who were overtly aggressive. This study attests to the need for further research into peer relationships to better understand how they are used in aggressive situations.

Quantitative research was also utilized by Seals and Young (2003) who surveyed 454 public school students in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades to investigate a prevalence of bullying and victimization, as well as explore the relationship of bullying and victimization to gender, grade level, ethnicity, self-esteem, and depression. Their findings indicated that twice as many male students were identified as bullies, and more seventh than eighth graders were involved. “Additionally, both male and female bullies who bullied alone tended to target victims of the same gender. However, more females than males were involved in mixed-gender group bullying” (Seals & Young, 2003, pp. 744-745). The most prevalent form of bullying identified through this research was verbal name calling. They found no significant differences between ethnicities and bullying tendencies. With regard to depression, the findings of Seals and Young support other findings that while depression is reportedly higher among victims, bullies also report depression. A limitation to this study is that it only included students from two grades. Seals and Young suggest further research with a cross-sectional study of students in all grade levels.

Cullerton-Sen and Crick (2005) analyzed the physical and relational victimization of 119 fourth grade boys and girls through self-reports, peer reports, and teacher reports. This study was significant in that it sought to understand the perspective of teachers with regard to relational victimization among students. Cullerton-Sen and Crick (2005) state:

Findings indicate that teacher reports of relational victimization are not only distinct from teacher reports of physical victimization (as well as self-and peer reports of victimization), but are also uniquely related to children’s adjustment problems, particularly their experiences of peer rejection, internalizing, and externalizing difficulties. (p. 155)

The teacher reports used in this study were predictive in determining the social-emotional adjustment of the students who were victimized, providing evidence of the importance of teacher's perspectives when assessing physical and relational victimization. Further, this research was consistent with other research on gender differences and aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) which identified relational victimization as more salient among girls.

### *Mixed Methods Research*

Cairns and Cairns (1984) used a mixed methods, longitudinal approach to predict aggressive patterns in girls and boys as they conducted individual interviews, teacher ratings, peer nominations, and behavior observations over a one year period with 174 children. They found the highest level of predictability among two measures of the same type. For example, teacher ratings in one grade were the best indicators for teacher ratings in the next grade, although there were different teachers involved. Similar findings of predictability were apparent with the self-ratings and peer nominations. With regard to gender, Cairns and Cairns (1984) state that "According to prevailing societal norms, fighting can often enhance attractiveness in males, while producing the opposite effect in females" (pp. 239-240). They go on to say that "It seems therefore reasonable to expect that highly aggressive behavior in preadolescence constitutes an essential stepping stone for later deviance, particularly among girls" (Cairns & Cairns, 1984, p. 240).

Crothers, Field, and Kolbert (2005) researched the relationship between gender role identity and relational aggression among fifty-two adolescent girls. In addition to using the Relational Aggression Scale and the Bem Sex-Role Inventory with the girls, they completed the research with focus group interviews. The fear of social abandonment was identified as a concern among the respondents. "Numerous respondents noted that

their female peers often capitalize upon this fear of social abandonment to obtain power by threatening exclusion from the group” (Crothers et al., 2005, p. 352). Further, most of the girls reported that they used indirect methods of conflict management such as deception, triangulation (involving another peer in the conflict) or avoiding conflict to avoid disconnectedness in their peer relationships. “In summary, this sample of adolescent girls seemed to believe that femininity restricts options for conflict management either to the use of relational aggression or to the suppression of wants and feelings” (Crothers et al., 2005, p. 353). Their findings concluded that societal views of what is acceptable feminine behavior have been imposed upon adolescent girls, resulting in a predominance of indirect aggression among females. Through indirect and covert means, girls are able to hide their aggression from adults and society in general, while still exerting power among their peers. Further, Crothers et al. (2005) asserted that “adolescent girls in this study defined the only other available option as avoiding conflict and repressing their emotions, describing such an approach as damaging to their psyches” (p. 353). This study not only supports the belief that societal gender roles perpetuate relational aggression among females, but it also attests to the impact that relational aggression has upon the developing psyches of young girls. Noted limitations to this research include a lack of established reliability with the Relational Aggression Scale, the need for a more diverse sample of adolescent girls of color, and a lack of data regarding the socioeconomic variables that may be a factor in predicting relational aggression.

#### Literature on the Adolescent Female Experience

While the empirical data presented lends support to the existence of indirect, relational, and social aggression among female students, it fails to offer insight into the

overall lived experiences of female students. Prefacing this study was the need to better understand the contribution of schools and society to the development of the adolescent female's psyche. Authors Peggy Orenstein and Mary Pipher each provide literature that is beneficial in this regard. While their books do not specifically address tendencies in female bullying behaviors, they both explore challenges faced by adolescent females that negatively affect social and psychological development, thus feeding into the pattern of relational aggression, and making their research worthy of inclusion in this study.

In 1994, Peggy Orenstein wrote *SchoolGirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* after being influenced by the 1991 national poll conducted by the American Association of University Women entitled *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*. Findings of the poll revealed unequivocal experiences in the education and socialization of female and male students, resulting in a decline in the confidence of young women to pursue more challenging careers paths. Orenstein (1994) tells us that “our culture devalues both women and the qualities which it projects onto us, such as nurturance, cooperation, and intuition. It has taught us to undervalue ourselves” (xix). Consequently, Orenstein set out to explore the gendered experiences of adolescent females by immersing herself into their lives for a year. Through interviews, observations, group interactions, and daily involvement in their school lives, Orenstein worked with over one hundred and fifty young girls, specifically profiling six of them, in two separate middle schools during 1993-1994. The anecdotal reporting of Orenstein's work with young girls brings to light the feelings of adolescent girls and their sense of constraint in the quest to achieve. Her findings scaffold interest in the lives of adolescent

girls by providing supportive research into the difference of the socialized gendered experiences of females.

These differences in social experiences as described by Orenstein (1994) are contributors to the covert manner in which female students demonstrate aggression. The subtle devaluation of female competition and achievement becomes ingrained in young girls, causing them to publicly suppress their natural competitive human nature. As such, covert manners of bullying through social aggression become a way in which girls feel they can compete without adults knowing and disapproving.

Mary Pipher's (1994) book, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, was also pivotal in this research by presenting the adolescent experiences of young girls. Pipher (1994) likens the vulnerability of adolescent girls to "saplings in a hurricane" (p. 8) by examining the loss of self to the individual, cultural, and developmental factors that contribute to the despondence of the adolescent female experience. Throughout her career as a therapist for adolescent girls, Pipher became acutely aware of the cultural changes over time and how those changes began to rob adolescents of what used to be a childhood. Consequently, she describes the plague of eating disorders, sexual assaults, drug and alcohol use, and pressures that place demands upon young girls. While female bullying is not the main topic of this book, and Pipher only briefly discusses female bullying as it relates to adolescent females and their peer relationships, she does present a picture of the female adolescent experience that is meaningful and resourceful in the course of this research. Through her insightful research and understanding of societal pressures, Pipher explains how such pressures placed upon

adolescent girls causes them to be torn between their authentic self and the false self that they become in order to be socially accepted. Pipher (1994) contends:

Authenticity is an “owning” of all experience, including emotions and thoughts that are not socially acceptable. Because self-esteem is based on the acceptance of all thoughts and feelings as one’s own, girls lose confidence as they “disown” themselves. They suffer enormous losses when they stop expressing certain thoughts and feelings. (p. 27)

With regard to social aggression, this research provides a backdrop of knowledge into the social lives of girls and contributes to a better understanding of the prevalence of social aggression among females. Further, societal pressures impact development of the adolescent female psyche as the struggle between the authentic and true self ensues. The authentic self experiences aggression very naturally, but the false self tells young girls that it’s not acceptable for the aggression to be seen by others, frequently resulting in covert social aggression that is hidden from the condemning eye of society.

#### Literature on Social Aggression among Adolescent Females

Although researchers of bullying overlooked the female experience for far too long, some thirty years after Olweus initiated his research on male aggressors, several notable contributions were made in the studies of female aggression. In her book, *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*, Rachel Simmons (2002) explains the context of covert aggression in the following statement:

There is a hidden culture of girls’ aggression in which bullying is epidemic, distinctive, and destructive. It is not marked by the direct physical and verbal behavior that is primarily the province of boys. Our culture refuses girls access

to open conflict, and it forces their aggression into nonphysical, indirect, and covert forms. Girls use backbiting, exclusion, rumors, name-calling, and manipulation to inflict psychological pain on targeted victims. Unlike boys, who tend to bully acquaintances or strangers, girls frequently attack within tightly knit networks of friends, making aggression harder to identify and intensifying the damage to the victims. (p. 3)

To better understand alternative forms of aggression among female students, Simmons immersed herself into their culture. Her research consisted of extended visits to ten different schools in three different parts of the country within the span of a year. These schools were from all academic levels- elementary, middle, and high schools- and represented student populations with a range of economic and racial demographics. By visiting classrooms to host group discussions, as well as conducting individual interviews, Simmons found that girls were eager to share their own experiences with bullying. Her disappointment over the course of the research was that no parent shared stories of a daughter who bullied. Simmons (2002) stated, “Silence is a second skin for American families” (p. 205). This silence demonstrates a lack of knowledge or a pattern of denial among parents when it comes to aggressive tendencies among their daughters.

While physical forms of aggression are more typical of males, females tend to use relational or social aggression to bully their peers (Olweus, 1993; Pipher, 1994; Jack, 1999; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002; Chesler, 2003). Walking the halls of every school are female aggressors whose tendencies to bully through covert means go unnoticed. Bullying among females tends to go against the norm that society has established – that girls are made of sugar and spice and everything



nice. Simmons (2002) argues that “the sugar-and-spice image is powerful, and girls know it” (p. 23). Female aggressors often use this image to their advantage when confronted about their behavior by coyly smiling, all the while denying any allegation of wrongdoing.

In addition to Simmons’ (2002) work, another eye-opening book that sheds light on the hidden aggression of adolescent females is *Queen Bees and Wannabes: A Parent’s Guide to Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and Other Realities of Adolescence* (2002), written by Rosalind Wiseman. Wiseman (2002) contends that “every girl I know has been hurt by her girlfriends” (p. 2). Wiseman, the co-founder and president of the Empower Program, spent ten years teaching and listening to adolescent girls prior to writing this book. While she explains the cultural factors that influence covert aggression, she also points out the role that girls themselves play in the cycle of social aggression. She declared that:

Our culture teaches girls a very dangerous and confusing code of behavior about what constitutes ‘appropriate’ feminine behavior (i.e., you should be sexy, but not slutty; you should be independent, but you’re no one without a boyfriend). We like to blame the media and boys for enforcing this code, but we overlook the girls themselves as the enforcers. (Wiseman, 2002, p. 13)

Unlike the context of synthesized information obtained through her interviews with adolescent females in Simmons’ (2002) book, Wiseman speaks specifically to parents, teachers and caregivers, providing suggestions for improving communication with adolescent girls by offering an empathetic understanding of their experiences and a peek inside of their conflicted world.

Aggressive behaviors among girls in middle childhood were first studied because of the belief that peer relationships peak during that developmental stage. Greener and Crick (1999) point out that:

Behaviors that initiate and maintain relationships may very well increase in importance for children in middle childhood as the transition is made from dependence on the family, where social expectations prescribe the acceptance and belongingness of members of the kin group, to greater reliance on the peer groups, where members were less obligated to accept others. (p. 351)

Pipher (1994) agrees that adolescent girls shift from having a desire to please their parents to one of seeking peer acceptance. “While peers can be satisfying and growth-producing, they can also be growth-destroying, especially in early adolescence” (Pipher, 1994, p. 66). Consequently, peer relationships play an important role in the psychosocial development of young girls because of the value that girls place upon relationships. Rather than diminish the potential for relational victimization as one would expect when relationships are valued, girls are keenly aware of their connectedness to other girls and use it as a method of aggression.

#### Literature on Social Aggression among Women

Patterns of aggression among females often do not end with adolescence. Dellasega (2005) tells us that “when there is a persistent failure to bond, to be heard, and to be understood, girls learn unhealthy relational patterns that can last into adulthood” (p. 11). As women continue to interact socially and professionally with other women, disparaging behavior towards one another commonly arises. In many cases, women

encounter other women in the workplace where competition is at its peak. Social aggression will often rear its ugly head, yet again, in adulthood as a force of aggression that women are familiar with from their childhood days. Dellasega contends that “while the battleground shifts from school hallways to coffee rooms and carpools, aggression among women in adulthood still uses relationships rather than fists to deliver blows” (p. 78). By adulthood, many women have become skilled at social aggression and use it to their advantage in the workplace by sabotaging other women. Women use betrayal, manipulation, and the spreading of rumors to interfere with the success of other women.

Social aggression in the workplace also undermines the advancement of women and supports the existing patriarchal system. With regard to the workplace, Heim, Murphy, and Golant (2003) state that “Clearly, female bickering is incredibly costly to us. In order to avoid such hassles, some women choose to hide their talents, which may thwart their advancement” (p. 12). Not only are some women’s talents lost in the drama of relational aggression, but the constant chaos that encompasses this manner of bullying creates a negative stigma about working with women, providing a stepping stone for men to continue their climb to the top within the work setting.

Phyllis Chesler’s *Woman’s Inhumanity to Woman* (2003) also focuses upon the aggression that females direct at one another, but notably different from the works of Simmons (2002), Wiseman (2002), Dellasega (2005), and Heim et al.(2001). Rather than specifically focusing upon females during childhood and adolescence, or female aggression in the workplace, Chesler broadens the spectrum by considering women’s aggression toward one another as documented through hundreds of interviews with

women, in addition to her in-depth studies of women in familial relationships, animal interactions, other cultures, and literary depictions of females. While Chesler identifies and acknowledges aggression among females, she points out that many women are offended by this topic, particularly feminists, because they believe it to be oppressive to women by focusing upon women sabotaging one another instead of sharing the positive view of women's relationships that build women up. Chesler experienced a negative reaction firsthand when she asked a feminist friend of hers to read the manuscript of her book. Her friend did not want to read the book as she believed that Chesler should instead be writing about how men oppress women. It took months for her friend to understand that Chesler's intention was not to further oppress women but, to point out in many ways, that women participate in their own oppression in relation to other women. Consequently, it is an important topic for women to understand in order to overcome its detrimental effects. Chesler (2003) declares:

Psychologically, seemingly contradictory things can be true. Women mainly compete against other women and women mainly rely upon other women; women envy and sabotage each other through slander, gossip, and shunning, and women also want other women's respect and support. Once we learn how to think 'in opposites,' certain things become clear- including what a woman can do in order to either bond with, or disconnect from, another women with integrity and objectivity. (x)

Although the format and specifics of her research are broader and presented differently, Chesler's research into female aggression intends to equip females with a better understanding of a covert manner of aggression that must be fought, sending the same

message to women as others who have written about female aggression towards one another (Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002; Dellasega, 2005; Heim et al., 2001).

### Common Themes in Studies of Female Aggression

While reviewing studies related to aggression among females, several common themes surfaced. The influence of biological factors, those factors which are a part of one's genetic make-up and innately compose our being, was a common theme used to explain differences in female and male aggressive tendencies. The importance that females place upon relationships is another frequently occurring theme in literature pertaining to female aggression. Finally, the societal influences of gender expectations that are imposed upon females and males in the society in which we live, beginning in infancy, are often included in studies that establish differences in female and male aggression.

#### *Biological Factors*

Many studies in aggression point out the biological factors that influence differences in aggressive tendencies among females and males. Heim et al. (2001) point out the biological differences in babies' perception at birth, noting that female babies show more interest in people by looking at their faces for longer periods of time than male babies. Further, language acquisition and fluency are developed earlier in girls than boys, providing young girls with a repertoire of verbal skills to use to their advantage at an early age as they begin to develop social circles.

Hormonal differences among males and females have also been included in studies of aggression. While it was once believed that both males and females engaged in

a fight or flight response when presented with a dangerous situation, such is not the case as supported by the research of Dr. Shelley Taylor. With regard to Taylor's research findings, Dellasega (2005) concludes "Her work suggests that female hormones such as oxytocin make women more likely to show a friend-seeking response during times of stress" (p. 22). Oxytocin is a hormone that is often associated with uterine contractions in labor and is released in mothers as they nurse their infants. Further, sexual activity and orgasm produce oxytocin in both females and males. Yet, differences in the effects of oxytocin on females and males have been noted.

The effects of oxytocin are strongly modulated by estrogen, which of course circulates at much higher levels in females than in males. In fact, the androgens (especially testosterone and vasopressin) that males possess in abundance have been shown to inhibit oxytocin release under stressful conditions. (Heim et al., 2001, p. 81)

Taylor's (2003) research indicates that the effect of oxytocin on the female species, the mother of the infant, helps to keep the mother calm in stressful situations. This response functions as a safety measure to protect the infant by keeping the mother from fighting or fleeing in stressful situations (the fight or flight response), both of which could put the infant in harm's way. Oxytocin in females produces a "tend and befriend" impulse, as noted by Taylor (2003), in that females in stressful situations are more apt to calmly care for their children and seek female support during such times. Taylor (2006) further explained that "estrogen strongly enhances the effects of oxytocin, which is also consistent with a greater role for oxytocin in women's behavior than in men's" (p. 76),

offering support of the belief that oxytocin is influential in the affiliative behaviors of females.

### *Female Relationships*

Recognizing the importance of relationships to females is a major theme that surfaces in studies of relational aggression. “Girls are social beings who need to belong. Studies suggest that girls have a greater need for dyadic and expressive interpersonal intimacy than boys do and are more adept, sooner, at engaging in it” (Chesler, 2003, p. 80). Dellasega (2005) concurs that “women of all ages develop their identities in the context of relationships. Who they are and how they feel about themselves often come from friendships and partnerships” (p. 21). Throughout life, females seek social connections with others and place great value upon those relationships (Miller, 1976; Chodorow, 1978, Gilligan, 1982; Orenstein, 1994; Simmons, 2002; Chesler, 2003; Dellasega, 2005). Females most often come to define themselves through their relationships with others as daughters, sisters, mothers, and wives.

The significance of relationships to females renders vulnerability when it comes to social aggression. According to Jack (1999), “For both girls and women, the goal of aggressive activity is to restructure the relationship and thereby affect the persons within it” (p. 45). Through social exclusion, name calling, and the spreading of rumors, relationships are manipulated in an aggressive nature. For this reason, the study of female aggression warrants recognition of the importance of relationships to females. Rebecca Martusewicz (2001) explained that:

Even given the dissociated and often rivalrous nature of girls' relationships with each other, the identities that get made are often contradictory and far from simply subjugated in relation to boys. While it often results in hurtful effects, this dynamic relationship among girls also includes the articulation of compassion, loyalty, care, and even activism that is central to the unity of the group and to the strength of girls' ethical development. (p. 92)

This passage by Martusewicz reminds us of the importance in gaining understanding of the experiences of girls, including their tendency to value relationships, without reducing the experiences of girls to the mere subjugation of males. Due to the different social expectations placed upon girls and boys, they undergo very different experiences within our culture. Lamb (2001) articulates this well as she describes girl friendships as a “performance of femininity” whereby “girls like best friendships for the intimacy and connection they provide, but girls also *feel the need to create* best friendships because they are trying to be girls, trying to be normal, and doing what their mothers and the culture expect them to do” (p. 193). Through the construction and maintenance of friendships, girls fulfill their own personal need for relationships, as well as the cultural expectation that they will connect with others to fulfill their feminine role within society.

For girls, the best way to pose harm is by threatening or actually posing damage to a relationship. Simmons (2002) contends that “the centrality of relationship in girls’ lives all but guarantees a different landscape of aggression and bullying, with its own distinctive features worthy of separate study” (p. 30). Due to the very different ways in which girls are socialized to connect with and nurture others, female relationships are commonly included in research on social aggression to justify the need to study female



aggression separately from the physically aggressive tendencies of their male counterparts.

### *Societal Expectations*

Another common theme that surfaces in aggression research is how male and female children are socialized differently according to societal expectations for their gender. “Although we live in the same society, males and females are actually raised in unique and distinct cultures” (Heim et al, 2001, p. 86). Overall, girls are treated more delicately by adults, whereas boys are roughhoused and expected to be tough. Studies have also concluded that male students receive more attention from teachers in school than female students, contributing to their overall academic success and higher scores on standardized tests (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Orenstein (1994) states that “our culture devalues both women and the qualities which it projects onto us, such as nurturance, cooperation, and intuition” (xix). Consequently, females who stray from the norm are looked down upon by society. Aggressive tendencies among females have been considered socially deviant, or innately evil by nature. This, however, is not the case. In her book, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, psychoanalyst Jean Baker Miller (1986) warns that:

Male culture has built an amazingly large mythology around the idea of feminine evil – Eve, Pandora’s box, and the like. All this mythology seems clearly to be linked to men’s unsolved problems, the things they fear they will find if they open Pandora’s box. Women, meanwhile, have been prepared to stand ready and willing to accept all that evil. (p. 59)

As Miller (1986) further explains in her book, it is the objectification of women by men that has resulted in women feeling dehumanized and ready to “accept the evil assigned to them” (p. 59). The belief that women are to be treated like objects is pervasive within our male-dominated society. Further, the differences between males and females arise from the socialization of these norms and the development of personalities according to perceived gender lines. It is important, however, to note that the aggressive tendencies of human nature as explained by Winnicott do not distinguish gender lines, but rather presumes that aggressiveness is innate in everyone, thus avoiding the conclusion that aggressiveness depicts a negative quality specific to the female species.

Phyllis Chesler, author of *Woman's Inhumanity to Woman* (2003), tells of the opposition that she encountered by other women while writing her book. Some women were dismayed that Chesler wrote about women hurting other women instead of writing about the ways in which men hurt and oppress women. Chesler shares that women have difficulty acknowledging that women can be aggressive because it goes against societal expectations. As a result, Chesler proclaims that “female-female aggression has been less studied, less discussed, and less recognized than male aggression. Perhaps, in a society that values men over women, what women do to each other is simply deemed less important by both men and women” (p. 38). Entrenched in what is deemed socially normal, some women have difficulty deviating from their traditional role of following the lead of men in their beliefs and expectations.

### Significance of Studying Female Aggression

As a female educator, my intention for studying female aggression is to gain a better understanding of social aggression as a form of bullying among adolescent females

and to explore how society and schools affect the psychological development of young girls, thus contributing to and perpetuating social aggression. My desire is not to further oppress women by pointing out negative tendencies of females, but rather to use the knowledge as a tool for helping adolescent females who are victimized by social aggression inflicted by their female peers. White and Kowalski (1994) contend that eliminating the oppression of women is a primary goal of feminists, and it begins with acknowledging the source of oppression. "History is replete with examples of the power women garnered from recognizing their victimization. Empowerment comes from the knowledge gained by naming" (White & Kowalski, 1994, p. 503). Through naming oppressive acts against women, such as spousal abuse and rape, women have been able to combat such oppression. With regard to this research, much literature on bullying behaviors has been devoted to the physical and overt aggression that is typical of males, yet further research on relational aggression among females is warranted (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick et al, 2002; Simmons, 2002; Chesler, 2003; Crothers et al., 2005). Crothers et al. (2005) affirm that:

Investigating relational aggression among adolescent girls will enable needed discussion and deconstruction of relationship patterns that are injurious and disempowering. Furthermore, examining the relationship between gender role identity and relational aggression will illuminate the methods that enable these unhealthy communication and relationship patterns to persist. (p. 350)

The reviews of empirical research and relevant literature have provided a foundation for understanding covert forms of aggression among female students. Absent from the research is a psychoanalytic perspective. The present study departs from the existing

research by utilizing psychoanalysis as a lens for research, specifically considering the dynamics of attachment and object relations to expand our knowledge of adolescent females. Both psychoanalytic theories and societal expectations indicate that females are oriented and expected to value relationships with others, thus converging in the influence of the developing female psyche and posing discourse around the salience of social aggression among females. The social intelligence of female students is often used as a powerful weapon of aggression. Further, by placing emphasis upon relationships with others, females render themselves vulnerable to both bullying and victimization in a socially aggressive manner.

Studying female aggression is important within the context of schools and society. As female students learn to relate to one another and the outside world, it is important to better understand how social aggression affects young girls, causing them to lose focus of themselves and their academic goals. Often victims of social aggression suffer to their emotional detriment. The purpose of this study is to psychoanalytically examine the contributing factors of social aggression among female students as a form of bullying. This study contends that schools and society contribute to social aggression among female students. Relationships among students and teachers are limited by the increased focus upon high stakes testing and the influence of social media. Society is also an influential factor in aggression, as Simmons (2002) reminds us that “our culture refuses girls access to open conflict, and it forces their aggression into nonphysical, indirect, and covert forms” (p. 3). Social aggression is perpetuated among girls as they conform to the myth of the non-aggressive female by aggressing inconspicuously (White & Kowalski, 1994).

In Julie Webber's *Failure to Hold: The Politics of School Violence* (2003), Webber discusses the analytical separation of studying the socialization issues of masculinity and femininity. Webber (2003) states that "the overall effect of this separation is to heteronormalize the discussion of masculinity and gender, ignoring the way the two positions are not so much really separate as analytically separate" (p. 56). Having established relationships with both adolescent male and female students through my role as their school counselor and later administrator, I find it necessary to delineate the experiences of males and females. The experiences of boys and girls are fundamentally different due to the dictation of gender-specific societal norms (Skelton, 2003). The unwritten rule that boys are rough, tough, and physically aggressive directly impacts the experiences of young boys because they are considered weak sissies when they turn away from a physical challenge. Girls, on the other hand, are not granted the same freedom to physically assert themselves without being deemed unlady-like. Consequently, girls covertly express aggression to avoid shattering the proper public image, to conform to society's expectations of what they ought to be. As a result, girls more frequently than boys inflict social aggression upon peers by name-calling, gossiping, and socially ostracizing their victims (Olweus, 1993; Pipher, 1994; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002; Chesler, 2003). Torn between social expectations and their true selves, adolescent boys and girls need to be studied separately, and in depth, to gain a better understanding of their fundamentally different social experiences. Failing to pursue separate studies of the different experiences of males and females undermines the female experiences by using male experiences as a baseline for judging aggression (Campbell, 1982; White & Kowalski, 1994; Crick & Grotpeter,

1995). Winnicott (1964) explains aggression as innate to human nature, an attempt to distinguish self from other. Thus, differences between the female and male experiences warrant discussion if we are to arrive at any type of understanding of how female and male aggressive tendencies diverge. Crick, Casas, and Nelson (2002) determined a critical need for further research into relational aggression among adolescent females by pointing out that:

Regardless of whether or not future research indicates the existence of gender differences in the frequency of relational victimization, the study of relational victimization is likely to have significant utility for enhancing knowledge of the social development of females. (p. 99)

Considering the vast differences acknowledged in empirical research between male and female bullying tendencies, we owe it to our female students to seek a better understanding of their experiences as both the aggressor and victim in social aggression.

The intent behind this study of female aggression is not to essentialize along gender lines, but rather to find commonalities among the experiences of female students. The importance that females place upon relationships warrants consideration in studying female aggression separately from male aggression. To further explain the purpose of separate studies, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) chose to exclusively interview women in their controversial book entitled *Women's Ways of Knowing*, stating that "the male experience has been so powerfully articulated that we believed we would hear the patterns in women's voices more clearly if we held at bay the powerful templates men have etched in the literature and in our minds" (p. 9). Bettis and Adams (2005)

acknowledge that girls from various backgrounds experience girlhood differently, as it is not experienced in the same manner as a universal construct for all girls, while also asserting “the importance of strategically using girlhood as a universal construct for the purposes of social change” (p. 276). Because it would be virtually impossible to articulate the individual and varying experiences unique to each adolescent female, the goal of this research is to capture and lend a voice to the feminine experience as it relates to societal expectations and aggression, while recognizing that it is limited by my own experiences and interpretations of what is considered feminine as related to my societal role as a middle-class, white female.

While much has been researched about the physically aggressive acts of bullying commonly seen among male students, in comparison, there is little research on social aggression that is prevalent among female students. The studies on social aggression that do exist are often quantitative and consist of the summaries of surveys, rating scales, and self-reports that expose the nature of social aggression; or they tend to be qualitative in nature, whereby students were interviewed to determine their involvement in bullying. Overall, the research on social aggression lacks a psychoanalytic perspective and warrants additional study. The present research aims to explore the influences of society and schools upon the developing psyches of young girls to better understand the resulting proliferation of social aggression.

## CHAPTER III

### PSYCHOANALYSIS OF ATTACHMENT AND AGGRESSION

To better understand the phenomenon of social aggression as a prevalent form of bullying among female students, a psychoanalytic framework has been chosen for this study. Interpretations of the psychoanalytic theories of object relations, attachment, and Jung's shadow that are utilized in this research are presented to explore why relationships with others are so crucial in the lives of females, and why females are more apt than males to use the withholding or damaging of relationships to harm one another. More specifically, psychoanalytic theories are presented as a framework to interpret the influence of societal factors upon the developing female psyche and explain how these factors lead to social aggression. It is crucial that educators and parents understand the factors that perpetuate the covertly aggressive behaviors that are often seen among adolescent females. Denial of its existence among adults has been supported by the covert nature of the aggression, yet it looms large among student populations who are keenly aware of socially aggressive bullies and their victims. The culmination of this research is psychosocial in nature as it explores the intersection of societal influences upon the developing psyche of the female student, providing an insightful peek into their conflicted world and offering an interpretation that cannot be provided through empirical data alone.

As girls are reared in a patriarchal society, they receive conflicting messages that affect the development of their psyche (Orenstein, 1994). To better understand the influences of society upon the developing psyche of young girls, which also encompasses the influence of mothers, technology, and the hidden curriculum of schooling,



psychoanalytic theories of attachment and aggression offer insight to the following questions: How do societal perceptions of the female gender lead to a prevalence of social aggression? What perpetuates social aggression as a form of bullying among female students? The complexity of these questions makes it difficult to answer them succinctly with empirical data. A closer look at psychoanalysis and its traditions is necessary to provide a background of knowledge for interpreting the perpetuation and detriments of social aggression.

### The Hermeneutics of Psychoanalysis

The methodology of this study is theoretical in nature and differs from empirical research by using psychoanalytic theories as a lens for interpreting the phenomenon of socially aggressive behaviors among female students. As a form of qualitative inquiry, psychoanalysis lends itself to hermeneutics. Psychoanalytic theories are often utilized to provide researchers with a basis for interpreting answers to questions that have been posed about the human mind and behavior. Because psychoanalysis requires interpretation, it stands to reason that it is subjective. Morris (2001) tells us that “a psychoanalytic hermeneutic is necessarily incomplete and ambivalent” (p. 26). Further, “psychoanalytic theory can do only so much to help us understand” (Morris, 2001, p. 26). As such, there is no absolute truth and there are no concrete answers to questions posed through psychoanalytic exploration. The rationale for using the hermeneutics of psychoanalysis in this research is to seek understanding, as well as the meaning and implications of social aggression in the world of young girls, not to establish its existence as prior research has already done. Psychoanalysis is appropriate in this regard. Smith (1991) affirms that:

Constantly engaged in the practice of interpretation, the hermeneutic imagination is not limited in its conceptual resources to the texts of hermeneutic tradition itself but is liberated by them to bring to bear any conceptualities that can assist in deepening our understanding of what it is we are investigating. (p. 201)

While psychoanalytic interpretation does not wholly explain the phenomenon of social aggression, it does offer a framework for meaningful discourse, a discourse that is necessary to face the reality of social aggression and the emotional, as well as psychological, damage that it causes.

Psychoanalytic interpretation of social aggression among females is further informed by my lived experiences as the researcher. My own personality was shaped by my lived experiences, which in turn will surface as theories are interpreted from my individual perspective. Bringing personal meaning to this research is a culmination of experiences informing my current understanding of social aggression. Painful and shameful memories have surfaced during this research, memories that have been repressed for years, of my involvement in a socially aggressive peer group as a young girl and adolescent. Watching my best friend suffer through the victimization of a socially aggressive peer still haunts me. As a former bystander, my memories bring about a sense of guilt that has been repressed and denied unconsciously, yet it is time to face the past by seeking understanding.

For me, denial is no longer an option as these long-repressed memories surface. Winnicott (1986) tells us that “health is not associated with *denial* of anything” (p. 35).

An opportunity for redemption has come through my career in education. My experience as a middle school counselor prompted the realization that social aggression is not an isolated event, but a cycle that is perpetuated. My present position as an administrator in the very school that I attended as a child adds purpose and meaning to this experience in a way that will allow me to combat social aggression with students in a cathartic manner. All of these experiences, along with psychoanalysis, inform this research.

Psychoanalysis has been used by others in the field of curriculum studies to interpret human behavior as it is influenced by the unconscious mind. Through varying topics and theories, psychoanalytic research raises questions and provides an opportunity for unique interpretations as applied to the subject matter. Relative to the present study, psychoanalytic theories regarding the psyche offer much depth for research into violence and gender, as others in the curriculum field have demonstrated. Pinar (2001) incorporates psychoanalysis with regard to violence and gender throughout his book entitled, *The Gender of Racial Politics and Violence in America: Lynching, Prison Rape, and the Crisis of Masculinity*. Morris (2001) also draws upon psychoanalysis to raise questions around the repressed memories of violence during the Holocaust and its representation in texts in her book, *Curriculum and the Holocaust: Competing Sites of Memory and Representation*. Morris (2001) explains that “Psychoanalysis is a form of hermeneutics that offers insights helpful for understanding the ways in which we might psychologically frame memories, especially when these memories are repressed” (p. 25).

In a similar vein with this research into social aggression, both Grumet (1988) and Webber (2003) incorporate object relations theory into their respective works, though

utilizing it to interpret different issues. In *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching*, Grumet (1988) incorporated the works of Nancy Chodorow and states:

Chodorow's schematic presentation of object relations is a magnificent contribution to those of us who work to understand the relation of gender to the symbol systems that constitute knowledge, curriculum, and schooling. (p. 11)

Webber (2003) also found object relations to be informative for her research, but in a different manner than Grumet (1988). In *Failure to Hold: The Politics of School Violence*, Webber (2003) focused upon Winnicott's concept of the "facilitating environment" to analyze school shootings with regard to the hidden curriculum and the school environment itself. While Webber's work is specific to highly publicized cases of school shootings, this research intends to proceed in a different manner with object relations theories by using it as an interpretive tool for relationally aggressive tendencies among female students.

Doll's (2000) "Good Girls/Bad Girls" incorporates Jungian analysis by interpreting symbols in our culture and literature that represent the oppositional roles of good girl or bad girl. Doll (2000) points out that these are roles that "women have been trained to choose for themselves" (p. 87). Similarly, this research explores how girls are influenced by culture and society and how these factors drive girls to engage in covert forms of aggression. Jung's concept of the shadow, the part of one's unconscious personality that is projected onto others, is also incorporated as it relates to aggression among girls, as well as the hidden curriculum.

## Psychoanalytic Traditions

Known as the originator of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud established the origins for psychoanalytic thought, providing a paradigm for utilization and dissension of his theories within the field. Freud's beliefs about the development of the psyche were centered on sexual and aggressive drives, frequently referred to as the psychosexual stages of development that begin at birth and continue throughout life as the individual seeks sexual gratification through biological functions. Much controversy and debate in the field of psychoanalysis was sparked by Freud's theories as others within the field began to offer their own interpretations, causing splits within the field. With regard to dissension among psychoanalysts, Bókay (1998) points out that:

Analysts often engage in personal remarks, when their theory is challenged, because an analyst's very self is attacked along with his theory. The fierce fights within the movement are therefore part of the essential character of psychoanalysis and the necessary means of articulating its radical content. But it is impossible to assess these conflicts objectively, because each of the divergent approaches is coherent and can provide an explanation of the phenomena it observes. (p. 190)

The multiplicity of psychoanalytic interpretations, by its very nature, is subject to conflict as the perspectives of analysts vary and diverge. From one such divergence in the field came object relations theory which postulates that relational needs direct one's behavior and personality development. Emerging from the work of Melanie Klein, a member of the British Group of psychoanalysts, object relations theory shifted the focus from Freud's drive theories which asserted that the quest to satiate libidinal and aggressive

drives was the primary human need, to an emphasis upon the need for interpersonal relationships, beginning with that of the mother and child. The “object” in object relations theory most often refers to the significant others whose influence in the relationship affects the development of the psyche as one internalizes aspects of the object relationship. While I draw upon the works of various psychoanalysts, the theory of object relations has been the most influential in my own interpretative approach to using psychoanalysis. Central to this research into social aggression is the quest to look circumspectly at its contributing factors in the lives of female students by primarily relying upon the psychoanalytic works of D.W. Winnicott, a pediatrician whose theories extended and varied the concept of object relations initially made prominent by Klein.

Winnicott fell into the categorization of the British Group of Independent Analysts whose divergent beliefs did not follow a unified framework, but were derived from object relations theories. “The Independents abandoned the libidinally driven structural model and developed a ‘self-object’ theory, in which parts of the self are seen in dynamic interaction with each other and complementary internal and external objects” (Fonagy, 2001, p. 93). As a pediatrician, Winnicott focused much of his work on the mother-child dyad. Of particular interest to Winnicott was the level of care provided by the “good enough mother” and the resulting influence upon the child’s developing personality. For Winnicott, the mother was of primary importance as her response to the needs of her child established the pattern by which the child would learn to relate to others (Winnicott, 1964; 1965a; 1965b; 1986; 1987).

Like object relations analysts before him, John Bowlby also renounced the tenets of Freud’s drive theory. Bowlby’s focus was upon relationships that establish attachment

behaviors in personality formation. While aspects of attachment theory are rooted in the works of the British Independent analysts, Fonagy (2001) points out an important difference between object relations theorists and Bowlby's beliefs in that "the goal of the child is not the object, for example, the mother. The goal that regulates the system is initially a physical state, the maintenance of a desired degree of proximity to her" (p. 8). Accordingly, the child's system of behaviors is contingent on the child's feeling of security, or lack thereof, within the attachment system established by the caregiver (Bowlby 1979; 1988). While psychoanalytic groups were reticent to accept Bowlby's beliefs on attachment as a contribution to the field, "it is interesting to observe, that unlike most of his creative psychoanalytic contemporaries Bowlby's ideas did not lead to a new psychoanalytic school" (Fonagy, 2001, p. 3). Instead, Bowlby's work inspired empirical research regarding the impact of attachment and separation upon the child's development. Although controversial, the crux of Bowlby's theories is upon the importance of attachment, and it is included in this research as a factor to explore in relation to the socially aggressive patterns of behavior that have been noted among female students.

#### Psychoanalytic Theories of Attachment and Aggression

As previously established, psychoanalytic theories are not all-encompassing and a number of variations stem from them. This research primarily relies upon the tenets of Winnicott's theories of object relations, while incorporating the works of other psychoanalysts throughout to interpret the development of the female psyche and how it perpetuates social aggression among females. With the understanding that social or relational aggression is not specific to female behavior, just as physical aggression is not

specific to male behavior, this research takes into consideration the findings of previous research which establishes a basis to support the prevalence of relationally aggressive tendencies among females as opposed to males (Olweus, 1993; Pipher, 1994; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002; Chesler, 2003). Rather than replicate prior empirical studies that establish its existence, the intent of this research is to look at social aggression through a psychoanalytic lens to better understand the behavior of covert aggression that is salient among female students. A closer look at some specific theories on attachment and aggression offer an interpretive stance to better understand socially aggressive behaviors.

#### *Attachment and the Ontogeny of Personality*

Because life begins with the mother, and mothers are most often the primary caregivers to nurture infants, it is not surprising that object relations theories often begin with the mother's influence. As an experienced pediatrician, Winnicott was particularly interested in the mother-child dyad. In his writings about relationships between mothers and babies, Winnicott (1964) contends that the two begin their intimate connection before birth. After birth, the mother's interactions with her baby are foundational in developing the infant's personality, as well as the emotional development that helps the infant learn how to handle the frustrations of life. Winnicott (1987) speaks frequently of the ordinary devoted mother, meaning the mother who properly cares for and responds to her baby's needs intuitively. This reliance and bonding between the two establish a foundation on which the baby first learns to relate to others. In his book, *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World*, Winnicott (1964) states:



I once risked the remark, “There is no such thing as a baby”- meaning that if you set out to describe a baby, you will find you are describing *a baby and someone*.

A baby cannot exist alone, but is essentially part of a relationship. (p. 88)

According to Winnicott, as the mother intuitively tends to the baby’s needs, the baby and mother identify with one another. Babies are vulnerable to the nurturing given by the mother, as this is the beginning of not only a relationship, but foundational to a lifetime of relating to the world around them.

For Winnicott (1965b), the good enough mother’s role included three primary functions crucial to the healthy development of the infant: holding, handling, and object-presenting. In the earliest stages of life, while in the womb and as an infant, Winnicott used the term “holding” in reference to the mother’s physical holding of the child. As the child grows, Winnicott (1986) explains that although holding begins with the physical, it gradually widens to include the function of the family in caring for the child’s adapting needs and providing ego support. Winnicott (1986) states that “The family continues this holding, and society holds the family” (p. 107). A second term used by Winnicott (1965b) as necessary for an infant’s healthy development is “handling,” a term referring to facilitation of the mother in the development of the infant’s autonomy. Through the mother’s “handling,” the infant begins to distinguish what is “me” and what is “not me” in the process and comes to understand that the body is part of the self, resulting in a psycho-somatic existence. The third function of the mother is object-presenting, thus initiating the capacity of the infant to learn how to relate to others. Because the mother is most often the primary object of the infant’s affection, her role in this relationship establishes the standard upon which the child learns to relate to others. As the mother

introduces the child to those in the surrounding environment, the child learns to develop other interpersonal relationships.

While object relations theory places great emphasis upon the relationships that infants develop with others, beginning with that of the mother, the “objects” may be other people, such as grandparents, siblings, friends, or they may be pets with whom the child has developed a relationship. Transitional objects are other objects that the child uses to create a feeling of security, such as blankets, toys, or stuffed animals with which the infant develops an attachment. Grunet (1988) described object relations in the following way:

Derived from psychoanalysis and cultural anthropology, object relations theory investigates the genesis of personality in the interplay of the aggressive and libidinal drives seeking satisfaction and the social relationships that surround the infant and in which it participates. (p. 9)

Born into a relationship with one’s mother, the infant begins to incorporate aspects of that relationship, along with aspects of relationships formed with other objects, into a self structure that develops into a personality. Following the tradition of object relations theory, Winnicott describes the facilitating environment provided by the mother who intuitively meets the infants’ needs in a manner that allows the infant to grow and mature, establishing for the infant a foundation for good mental health. Winnicott (1987) asserts “the mother (if she is doing well) is laying down the foundations of the individual’s strength of character and richness of personality” (p. 25). The maternal relationship, and resulting facilitating environment, is central to the development of an infant’s personality. The mother offers the child the best facilitating environment for healthy personality

development through the proper holding, handling, and object-presenting as previously detailed. Winnicott (1965) reiterates the dynamics of personality development by stating that:

The forces towards living, towards integration of the personality, towards independence, are immensely strong, and with good-enough conditions the child makes progress; when conditions are not good enough these forces are contained within the child, and in one way or another tend to destroy the child. (p. 65)

The lack of a “good-enough” environment, one that fails to meet the individual’s physical and social needs, may lead to mental illness or socially deviant behavior.

Winnicott addresses three categories of psychological disorder which he describes as an immaturity of an individual’s emotional growth, including the ability to relate to others and the surrounding environment. According to Winnicott (1986), psychological disorders represent a “hitch in the individual’s emotional development” (p. 103). One disorder, psychoneurosis, is described by Winnicott as seen in individuals who were cared for well-enough in the earliest developmental stages, yet they experience difficulties with some aspect of life, affecting only part of the personality. Winnicott includes depression in this category. Other examples of neurosis are anxieties, phobias, and eating disorders. A second disorder is psychosis, whereby the basic structuring of the personality is altered by a disturbance that occurred in the very early stages when there was a failure to nurture (Winnicott, 1986). Perhaps there is a genetic component in disorders classified as psychosis, such as schizophrenia and other psychotic illnesses, where a faulty ego structure exists and impairs a person’s ability to function with mental

stability. The third disorder described by Winnicott is what he termed the “in-betweens” or those who are antisocial. Within this category, as Winnicott explains, are individuals who were initially cared for well enough; however, they experienced a failure by the environment either at some point or repeatedly over a period of time, presenting as an attitude of resentment for the suffering or deprivation experienced. Antisocial tendency often manifests as delinquency in youth resulting from feelings of disappointment or being let down by the environment.

The care and concern for the well-being of an infant involves feeding the infant, a process that is biological in nature as the mother’s body is equipped to breastfeed; however, psychoanalysts also attribute this fundamental process to the infant’s emotional development. With regard to breast feeding, Melanie Klein spoke of the “good breast” to describe the physical satisfaction and sensual pleasure of sucking experienced by the infant during the feeding (Klein, 1964). The contentment felt by the infant in a “good breast” feeding is instrumental in the development of love towards the mother.

Frustration towards the mother surfaces when the infant grows hungry or has a feeding experience that is not gratifying in some way, resulting in a “bad breast” experience and phantasies of aggression and destruction of the mother’s breast. With mother being the primary object of the infant’s affection, as well as the one upon whom the infant is dependent for care, the infant may phantasize of repairing the damage done to the mother’s breast if there were prior destructive fantasies toward the breast. From a sense of guilt and an ambivalent love/hate relationship with the breast, the infant may phantasize of restoring the original love relationship by making reparation. According to Klein (1964), “Love and hate are struggling together in the baby’s mind; and this struggle

to a certain extent persists throughout life and is liable to become a source of danger to human relationships” (p. 60). For Klein, the unconscious guilt from the inability to harness aggressive tendencies toward the one loved can manifest in a variety of ways, causing disturbances in an individual’s personal relationships. These unconscious mental conflicts and emotions shape the developing psyche of the infant and continue to influence relationships as the infant grows and later relates to others.

According to Bowlby (1969/1982, 1988), the ontogeny of personality crucially hinges upon the interaction and response of caregivers to the needs of their children throughout the stages of infancy, childhood, and adolescence. Through his extensive research on attachment theory, John Bowlby (1988) states that “human infants, we can safely conclude, like infants of other species, are preprogrammed to develop in a socially cooperative way; whether they do so or not turns in high degree on how they are treated” (p. 9). Again, specific importance is placed upon the infant’s initial relationship with the mother (Bowlby, 1969/1982; 1988). Through the bond with the mother, the infant establishes an attachment or security, referred to as a secure base by Bowlby. As the child grows and begins to interact within society, the attachment figure (primarily identified as the mother) provides a secure base for the child, offering security and safety within the attachment of their relationship. For Bowlby, of primary significance in human nature is the propensity to explore the environment and return to the secure base to seek proximity to the attachment figure for protection.

In his book, *A Secure Base*, Bowlby (1988) has identified three prominent patterns of attachment and subsequent personality traits that result from parental responses to the needs of their children. The first pattern is considered to be a secure

attachment between parent and child and is derived from a responsive parent who provides a nurturing environment, fostering the infant's desire for exploration. An anxious resistant pattern is identified by Bowlby as resulting from inconsistent parental responses where the parent is occasionally responsive to the infant's needs and unresponsive at other times. Just as its name implies, the anxious resistant pattern tends to cause ambivalence in the child, torn between clinging to the parent and exploring his or her environment. Bowlby identifies the third pattern as an anxious avoidant attachment. This final pattern in personality development comes from a complete lack of response by a parent figure in meeting the child's needs, resulting in an attempt by the individual to "live his life without the love and support of others," thus seeking to become "emotionally self-sufficient" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 124). Bowlby does, however, point out that personality is a result of the developmental environment within which an infant, child, or adolescent becomes subjected, meaning that individual personalities have the potential to change for better or worse if significant environmental changes take place.

Similar to Bowlby's description of attachment patterns related to the secure base is Winnicott's rendition which describes the child's patterns of excursions and returns. Winnicott (1986) describes excursions and returns as the child's opportunity to experience a variety of object relating through their discovery of the world around them. For example, the child may be allowed to leave the proximity of immediate family to enjoy a relationship with a friend, or play outside with a pet. Following the excursion, the child establishes a pattern of returning home to the parents and secure environment. Eventually the excursions widen to include the child's involvement in school and society.

Through these repeated patterns of successful excursions and returns in various situations, the child establishes a sense of confidence in the return journey, fostering healthy development of the child when all goes well.

Echoing the importance of an infant's maternal relationship to personality development, psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow explains that through the maternal relationship, the infant comes to distinguish mother as a separate being. Chodorow (1978) contends "This beginning perception of its mother as separate, in conjunction with the infant's inner experience of continuity in the midst of changing instances and events, forms the basis for its experience of a self" (p. 67). Thus, the infant's relationship with the mother is foundational in the infant's primary understanding of self and development of personality. Chodorow further discusses the influence of familial relationships on personality development through the perpetuation of male and female gender roles within society. Chodorow (1978) states that psychoanalysis:

provides a systemic, structural account of socialization and social reproduction.

It suggests that major features of the social organization of gender are transmitted in and through those personalities produced by the structure of the institution—the family—in which children become gendered members of society. (p. 39)

Thus, the influential role of social attachment, initially with the mother and later with society, is crucial to the development of personality and is critically important in predicting the way that an individual may respond to social rejection. While some adolescents will respond to social rejection through physically violent means, others will socially annihilate their peers, a trend commonly reported among adolescent females.

### *Psychoanalytic Theories of Aggression*

The old adage that “hell hath no fury like a woman scorned” serves as a warning that women are not to be crossed as if mystical, witch-like powers will be used to curse the offender. Similar sayings specific to men do not come to mind. Ironically, statistics show that men are more physically violent, and thus far on the scenes of school violence, male students have dominated as assailants. This research asserts that this is largely in part due to the relational, as opposed to physical, nature of aggression among females. To gain a better understanding of aggression, several psychoanalytic theories of aggression pertinent to this study are drawn upon.

Carl Jung offered a unique perspective of personality with regard to his concept of the shadow, one that is informative in constructing this research on social aggression. Jung (1939) states that the shadow “corresponds to a negative ego-personality; it embraces all those characteristics whose existence is found to be painful or regrettable” (p. 173). According to Jung, each personality has a shadow side, a part of the personality that is so bad and shameful that it is unconsciously projected onto others as a defense mechanism. While these imperfections of character are rejected within the individual’s ego, they may be recognized in the personalities of others. “Although unconscious, the shadow does not cease to exist: it remains dynamically alive” (Stevens, 1990, p. 43). Like unconscious thought, covert aggression lurks in secrecy, but has the potential to wreak havoc. Jung (1963/1970) does, however explain that as an individual gains psychological insight into her shadow energy, projection of it onto others is hindered as she comes to realize that the shadow is actually a part of herself.



Aggressive tendencies are common among both males and females and are seen in the earliest relationships between a baby and his mother. Kleinian thought believes that the breastfeeding experience becomes a source of emotional conflict in the infant.

Hate and aggressive feelings are aroused and he becomes dominated by the impulses to destroy the very person who is the object of all his desires and who in his mind is linked up with everything he experiences- good and bad alike.

(Klein, 1964, p. 58)

The patterns of aggression that arise in the infant are linked to his inability to provide for his own needs, a feeling of dependence that becomes a source of frustration and may manifest physically as the infant becomes so upset that breathlessness or choking result. Because physical manifestations further stress the infant, aggression is exacerbated (Klein, 1964). As the child begins to experience destructive impulses prompted by anxiety, he projects his fears onto the external object, his mother, and then perceives her as a source of danger. Through the projection of his destructive impulses, the child exchanges his internal dangers for external ones which his ego seeks to destroy, a position referred to by Klein as the paranoid schizoid position (Klein, 1963).

D.W. Winnicott (1964), explains that aggression serves to clearly distinguish for the infant a difference between the self and other and is first visible in infants as “directly or indirectly a reaction to frustration” (p. 232). Although some infants may appear to be very aggressive and others not demonstrate much aggression at all, Winnicott contends that aggression is a common impulse among all infants; however, the differences that are visible come from the manner in which the infant deals with aggression. While some may handle aggression in an open, demonstrative fashion whereby hostility is directed at

external objects, other children inwardly harbor aggression, thus becoming “tense, over-controlled, and serious” (Winnicott, 1964, p. 234). Maternal response and guidance through this initial exploration of aggressiveness allows the infant to discover the outside world and to learn aspects of control that the infant has over his or her aggression, consequently beginning the development of personality.

With attachment theory, Bowlby (1979) believed that aggression was a predominant factor in the maintenance of affectional bonds with others. Although aggressive tendencies are typically perceived as negative and destructive, Bowlby explained that:

A little paradoxically, behaviour of an aggressive sort plays a key role in maintaining affectional bonds. It takes two distinct forms: first, attacks on and frightening away of intruders and, second, the punishment of an errant partner, be it wife, husband, or child. (Bowlby, 1979, p. 69)

Rather than viewing aggression as an internal drive, attachment theory asserts instead that aggression serves to maintain an attachment with others. Through the utilization of aggression, a person may protect the one they love, or aggression may also be used to punish a loved one to maintain an attached connection when anger comes between the two. More concisely, for Bowlby, aggression is born of the basic human need to remain securely attached to others.

#### Social Attachment Gone Awry

In his book, *Savage Spawn: Reflections on Violent Children*, author Jonathan Kellerman (1999) also emphasizes the influential nature of the parent-child relationship. Kellerman takes an in-depth look at anti-social behavior among youth, including

aggressiveness and even psychopathic tendencies. Trained in child clinical psychology, Kellerman (1999) asserts that one important factor in the development of psychopathic tendencies is often a “disruption of the parent-child attachment, especially during the first two or three years of childhood” (p. 52). Social attachment is crucial to establishing the foundation of a healthy emotional state, particularly during the child’s early years as the personality is developing. Kellerman (1999) proclaims that:

Studying the infant-toddler period makes intuitive good sense because much emotional conditioning occurs during this period and one of the most striking aspects of psychopathy is gross abnormality of the emotional system. (p. 52-53)

Emotional disturbances often manifest among school children in the form of bullying, but in the extreme cases described by Kellerman, it does not end there. Some children and adolescents are so socially and emotionally detached from others that they resort to killing their classmates at school, perhaps indicating that the lack of social attachment has become too painful to endure.

While it is human nature to seek social acceptance, this to be particularly evident at the middle school level where adolescents are changing physically and emotionally on a daily basis. Social acceptance is crucial to a healthy self-concept during adolescence, for it is during adolescence that youth begin to seek separation from their parents and come to rely more heavily upon peer acceptance (Pipher, 1994). Both the need and desire for social acceptance are visible among both female and male students; however, while serving as a middle school counselor, the female students more frequently verbalized to me the loneliness of peer rejection. The crafty, manipulative tongues of

peers are devastating to young girls who are intrinsically aware of themselves and those around them, and for them the “fear of solitude is overpowering” (Simmons, 2002, p. 32).

Solitude – a form of social isolation – is a factor commonly uncovered in cases of emotional abuse and failure to thrive among children. From birth, children need love and affection from others in order to survive. Beyond the biological necessity of caregivers to provide for the infant’s physical needs for survival, provision for the infant’s socialization and attachment to significant others is also vital (Bowlby, 1953, 1973, 1979, 1988). Some infants lack the will to survive without sufficient love and attention. In fact, “a parent’s love is so important to a child that withholding it can cause a failure to thrive” (Houston, 1995, p. 254). Neglecting to fulfill the needs of a child to attach to others through healthy interactions can result in severe emotional and physical ailments such as “listlessness, loss of appetite, growth delays, and illness, and in extreme cases, even death” (Marino, Weinman, & Soudelier, 2001, p. 94). Chodorow (1978) concurs that children who are physically cared for, but lack emotional relationships with others “may grow up without ego capacities sufficient to establish relationships, may not develop basic motor and verbal skills, may be psychotic, and, in extreme cases, die” (p.60). Thus, for an individual to thrive, emotional relationships with others are essential to both mental and physical health.

Many victims of social isolation by peers also fail to thrive. “The act of being bullied tends to increase some students’ isolation because their peers do not want to lose status by associating with them or because they do not want to increase the risks of being bullied themselves” (Banks, 1997, p. 1). Once others have excluded a student through

bullying, it becomes difficult for the majority of victims to regain peer acceptance and positive peer interaction. Rather than endure mental torture by classmates, the National Association of School Psychologists reports that “an estimated 160,000 children each day miss school for fear of being picked on” (Orecklin, 2000, p. 69). When school becomes an unhappy environment, social avoidance becomes a defense mechanism. Academics often lose priority among these students. “In addition to academic failings, they suffer such physical ailments as stomachaches and headaches as well as psychological troubles that in extreme cases include suicidal tendencies” (Orecklin, 2000, p. 69). The emotional detriment associated with the social isolation of a student through the means of social aggression can result in anxiety, depression, and a failure to thrive that has most recently been evidenced by the psychological distress and suicides of students who have been ridiculed and ostracized through social media (Gillespie, 2006; Mason, 2008; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Darden, 2009; Feinberg & Robey, 2009). Recognizing that emotional abuse can be as detrimental as physical abuse resonates through research on social aggression among female students as they are, in effect, inconspicuously emotionally abusing one another.

Emotional abuse has been compared to the likes of cancer in that “it does its most deadly work internally and like cancer, it can metastasize if untreated” (Houston, 1995, p. 254). In regards to child abuse, Houston (1995) argues that while all forms of child abuse are deplorable:

emotional abuse may be the cruelest and longest lasting because it is the systematic diminishment of another person. Emotional abuse reduces a child's

self-concept to the point that the victims consider themselves unworthy – unworthy of respect, unworthy of friendship, unworthy of the natural birthright of all children: love and protection. (p. 254)

Also common in emotionally abusive relationships is the degradation of the victim in the presence of others, lending intensity to the impact of the abuse by reinforcing the humiliation with an audience. An example of this can be seen with emotionally abusive parents. Instead of being the only one to harbor resentment and contempt towards a child, Romeo (2000) declares that “the emotionally abusive parent will also encourage others to reject and ridicule the child” (p.183). Emotional abuse within the school setting is much the same, as Leary, Kowalski, Smith, and Phillips (2003) explain “bullying and teasing typically occur in the presence of other people, thereby providing an element of public humiliation as well” (p. 203). Degradation and shame, particularly when condoned by a group, stir up feelings of rejection and isolation. Among girls, aggressive behaviors commonly tear away at the self-esteem of peers through name-calling and social exclusion, leaving jagged emotional wounds that sometimes result in irreparable damage.

For adolescent girls, isolation may be particularly damaging to ego development as their reality is rooted in the cultural expectation that they define themselves in relation to others (Miller, 1976/1986). With regard to the structure of the female psyche, Miller (1976/1986) asserts that:

One central feature is that women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of connections with others. Indeed, women’s sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then to maintain affiliations and relationships. Eventually, for many women the threat of disruption of connections

is perceived not as just a loss of a relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self. (p. 83)

While all human beings are in need of attachments to significant others, Miller reminds us that society encourages boys to move beyond this state of existence and into one that is more self-reliant. Our culture rewards boys for developing their independence by applauding their attainment of power and stature within society. Girls, on the contrary, are encouraged to remain in a role that focuses upon personal connections with others. Chodorow (1978) explains that the differences in the relational capacities of girls and boys are derived from the internalized object-relational structure that is developed from the mothering of women. Girls identify more with their mothers than do boys, and this is reflected in their personality features which are commonly reproduced in society as girls grow up to be mothers themselves and tend to the needs of others. Thus, Chodorow contends that girls “identify with their own mothers as they grow up, and this identification produces the girl as a mother” (p. 31). Through this identification with their mothers, Chodorow contends that the relational bonds of the mother-baby dyad is reproduced by women with their daughters, psychologically and emotionally influencing females to have a greater capacity to engage in relational interactions than sons, whose capacity for autonomy increases as boys when they separate from their mothers during the Oedipus phase.

The detriment of isolation and/or emotional abuse from others, coupled with the significance of relationships among females, offers a critical grasp of the impact of social aggression in the lives of girls. Psychoanalysis allows an exploration of the unconscious

mind, a peek into the psyche development of the female child. To interpret the socially aggressive patterns among females, psychoanalytic theories of attachment and aggression are significant as they coincide with the societal influences in the development of the female psyche.



## CHAPTER IV

### SOCIETAL INFLUENCES UPON THE FEMALE PSYCHE

One's gender plays an influential role in an individual's experiences and is targeted by the commonly held expectations for the prevailing gender norms of the society in which they live. Through psychoanalysis, Freud postulated that resolution of the Oedipus Complex was a central aspect of gender formation within the psyche of an individual. According to Freud (1969), children develop a triangular relationship consisting of an unconscious hatred of the parent of their same sex while simultaneously engaging in a jealous rivalry for the affections of the opposite sex parent. Specific to the Oedipal process in girls, Winnicott (1964) elaborates that "the little girl, then, has a special problem, if only because when she comes to love her father her rivalry is with her mother, who is her first love in a more primitive way" (p. 150). In object relations, Winnicott reminds us that for little girls, "the trouble is a conflict in her relation to the physical world brought about by her rivalry with her mother, who was originally for the child the physical world itself" (p. 150). Realizing that she is, like her mother, castrated and inferior, the girl develops penis envy and then chooses her father as her love object. The failed quest to gain her father's affections causes the girl to identify with her mother, which allows the girl to maintain her father as the love object, thus assuming her feminine role within society.

Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (1990) tells us that within the field of psychoanalysis, there is no consensus specifically regarding female psychology. Freud's view that femininity was, in effect, a failed masculinity has been met with much criticism by feminists who argue that Freud's theories are biased against women. Young-Bruehl

asserts, however, the value of considering Freud's theories while analyzing the societal hierarchy of gender in which the patriarchy prevails. Explaining this focus, Young-Bruehl (1990) states:

On the other hand, the psychoanalytic portrait of the female as a failed male has been accepted as the deepest analysis available of the effects of patriarchy (or the nuclear family as the carrier of patriarchy) on men's attitudes toward women and women's attitudes toward themselves. Here it is not the view that is objected to, but the reality which the view reflects, the reality that must be addressed by any truly radical social reform. (p. 41)

For females to gain momentum in a patriarchal society, some feminists believe it necessary to consider the imposed feminine role which serves to perpetuate the marginalization of females.

In *Under the Sign of Hope: Feminist Methodology and Narrative Interpretation*, Bloom (1998) draws upon feminist theories and compares the essentialist position with that of the social constructionist position with regard to femininity. The essentialist position of femininity assumes that females have an unchanging essence comprised of characteristics that are not "socially, historically, or culturally constructed," such as being passive, nurturing, and emotional (p. 142). Contrasting the essentialist position is the "constructionist" position, which recognizes gender as socially constructed, understanding that identity is discursive and varies by an individual's own lived experiences with relation to race, class, and sexuality (p.141). Bloom utilizes both positions in her work and finds it to be beneficial with feminist research to do so, articulating that:

The work of maintaining this dual use of the analytic category of women is particularly critical to feminist empirical work, where the researcher is responsible to not only the feminist politics as a part of a collective struggle, but also to the individual participants of the study, whose personal struggles must not be diminished or colonized by theory. (p. 143)

Traversing the discourse of femininity reifies the varying perspectives and recognizes that there is no absolute Truth with regard to gender. As we turn our attention back to the present study to analyze social aggression in response to the societal influences upon the female psyche, collective female that is, we must do so in recognition of the influences of my own interpretations as the researcher which have been shaped, as well as limited, by my personal lived experiences as a middle-class, white female.

#### Pink: The Reinforcement of Femininity

Today immersed from the very beginning into a world of pink, the birth of a baby girl into American society conjures images of soft lace, tiny hair bows, and ruffled dresses. Ah, the picture of sweetness and fragility, a baby girl is handled with the utmost care. Even before an infant's face is mature enough to offer a clue regarding its sex type, hospitals and parents distinguish baby girls with the adornment of pink attire and accessories, while baby boys are frequently distinguishable to society by the wearing of blue (Frazier & Sadker, 1973; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Orenstein, 2011). Orenstein (2011) asserts that little girls became targeted by marketers in the mid-1980's when marketers began to amplify children's differences in their products. The marketing scheme proved to be successful in luring little girls, and as Orenstein shares "pink fully came into its own, when it began to seem innately attractive to girls, part of what defined them as

female, at least for the first few critical years” (p. 36). Lamb and Brown (2006) contend that the pink hype is a marketing scheme that offers more than just pink clothing and accessories for girls; what they offer instead is a particular type of girl. “This type of girl is either really feminine or she rejects the feminine for more masculine choices” (Lamb & Brown, 2006, p. 19). When girls choose colors other than pink, colors such as red, blue, green, or black which convey aggressiveness and action stereotypical of boys, they forgo the sweetness and innocence conveyed by the stereotypical feminine pink. According to Lamb and Brown (2006), to wear pink or not wear pink becomes more than a simple selection of clothing, but rather insinuates a choice of characteristics and labels assigned to a girl’s identity according to the gendered stereotypes of society.

Children’s toys also provide staunch reinforcement of the societal division along gender lines according to what are deemed appropriate interests of girls and boys (Frazier & Sadker, 1973; Jack, 1999; O’Reilly, 2001; Heim et al., 2003, Francis, 2010; Orenstein, 2011). Toys for boys most often signify the need for speed, adventure, and aggression, such as race cars, building sets, toy soldiers and action heroes. On the other hand, the aisles of toys intended for girls are replete with accessories for dress-up, an assortment of dolls, and replicas of kitchen appliances and utensils, all of which reinforce to little girls the significance of their appearance and tending to others. Even with gender neutral toys, such as games, puzzles, and blocks on the market, dolls remain a favorite among girls.

For Klein (1964), a little girl’s devotion to her doll as an object of affection stems from the Oedipus complex and is rooted in her unconscious phantasy that her mother’s body is full of her father’s babies. Through her intense unconscious desire to have her own baby as a prized possession from her father, the little girl introjects a love for the

phantasized baby which is represented by the doll, thus contributing to the love that she projects onto the real baby to whom she gives birth as an adult. Winnicott (1964) explains that through pretend nurturing and care, tending to dolls in childhood prepares a little girl for her future role as an ordinary devoted mother, allowing her to gain experience by identifying with her own mother through play. Chodorow (1978) adds that identification with her own mother produces the girl as mother, thus reproducing the social roles of women for the next generation. Women “thus contribute to the perpetuation of their own social roles and position in the hierarchy of gender” (p. 209).

Comparisons between females and males are continued throughout life as their identities become defined through the social constructs of gender. From birth, society defines expectations for each. Martusewicz (2001) asserts that:

Girls- and boys, for that matter- are born into and grow up in a culture in which social relations are hierarchized by gender. Identities are made in participation with a powerful system of meaning that presents men and boys as stronger, smarter, and more apt to achieve independent, autonomous lives simply by virtue of their gender. (p. 67)

Standards for humanity have been defined by males, lending them the advantage in society (Miller, 1986). The power assigned to males is a struggle which females battle throughout life as their experiences are defined and judged according to the male standards which prevail in the gender hierarchy. When it comes to aggression, society also imposes different expectations upon girls and boys. Vail (2003) explains that:

Girls are socialized to be nurturing and sweet, which forces them to express their aggression in backhanded ways. Overt aggression is not considered feminine. A

key element of girl aggression is that the aggressors set up a situation in which they can hurt someone and not be blamed- or even be discovered. (p. 11)

Hidden aggression provides a convenient outlet for girls to use their social intelligence as a discreet weapon against others while simultaneously maintaining a proper societal image by not engaging in physical brawls.

A familiar nursery rhyme tells us that little girls are made of “sugar and spice and everything nice.” The expectation to be “everything nice” puts a great deal of pressure on girls to hide their aggression, thus contributing to the prevalence of covert forms of aggression among females throughout life. Simmons (2002) tells us that “the sugar-and-spice image is powerful, and girls know it” (p. 23). Early on, little girls learn the societal standards assigned to the female gender and understand that they are to comply in order to fit in, in order to be accepted. Actions or emotions that are not considered acceptable for females, such as aggression, are often hidden throughout life out of fear of rejection by society. Jack (1999) concurs that “social expectations and the fear of being judged by others affect what parts of their experience women are willing to reveal and what parts they hide” (p. 21). As is the case with social aggression, the act of bullying is often covert and hidden from viewing eyes. This message is unconsciously understood by little girls in early childhood and frequently carries over into their covertly aggressive actions in adolescence and adulthood. As Simmons (2002) explains, “Silence is deeply woven into the fabric of the female experience” (p. 3). Consequently, the silence that Simmons discusses may force the female psyche to covertly aggress. To do otherwise would risk rejection by society for the taboo of engaging in physically aggressive acts as a female which is not acceptable according to societal standards. Taking a closer look at the

societal influences upon a girl's developing psyche reveals perpetual conflict. A psychoanalytic discourse regarding social aggression calls for a consideration of the primary societal influences that contribute to and perpetuate covertly aggressive acts that are salient among female students.

### Introduction to Society: The Role of the Mother

Winnicott (1964) argues that it is the role of the ordinary devoted mother to introduce her baby to the world in small doses. In the beginning, the good enough mother spends time providing for the baby's fundamental needs after birth. Through these interactions, the mother's relationship with the baby lays the foundation for the baby's emotional development and establishes the concept of what to expect in relationships. Thus, the mother's relationship with the child serves as an impetus for learning to socially relate to others. If we are to better understand the psychoanalytic roots of social aggression among girls, this is where to begin. Winnicott (1964) tells us that:

The emotional development of an infant starts at the beginning of his life. If we are to judge the way in which a human being deals with his fellow creatures, and see how he builds up his personality and life, we cannot afford to leave out what happens in the earliest years, months, and even weeks and days of his life. (p.103)

Because mothers are typically the primary caregiver of children, little girls learn a great deal from their mothers about how to relate to others. According to Winnicott, the level of care provided by the mother is of the utmost importance in meeting both the physical and emotional needs of the infant, thus influencing the developing psyche of the child in the process. As a baby develops and changes over time, the mother learns to adapt to

meet the changing needs. Throughout these adaptations to change, the baby integrates the mother's patterns of reliability and failures, forming the basis of the baby's expectations. Winnicott explained that failures of reliability are naturally expected to occur since mothers are human beings. However, through the successful mending of failures, the mother communicates love and helps the baby to learn security in her care. Contrary to learning security is a sense of deprivation. After feeling the level of care that is involved in the mother's mending of failures, a child becomes deprived when the mother then establishes a pattern of innumerable and unmended failures. When reliability upon the mother is lost, the child is apt to engage in relationship patterns to seek the security that was felt when prior failures were mended. Winnicott (1987) postulates, "It is then the lifework of the child to provoke conditions in which failures mended once more give the pattern to life" (p. 98). I contend that this pattern of reliability and failures is transferred to relationships among girls who are seeking security in their friendships. Social aggression often involves patterns of on-again, off-again relationships as friendships are withheld among female bullies. Constantly seeking the security and level of care experienced through mended failures may explain the unconscious psychological drive behind this manner of aggression. When girls aggress by withholding their friendship, what they may be seeking is affirmation that the other girl is upset by the disruption in the relationship and has a desire to mend it. In this regard, the control over whether or not the friendship is mended lies with the aggressor, analogous to the dependence of the infant upon the mother for the pattern of reliability following failures.

As a young girl grows, her mother also becomes a significant role model for the girl who is observing and learning what is deemed appropriate feminine behavior and



what is not. Beyond watching how the mother handles the care of her household, girls also are keenly aware of how their mother relates to their father, their siblings, and other women. As it pertains to conflicts, Jack (1999) states that “most women say they learned to avoid direct conflict by watching their mothers” (p. 192). Girls pick up on the notion that it’s unladylike for mom to be contentious since she’s supposed to nurture and care for her family as a socially dictated norm. As such, girls learn that they must be sneaky with their aggression, often attacking covertly by withholding friendships and spreading rumors about one another.

A young girl’s image of her mother may be challenged as she learns more about the role of women in our society. Grumet (1988) tells us that “the discrepancy that children experience between their mother’s influence in their home, compared to her influence in the public world, must undermine their comfort and confidence in maternal strength” (p. 26). At home, the mother is often the one who feeds us, clothes us, helps us with homework, and tucks us in at night. In the life of a child, the mother is of primary importance; however, when children begin to recognize that society does not respect the role of the mother as important when compared to positions in the outside world, it contorts the child’s image of mother on a pedestal. It becomes easy for the daughter to develop a lack of respect for the mother when she realizes that the mother’s role is not an esteemed position by society’s standards. Consequently, it is not uncommon for mothers and daughters to develop contentious relationships when the daughter lacks respect for the mother. With regard to the mother-daughter relationship, Lamb (2001) explains:

Most frequently their secret anger is aimed toward their mothers. The mother-

daughter relationship is particularly charged because mothers teach their daughters to suppress and because they themselves have been taught to suppress anger. Nevertheless, mothers are the major disciplinarian in most households and so take the brunt of girls' anger. (p. 162)

Although one important role of Winnicott's good enough mother is to provide a facilitating environment that supports the child's development, this becomes a more challenging task if the daughter resents having to suppress her anger as Lamb described. Mothers who are the disciplinarian in the family are put in the hot seat, blamed for being controlled by the daughter who is being disciplined, and by society if the daughter errs in any way.

The psychoanalytic emphasis placed upon the importance of mothers in the successful ego development of the child prejudicially blames mothers for problems that arise. In considering the mother's role in the child's development, it is important to note that mothers are often deemed culpable when things go wrong, particularly with their daughters. Miller (1986) tells us that blaming mothers is a common trend in psychoanalysis and offers the following explanations for this occurrence:

It is easier to blame mothers than to comprehend the entire system that has restricted women. It is true that mothers have interacted most with daughters and, thus, were the most direct agents of an oppressive system. But mothers were themselves victims of the system. (pp. 138-139)

The societal expectations that mothers teach to their daughters are often the same as those recapitulated to mothers throughout their lives as females. Both implicitly and explicitly, mothers convey expectations to their daughters based upon their own knowledge and

experience, circuitously reinforcing a system of oppression as Miller expressed. The manner in which females are expected to handle their anger and aggression is one such expectation that daughters learn from their mothers. Lamb (2001) points out that mothers avoid discussions pertaining to anger with their daughters, teaching girls to mask their own aggression. Further, she asserts that “when girls do not deny or mask anger, it emerges in ways that elicit strong cultural disapproval” (Lamb, 2001, p. 160). As mothers sow the masking of anger into the lives of their daughters, our culture reaps social aggression among female students. Unfortunately, this cycle points the finger back at the role of the mother, blaming her again for a system in which she herself struggles.

The relationship between mothers and daughters is significant in researching social aggression. Not only does the mother establish the standards by which the infant will learn to relate to others as described by object relations analysts, but she also provides a female child with a prototype for relating to other females. Chodorow (1978) points out that:

Because of their mothering by women, girls come to experience themselves as less separate than boys, as having more permeable ego boundaries. Girls come to define themselves more in relation to others. Their internalized object-relations structure becomes more complex, with more ongoing issues. (p. 93)

With object relations, girls unconsciously introject aspects of the maternal image as an internalized object. Their capacity to relate to others depends upon this introjected image. The qualities of the good enough mother who tends to her infant’s needs intuitively provides for the child an image of nurturance which affects how she learns to relate to others. Consequently, Chodorow (1978) further explains that the personal relationships

and friendships that women have with one another have been proven sociologically to be richer than those of men, attesting to the significance of relationships to women. Jack (1999) concurs in that “Women are socialized to be nurturant and to focus their energies on creating and sustaining relationships. A long line of research confirms that women’s sense of self is more interdependent, more based in relationships than men’s” (p. 39). This interdependence experienced by young girls establishes not only a basis for intense levels of friendship, but concurrently renders them extremely vulnerable to social aggression.

Lamb (2001) points out that socialization practices reinforce the masking of behavior to girls who learn that it is not appropriate for them to show anger in their facial expressions. She describes research in which preschool children are intentionally disappointed by researchers, yet the girls managed to contain their emotions in front of the adult. Jack (1999) also explains that anger and aggression are masked by females because our culture is unable to accept it. To do so would pose a threat to the patriarchal status quo. Further, the masking of anger and aggression by females conforms to society’s expectations whereas acting upon the anger through aggression is deemed inappropriate feminine behavior. “As women grapple with contradictory social norms governing their behavior, it is possible to see how changes in women’s roles affect their aggression” (Jack, 1999, p. 5). Contradictions between the societal norms and the urge to be aggressive compete within the female psyche. Social aggression affords females an avenue through which aggression can be expressed, yet it often occurs inconspicuously to avoid disapproval from others. A further explanation of the conflicting societal

perceptions of females will explain the vast difference in the messages that young girls receive which shape the development of their psyche.

### Conflicting Societal Perceptions of Females

Societal depictions of the female gender are rather contradictory and exemplify the notion that women are inexplicable. To generalize, society tends to view females as sweet, demure, and passive. Contradiction arises out of the opposite depiction of females which declares that women are hysterical by nature. The literal translation of the Greek root “hyster” is “womb,” thus, the etymology of the word “hysterical” is derived from “hysteria,” a psychological disturbance first associated with women as it was believed to be caused by disorders of the womb. Hysterectomy, or the surgical removal of the female reproductive organs, shows that this word is derived from the word “hysterical” representing the traditional declaration by society in general, more specifically by men, that women are hysterical. Two conflicting societal views, one of a docile lady and the other of a hormonal bitch, reify an indecisive nature of the female gender.

With regard to aggression, Jack (1999) reminds us that childhood stories reinforce the myth of the nonaggressive women and gives the following example, “The tale of Beauty and the Beast lays out the Western mythology of gender, aggression, and sexuality. Man is a beast; woman is an unaggressive beauty” (p. 23). Jack’s example demonstrates the manner in which the societal standards for women are focused upon their looks and passivity, whereas the illustration of man is that of physical strength and dominance. In other childhood literature, Chesler (2001) explains that “fairy tales are fraught with just such Fairy Godmothers and Evil Stepmothers, and should be understood as a history of embattled female relationships and other sudden reversals of blissful,

dyadic fortune” (p. 37). The beautiful, demure Fairy Godmother epitomizes the pervasive stereotype of the female gender, whereas the Evil Stepmother is disliked for her aggressive qualities and manipulation of others to get her way. For her aggression, the Evil Stepmother is an outcast because she fails to conform to the myth that women are nonaggressive. White and Kowalski (1994) argue that it is advantageous for men to maintain the myth of the nonaggressive woman because it perpetuates male dominance over the vulnerability of females in our society. Further, society labels women who are aggressive as deviant. “This naming process not only denies aggressive women the opportunity to be heard, but also serves to deter aggressive behavior out of fear of punishment” (White & Kowalski, 1994, p. 493). In other words, females tend to conform to the myth that they are nonaggressive rather than attract negative attention or bring wrath upon themselves by engaging in behaviors deemed deviant for women by society. As evidenced by empirical research, the myth of the nonaggressive woman is just that- a myth.

Conforming to society’s expectations that females ought to be docile puts a great deal of pressure on girls to hide their aggression, thus contributing to the prevalence of covert forms of aggression among females throughout life. Living up to societal expectations that girls are to conform to the image of the well-behaved lady often conflicts with natural feelings of anger and aggression that arise as girls are learning to deal with their emotions. Lamb (2001) asserts that while constructing themselves, girls omit the parts of the self that are not deemed acceptable by the prevailing culture. Girls often feel that their aggressive thoughts and actions are not acceptable, frequently causing them to hide their true selves from others. Pipher (1994) concurs that adolescence is an

especially difficult developmental time for young girls as they struggle with their true selves versus the false selves that they create to conform to what is expected of them. She explains:

With puberty, girls face enormous cultural pressure to split into false selves.

The pressure comes from schools, magazines, music, television, advertisements, and movies. It comes from peers. Girls can be true to themselves and risk abandonment by their peers, or they can reject their true selves and be socially acceptable. Most girls choose to be socially accepted and split into two selves, one that is authentic and one that is culturally scripted. In public they become who they are supposed to be. (p. 27)

The splitting of selves is, according to Winnicott, unhealthy. Winnicott (1986) states, “I contend this is not just a value judgment, but that there is a link between individual emotional health and a sense of feeling real” (p. 35). Denying one’s true self is inauthentic and can prove to be emotionally harmful. The part of the psyche that is not acceptable to the girl becomes hidden away from the world’s view, yet it lurks and lingers for the opportunity to lash out when no one is looking, hence, a prevalence of covertly aggressive behaviors among girls. Through these conflicting selves, the same sweet girl can be your best friend one minute and a bully the next. Chesler (2003) offers the following depiction of this phenomenon by illustrating traits of the Good Fairy Godmother and Evil Queen Stepmother that are simultaneously present in the same female:

It is psychologically difficult to accept the fact that one’s mother, sister, best

friend, or female co-worker, who can be comforting and understanding at one moment, can, in the next moment, turn cold and rejecting. People often deal with this by ‘splitting’ women in half: the Good Fairy Godmother and the Evil Queen Stepmother- who may in reality be the same woman, compartmentalized. (p. 126)

In the socially aggressive experiences of girls, behavior is often erratic and unpredictable, especially if the bully and victim are friends. Girls struggle with knowing if their relationships with their girl friends are real or superficial when social aggression is occurring. The unpredictability of the relationship often creates ambivalence where both love and hate coexist in the relationship, much like the mother-daughter relationship as viewed through the Oedipus complex whereby the girl’s first love and attachment to her mother shifts to a rivalry and hate as the two compete for the father’s affections. Klein (1964) explains that “the woman’s early jealousy and hatred of her mother as a rival for her father’s love has played an important part in her aggressive phantasies” (p. 72).

In *The Secret Lives of Girls*, Sharon Lamb (2001) concurs that society imposes upon young girls the burden to be good girls, meaning that they must live up to the expectation that they will not engage in aggressive acts. As a result, girls find other ways of releasing their aggression by engaging in covertly aggressive acts, yet presenting a very different image to adults. Rather than engage in physical aggression, a societal taboo for a female, girls construct their images and personalities to the acceptable standards of adults in society, primarily their teachers and parents. Lamb explains that girls construct themselves differently in order to fit the mold of society. Girls are implicitly aware that they are to deny their anger and acts of aggression. She goes on to say that:

No wonder that with so little help from adults, girls experience enormous guilt



for letting aggression show. Boys in our culture have greater freedom to explore, rage, and experiment; they are free to be sexual, ravenous, outrageous, and plain mean. They're restricted in other ways that are most likely equally damaging, yet they are allowed their anger, their aggression. (Lamb, 2001, pp. 153-154)

So, not only are girls condemned by society for demonstrating aggression, they also are consumed with guilt when they fail society by not conforming to what is deemed acceptable behavior for a girl. Constant conflict and turmoil can consume an adolescent female, both within relationships and within her psyche.

Pipher (1994) explains that adolescent females are egocentric in their thinking as a result of their immature emotional development. As a result, they tend to focus upon their own experiences and internalize issues as being specifically about themselves.

When a girl is operating under a false self, the distortion of reality can occur. Pipher gives the example of girls becoming anorexic because it allows them to reduce their problems and concerns to the one primary focus of their weight. While succumbing to the pressures of living with a false self, some girls also face other detrimental issues such as food, drug, or alcohol addiction, sexual promiscuity, and self-mutilation. In concurrence, Lamb (2001) adds that when girls feel the pressure of conforming to the societal expectation of harnessing their aggression, "girls turn it against themselves: through eating disorders, self-mutilation, hypercriticism about their talents and bodies, and depression" (p. 143).

When a person goes through a psychologically devastating experience and suppresses within the unconscious the painful feelings associated with that experience, one possible outcome is a neurotic condition that can result in the form of a self-destructive disorder as those mentioned by Pipher and Lamb. Through the object relations lens, all of these

disorders could be considered a manifestation of a neurosis which propelled the adolescent girl into a relationship with a destructive object. Winnicott (1986) contends that it is not difficult for an individual to own the destructive impulses that are associated with feelings of anger or a reaction to a fear. Conversely, it is difficult to accept destructiveness felt toward an object that is loved. Winnicott (1986) explains that “the difficult thing is for each individual to take full responsibility for the destructiveness that is personal, and that inherently belongs to a relationship to an object that is felt to be good- in other words, that is related to loving” (p. 82). Healthy development, according to Winnicott, cannot occur without a facilitating environment providing support through the integration of the psyche and body, a developmental process whereby the psyche is able to come to terms with the body and take full responsibility for all feelings, including those that are destructive. He further explains that repetitive environmental failures of holding can block integration. The prevalence of social aggression among our female students beckons us to look more closely at their facilitating environments to better understand why some girls develop neurotic disorders as a result of directing their destructive impulses inward, and why others socially annihilate their female peers by directing their aggression outward. An introspective look at the unconscious beliefs held by our society about women offers an explanation for the conflicting views of women that affect social structures and the developing psyche of the adolescent female.

### *The Fear of Women*

Seemingly contradictory to the societal perception of a docile female is the concept of an unconscious fear of women. Winnicott (1964, 1986) tells us that every individual, both men and women, have an unconscious fear of women that results from

the earliest dependence upon a woman during infancy. In the beginning, this dependence is predominantly related to the mother tending to her infant's physical needs. As the infant grows physically and emotionally into a child, teenager, and adult, the original dependence upon the mother during infancy is not remembered by the individual; however, Winnicott explains that the unconscious mind harbors the fear of being solely dependent upon a woman. While the fear of women is greater with some individuals than others, Winnicott states that it is a universal fear and argues that it has a powerful influence over the structure of society. Further, he explains that this is why women are often victims of cruelty and violence, as well as why few women are in politically powerful positions, frequently causing them to be subject to dictatorship. "One of the roots of the need to be a dictator can be a compulsion to deal with this fear of woman by encompassing her and acting for her" (Winnicott, 1986, p. 253). Miller (1976) asserts that male society has a fear of women's effectiveness, thus inducing the same fear among women. Lamb (2001) agrees, contending that girls often develop an unconscious voice that polices their thoughts as though they were aligned with the male-dominated culture. By aligning with the male voice, girls are more prone to calling names or making disparaging comments to one another, establishing their own form of dominance among their female peers. With social aggression, females are often participants in the subordination of other females. Chesler (2003) aptly concurs by stating, "Female rivalries tend to support, not disrupt the status quo. Thus, in order to survive or improve their own lot, most women, like men, collude in the subordination of women as a class" (p. 37). Resonating from these various theorists is a common belief that the control of women serves to repudiate an unconscious fear of them.

The social structure that controls women in this manner through expected obedience is first learned by young girls through their relationships with their mothers, and is later reinforced by societal expectations as they venture beyond their home environment (Chodorow, 1978). Dellasega (2005) agrees in that “girls form friendships that mirror their relationships with their mothers, based on conformity rather than self-expression” (p. 21). How a young girl learns to relate to other girls is often modeled after what they learn from this initial relationship with their own mother, including their generalization of the fear of women. Where there are unhealthy patterns in relationships, girls tend to continue these patterns throughout their school careers with peers and even into their adult relationships. From learning that society is not accepting of their feelings of aggression, young girls may be unconsciously compelled to dominate other females as a manifestation of a fear of women resulting from their total dependence upon their mothers in infancy. From a psychoanalytic perspective, having an unconscious need to dominate other females out of a fear of women may explain why girls tend to engage in socially aggressive behaviors with their female counterparts, both friends and adversaries alike.

Dana Crowley Jack (1999) also discusses a fear of women in her book, *Behind the Mask*. She explains that fears are aroused at the thought of women being aggressive because it challenges the existing societal perception of what it means to be female. Further, she points out that it blurs gender lines that have traditionally defined males as aggressive and females as passive. Jack (1999) postulates the following:

Underlying these long-standing issues around gender and aggression is a fear woven deeply into the human psyche. What the culture fears, wants to control,

and denies is women's *intent to do harm*. Women give life to the human race.

Their intent to do harm is incompatible with their biological function as mothers and their social role as nurturers of the young; they must curb aggression so as not to hurt children. (p. 30)

Aggression in women is in opposition to Winnicott's description of the ordinary devoted mother who intuitively tends to her baby's needs. Society perceives women as nurturers because of their inherent role in giving birth and caring for children (Chodorow, 1978). To accept aggression among women is not conducive to maintaining the traditional role of women as nurturing mothers, thus creating a social taboo when women demonstrate aggression. Therefore, society exerts control over women by denying them overt aggression that would challenge the mother role, all the while contributing to covert manners of aggression among females (Jack, 1999). Through covert aggression, females are provided a means by which they are able to maintain a proper societal image while simultaneously wielding power.

### *The Power of Women*

The power of women is inextricably bound to the unconscious fear of women. As previously explained, Winnicott (1964) emphasizes the significance of the mother-child relationship as establishing a foundation upon which a child learns to relate to others. The same fear of women that stems from an infant's earliest dependency upon the mother's caretaking is essentially a fear of the mother's power, which becomes unconsciously generalized as a fear of all women's potential to wield power. Through this earliest relationship with their mothers, young girls learn how to establish a connectedness with others. The manner by which the mother exerts aggression is

influential in how a young girl learns to relate to others. The manipulation of others is one powerful, yet covert, manner of aggression that is often conveyed to girls by their mothers through passive-aggressive means. According to her findings through interviews with sixty women, Jack (1999) states, "Women also say their mothers taught them passive-aggressive behavior as a method of control: what appears on the outside as passive inaction actually carries an active, controlling intent which affects others as surely as does a shout" (p. 193). While it is often effective in producing the woman's desired outcome, manipulation through passive-aggressive means avoids the direct confrontation that is evoked by a shout. Young girls observe and experience from their own mothers how to exert power through the use of manipulation, a skill that serves to mask their underlying aggression.

Jack (1999) speaks at length of the manners in which females employ passive-aggressive control tactics. One such tactic is through the silent treatment whereby the female controls a situation by withholding conversation that could actually settle a dispute. Through silence, the other person in the relationship may experience a sense of disconnection, creating a feeling of anxiety over the possible loss of the relationship itself. "In children it creates anxiety about the security of attachment, because it gives them an absent presence- a mother who is physically there but emotionally unavailable" (Jack, 1999, pp. 205-206). Young girls come to realize the power of the silent treatment and utilize it themselves as a level of control in social aggression with their peers and later with their male partners. Another powerful way to convey aggression passively is through the eyes- hateful glares, staring, and the "evil eye" to communicate anger and dominance without articulating a word. As with the silent treatment, many females

masterfully express passive-aggressivity by staring at someone to establish a tone of discontent, often successfully hiding their aggression from those on the outside of the relationship. I, too, have mastered the use of the “evil eye” as both a mother and school administrator. By simply raising my left eyebrow at a child, discontent with their actions is successfully conveyed. From interactions with my own mother in childhood, I learned the power of an indignant look.

Directly asserting power and engaging in competitive behaviors are not deemed acceptable societal expectations for females (Heim et al, 2003). According to Miller (1976), young girls learn in early childhood that directly asserting power is equivalent to their destructiveness towards another person. As girls learn that society expects females to do for others, they equate doing something for themselves as being negative. “Acting for oneself is made to seem like depriving others or hurting them” (Miller, 1976, p. 120). Traditionally females have been taught to tend to the needs of others by forfeiting their own feelings and needs. Because tending to others often undermines feelings of power that females have, women often experience internal conflict. Accepting power can be difficult because it is unfamiliar to them. According to Miller, the specific role that women play in the development of others is devalued by society and perpetuates this cycle; however, she emphasizes how very important these qualities are in combating the dysfunctionality of this perception by society. As it has become more common for females to accept and to seek power, learning to accept and handle conflict constructively is necessary for progress as well. Young girls must be taught to embrace their own power without directing it in a destructive manner toward their female peers, a process which serves to perpetuate the subordination of females.

Challenging the norms of femininity, Girl Power has become a recent mantra of empowering young girls with the same opportunities as those traditionally afforded to boys. Adams (2005) explains that Girl Power shifts the cultural description of the ideal girl by conveying that girls can do whatever boys can do. The term asserts that girls are independent and strong, offering them greater access to athletics and academic achievement than ever before.

However, the success of Girl Power as a selling tool of ideal girlhood is based on another significant component of the discourse; that is, girls are not being asked to give up their femininity, but rather are being given a cultural script for today's version of masculinity as long as they remain feminine. (Adams, 2005, p. 110)

Girl Power offers girls access to activities requiring physical strength, assertiveness, and intelligence, such as involvement in sports, math, and science, all of which previously deterred the involvement of girls due to the implied masculine connotations. Girl Power brings its own level of risk as girls figure out how to balance the complexities, as well as the contradictions, of the demonstration of strength and intelligence, while at the same time balancing the traditional feminine qualities of attractiveness and a deferential attitude towards males (Adams, 2005; Erevelles & Mutua, 2005). The description of Girl Power insinuates that society will only accept girls exerting their strength and intelligence when they continue to abide by the cultural expectations of what is deemed acceptable feminine behavior, particularly maintaining their attractiveness and "girly" qualities that have traditionally set them apart from their male counterparts. Lamb (2001) adds that girls are encouraged to seek power through the femininity of their appearance and manners, yet she cautions that "truth be told, there really is power in this ideal, but it is a



borrowed power, a granted power- granted by men who benefit most from girls' niceness" (p. 43). Even with Girl Power, the reinforcement of feminine ideals serves to deter girls from crossing the line into areas presumed to belong to males if it means forfeiting their femininity.

With regard to female attractiveness as a component of feminine power, Wiseman (2002) tells us that "the pursuit and attainment of the elusive standard of beauty is one of the most critical components of girls' power structure" (p. 81). As girls' bodies begin to mature in puberty, they are faced with the power of their own sexuality as others take notice of how they look. Wiseman points out that the sudden attention and popularity that is gained by changes in her body can be conflicting to an adolescent girl, both disturbing and exciting, presenting a power that adolescent girls may be ill-equipped to handle. Pipher (1994) argues that we live in a culture that has contradictory and pluralistic sexual paradigms that convey confusing messages to adolescent girls. She illustrates that "women are to be angels sometimes, sexual animals others, ladies by day and whores by night" (Pipher, 1994, p. 246). Further, girls face the double-standard of being judged harshly for sexual exploration, versus the rite of passage that it represents for the adolescent boy. Out of shame, girls are apt to hide the power that they feel from being the object of male desire (Lamb, 2001).

Orenstein (2011) argues that the empowerment of girls via their sexuality is a cultural misconception. Girls have to perpetually negotiate what is considered beautiful and sexy without being perceived as a slut, which results in social annihilation. In addition, Orenstein contends that girls harshly judge one another based upon looks or sexiness, frequently turning it into aggression. "The fastest way to take a girl down

remains, as ever, to attack her looks or sexual behavior: Ugly. Fat. Slut. Whore. Those are the teen girl equivalent of kryptonite” (Orenstein, 2011, p. 167). In today’s culture, where technology has become a prevalent aspect of communication, girls have begun to utilize social media to express their aggression by posting sexually derogatory comments or pictures online as the ultimate humiliation. A speculative look at the psychological effects of social media affirms the havoc that it wreaks when girls utilize technology as a powerful tool of aggression.

### The Psychological Effects of Social Media

Winnicott (1965) states that “The family protects the child from the world. But gradually the world begins to seep in” (p. 40). In ways that were most likely unimaginable to Winnicott, the world has certainly seeped in by way of technology and social media. Technological dependency in today’s society has an incredible hold on our youth. Not only has Internet usage transformed beyond an informational resource to social networking, but the use of cell phones has become ubiquitous (Pickett & Thomas, 2006). While most parents today can still remember a time before cell phones and computers were widely used, such is not the case with our children. Technology has always had an influence in their lives, and contributes to the lack of social attachment that is necessary to build interpersonal relationships. One example of this is evidenced by the preference of most youth to text instead of making a personal phone call to communicate. An abbreviated texting language supersedes the human voice, and lacks an element of personal connection.

To say that technology is vast is an understatement. Computers, smart phones, and other electronic devices offer access to the Internet and the world beyond. While the

Internet is a valuable tool in many ways, it also introduces instant information at the fingertips of our children that most adults never imagined. Many parents lack the familiarity with technology that youth possess (Keith & Martin, 2005; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). To explain, Orenstein (2011) states:

But I have heard it said that we adults are immigrants to this land of technology; our kids are natives. They use it differently than we do. They experience it differently, without our old-world accents or values. Much as the mall was for a previous generation, the Internet has become a place where they experiment with identity, friendship, and flirtation. (p. 163)

Because youth are often more technologically savvy than their parents, they are skilled at hiding cyber activities that would alarm their parents. Today's youth are proficient at navigating the Internet, expanding their vulnerability to harm, yet most of them are not aware of the dangers involved. Considering just one popular social networking site, Facebook, is staggering as Wheeler (2011) points out that the population of Facebook users will soon exceed that of China, the most populated country in the world as 700,000 new users sign up per day, or 21 million per month. Beyond Facebook are a multitude of interactive chat rooms and social networking sites that engage people of all ages from around the world. Increasingly, parents have become aware of the need to protect their children from dangers on the Internet; however, many parents still misunderstand where the danger lies. Orenstein (2011) tells us that parents were initially concerned that their daughters would be stalked via the Internet by child predators, but as it turns out their own peers and acquaintances are more apt to pose harm.

Social aggression now transcends the premises of school and can occur virtually anywhere with the use of social media through cyberbullying, preventing even home from being a safe haven from harassment (Keith & Martin, 2005; Mason, 2008; Smith et al., 2008; Mustacchi, 2009). Cyberbullying has also added to the socially aggressive repertoire of young girls by providing a plethora of technological tools through which they can bully elusively. To further describe the range of media through which cyberbullying may occur, Feinberg and Robey (2009) offer the following definition:

Cyberbullying involves sending or posting harmful or cruel text or images using the Internet (e.g., instant messaging, e-mails, chat rooms, and social networking sites) or other digital communication devices, such as cell phones. It can involve stalking, threats, harassment, impersonation, humiliation, trickery, and exclusion. (p. 26)

Although technology is utilized with cyberbullying in lieu of face-to-face aggression, the fact remains that it poses a very real threat to a person's safety and emotional well-being, evidenced by the psychological distress of those who have been victims of cyberbullying (Gillespie, 2006; Mason, 2008; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Darden, 2009; Feinberg & Robey, 2009). In some cases, the emotional and psychological distress caused by cyberbullying resulted in suicide, reminding us that abuse in a virtual world can lead to devastating effects in real life (Sparling, 2005; Beckstrom, 2008; Long, 2008; Fredrick, 2009; Wheeler, 2011).

Like traditional bullying, cyberbullying is marked by an imbalance in power whereby the aggressor holds some type of strength or power over the victim and abuses that power by inflicting harm (Keith & Martin, 2005; Gillespie, 2006; Mason, 2008;

Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). Victims of bullying are vulnerable in some aspect and the bully's intent to harm the victim is another characteristic of cyberbullying that coincides with traditional bullying (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). An example of this with social aggression may be the forwarding of a compromising picture of an acquaintance with whom a girl is angry to another group of students in an effort to cause embarrassment and social ridicule. In this example, having possession of an embarrassing picture provides the aggressor with the power to humiliate the victim and renders the victim vulnerable to the aggressor's disposition of the picture. A final similarity between traditional ways of bullying and cyberbullying is repetition. According to Vandebosch and Van Cleemput (2008), repetitive acts of taunting and social ridicule via the Internet or cell phone constitute cyberbullying, distinguishable from cyber-teasing which implies cessation following a single instance of teasing. Through the imbalance of power, the intent to harm, and repetitive taunting or humiliation, cyberbullies instill despair in the lives of their victims. While traditional bullying and cyberbullying share several similarities, the ability to hide behind a different persona while being aggressive gives cyberbullies a marked advantage over traditional bullies who are easier to recognize among peers. Further, it provides a viable option for girls to utilize technology to inflict social aggression rather than risk the societal taboo of engaging in physical aggression as a female.

Compounding the intensity of cyberbullying is a phenomenon termed *the online disinhibition effect*. Suler (2004) explains that "while online, some people self-disclose or act out more frequently or intensely than they would in person" (p. 321). Students are less inhibited in what they say to their peers when they believe that they can remain

anonymous. Disinhibition is fostered by a sense of anonymity while online, allowing individuals freer rein with their expressions coupled with a lack of concern about the judgment of others (Suler, 2004; Beal & Hall, 2007; Mason, 2008). For socially aggressive girls, this manner of bullying is especially enticing as they are able to act upon their aggressive feelings inconspicuously, yet very effectively inflicting harm.

Concealing their identities while being aggressive allows girls to hide behind technology and avoid facing the consequences of their actions. “In the case of expressed hostilities or other deviant actions, the person can avert responsibility for those behaviors, almost as if the superego restrictions and moral cognitive processes have been temporarily suspended from the online psyche” (Suler, 2004, p. 322). Psychologically, they dissociate themselves from their behaviors.

Through cyber communication, girls can express aspects of their true selves that they are unable to express publicly. Pipher (1994) described girls as hiding unacceptable aspects of their true selves from society by splitting into a false self that conforms to whatever is deemed acceptable by society’s standards. Winnicott (1986) argues that “society is easily taken in by the false-self organization, and has to pay heavily for this. The false self, from our point of view here, though a successful defense, is not an aspect of health” (p. 33). By denying the authenticity of the true self, the false self takes over and can lead to depression. As Winnicott expressed, society pays the price when the false self affects the emotional well-being of young girls who have become accustomed to suppressing their true selves out of fear of social rejection and isolation. Developing an avatar allows girls in chat rooms and social networking sites to create themselves as they

wish. Creating one's avatar in cyber world provides the perfect platform for girls who are skilled at hiding aspects of their true selves. Orentstein (2011) concurs:

Girls, especially, are already so accustomed to disconnecting from their inner experience, observing themselves as others might. Unlike earlier generations, though, their imagined audience is all too real: online, every girl becomes a mini-Miley complete with her own adoring fan base that she is bound to maintain. (pp. 166-167)

Interacting with others online is not the same as a personal encounter. Continued interaction through technology alone fosters the dehumanization of others. It becomes difficult to distinguish real life from cyber world. However, the perception of anonymity offered by technology frees up the adolescent female to express aspects of her true personality, such as aggression, which may have otherwise been concealed. Sadly, cyber encounters become emphatically real when social aggression enters a relationship as cyberbullying. As with social aggression, girls are more apt to be aggressors and victims of cyberbullying (Keith & Martin, 2005; Beckstrom, 2008; Smith et al., 2008; Wagner, 2008). Wagner (2008) points out that girls are prone to victimization by cyberbullies because they spend more time than boys socially interacting online. While boys spend most of their Internet time playing games, girls are involved in communication activities, such as social networking, blogging, instant messaging, and participating in virtual worlds (Orenstein, 2011). The desire to communicate with others, coupled with increased access and usage of the Internet, establishes a war zone for girls who are socially aggressive. In addition, they often become hostages to the aggression for extended periods of time because they fail to seek the help of an adult out of worry that restrictions

of their cell phones or Internet use will be imposed (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Feinberg & Robey, 2009). Research by Juvonen and Gross (2008) found that concern over losing access to their electronic means of socializing with others was more prevalent among 12- to 14- year old girls whereby 46% of them concealed the harassment from an adult as opposed to 27% of their male counterparts in the same age group.

While students are encouraged to report cyberbullying to an adult, determining the extent of their authority over cyberbullying occurring through electronic communication off the school campus creates a complex situation for school personnel (Sparling, 2005; Beale & Hall, 2007; Beckstrom, 2008; Mason, 2008; Feinberg & Robey, 2009; Wheeler, 2011). Much of the jurisdiction of the school is bound by legal restrictions protecting the free speech rights of students as determined in the *Tinker vs. De Moines* case where the court determined that a student's right to free speech is protected by the First Amendment except when it creates a potential risk for or substantially disrupts school. Wheeler (2011) describes two very similar Third Circuit cases that resulted in different outcomes such that one found it within the authority of a school to discipline for off-campus cyberbullying while the other ruled that the school could not discipline for almost the same circumstances as the first case. Wheeler (2001) begs the question:

When two panel of the Third Circuit, on essentially the same facts, come to exactly opposite conclusions as to the ability of schools to discipline for this type of speech, how can we expect non-lawyer school administrators to navigate these waters? (p. 277)



While school administrators and legislators continue their struggle with understanding the role of the school in handling cases of cyberbullying, students continue with surreptitious means of harming one another with little threat of retribution. While the security of all students is of concern, Orenstein (2011) proclaims, “The mind reels at the idea of such technology in the hands of teenage girls, who are already masters of- and suckers for- stealth aggression” (p. 168).

### School as a Subculture of Society

One’s gender and the relationships that we have with others serve as powerful forces in how we define ourselves. Within the school environment, students interact with one another in a multitude of ways, sometimes in a positive and assuring manner, and at other times in hateful, dominant ways. These interactions with others are continuous within the school setting and are certainly pedagogical by nature. Henry Giroux (2000) affirms that “pedagogy is not limited to what goes on in institutionalized forms of schooling; it encompasses every relationship youth imagine to be theirs in the world” (p. 26). Students learn an immense amount from the relationships that they have with peers, which proves to be detrimental when the messages that they are receiving from their peers are exclusionary or vicious.

Not only are youth affected by peer interactions, but the culture in which they live is also a powerful influence that is channeled through the hidden curriculum of school. For students, school provides a subculture for society at large. Belenky et al. (1986/1997) explain that while males are viewed as competent and assertive in getting things done, females are viewed as incompetent, dependent, and passive. “The culture, needless to say, supplies many experiences that maintain and nourish such notions” (Belenky et al.,

1986/1997, p. 29). Schools provide the setting through which many stereotypes of gendered behavior are powerfully reinforced (O'Reilly, 2001). We are reminded by O'Reilly (2001) that:

Schooling is the one universal experience for all children that is provided by the states and the federal government. Public school systems, for the most part, are governed by school boards that are comprised of White or minority middle-class members, many of whom represent the corporate community. (p. 18)

Frazier and Sadker (1973) agree in their assertion that school is very influential in the lives of students because it is where the majority of their time is spent. Due to compulsory school laws, children are required to attend. "Only two other institutions- prisons and mental hospitals- are so thoroughly compulsory in nature" (Frazier & Sadker, 1973, p. 80). While Frazier and Sadker clearly establish that they are not comparing the conditions of schools to those of prisons and mental hospitals, they do emphasize the fact that all three of them institutionalize human beings. Further, as an institution that requires their presence, students learn more from the social environment than the actual curriculum. Immersion in the social environment of school on a daily basis reifies to girls the societal expectations that were first introduced to them at home as they experience the subtle reinforcement of the hidden curriculum.

## CHAPTER V

### PSYCHOANALYSIS OF SOCIAL AGGRESSION IN SCHOOLING

To culminate this psychoanalytic inquiry into social aggression as a form of bullying among female students, it behooves us to turn our attention to the hidden curriculum of schools as a contributing factor. Orenstein (1994) contends that “the lessons of the hidden curriculum teach girls to value silence and compliance, to view those qualities as a virtue” (p. 5). Consequently, girls often acquiesce to societal expectations learned through the hidden curriculum by aggressing covertly, subtly, and most often, socially. As the environment in which adolescent girls spend the majority of their time with peers, school frequently becomes the arena for their aggression.

In recent years, cries from our youth have demanded the attention of educators, particularly overt acts of violence, while the covert social aggression typically expressed by female students has been overlooked. Incidents of high profile school violence, school shootings in particular, have brought about much speculation by educators, parents, and society in general as to the reasons for this anger and aggression. Some have attributed the outbreaks of violence in America’s schools to the moral decline of our society, easy access to firearms, and the glamorization of death in certain aspects of popular culture, such as violent movies and video games (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003). “Political figures and academics have suggested that school violence is a symptom of moral deterioration within our nation’s youth, families, schools, and society at large” (Behre, Astor, & Meyer, 2001, p. 132). While these factors are certainly influential, they divert attention from the issues that trigger violence and aggression and further serve as scapegoats for more deeply rooted issues that are difficult for our society to accept.

Thus, the motives identified as responsible for school violence have provided the public with “an outside target onto which it could transfer its distress” (Webber, 2003, p. 18) in the aftermath of destruction. In addition, these factors fail to specifically address incidents of social aggression with the attention that it deserves, allowing its covert nature to hide in the background of discussions, much like the female aggressors and victims who personify the experience.

Social aggression commonly demonstrated by female students has been largely overshadowed by acts of aggression that are of the physically violent nature. While our culture rears males to be tough and aggressive, female students receive the message that physical aggression is not acceptable (Pipher, 1994; Fisher & Rodriguez Mosquera, 2001; Simmons, 2002). Fisher and Rodriguez Mosquera (2001) explain that “men and women are socialized with different values and normative beliefs concerning the appropriateness and functionality of aggression, resulting in different judgments of aggression, and different expected social implications of their aggressive responses” (p. 19). Aggressive behaviors among females are deemed as inappropriate, perpetuating traditional gender expectations as girls are indoctrinated by a society that reinforces that girls ought not to demonstrate anger or aggression. These gender expectations within society coalesce with the girl’s desire to conform and result in social aggression. While often covert, socially aggressive acts are very damaging in their own right, and reoccur daily under the unsuspecting eyes of parents and educators. Simmons (2002) explains the covert nature of female aggression as follows:

In the hidden culture of aggression, anger is rarely articulated, and every day of school can be a new social minefield that realigns itself without warning. During

times of conflict, girls will turn on one another with a language and justice only they can understand. Behind a facade of female intimacy lies a terrain traveled in secret, marked with anguish, and nourished by silence. (p. 3)

The secretive manner in which female students typically aggress calls for an introspective look at the school environment itself and the role that it plays in the proliferation of such aggression. A closer look at the psychoanalytic roots of aggression in schooling offers such discourse.

As our youth grow increasingly aggressive, we must ponder the issues contributing to aggression and violence. Taking an honest look at our society's role in perpetuating aggression is difficult to do, and as a result, implies that we are a nation in denial. We deny our contribution to the hidden curriculum in schools and the fear instilled in our youth and society at large. We deny that in the quest to get ahead in consumerist America that parents and teachers lack the time, and often the interest, to cultivate social attachments with youth, and youth with one another, as they are exploited as commodities. Through denial, Americans have avoided the basic human need for social attachment, as well as the subsequent ramifications of social rejection, a factor that may be a primary trigger of violence and aggression. An interesting concept presented by Olson (2010) is that the denial of bullying is an expression of schooling's shadow side, a term borrowed from Jungian psychology. She posits that aggression and bullying in schools is not random, but is a response to the controlling institution of schools. The shadow energy, that which is the negative energy that has been rejected and repressed, often surfaces in a destructive manner. Further, Olson (2010) explains that:

Shadow energy can only be owned and made generative if it is seen and

acknowledged. Bullying can be regarded as the shadow side of compulsory schooling when it fails to serve students with affirmative support, engaging pedagogy, and a sense of relevancy of instruction. (p. 9)

To face the shadow side, it is necessary for society at large, more specifically the government, educators, and parents, to own bullying as a systemic problem and alter the focus of schooling. Focusing upon the emotional needs of our nation's children has become lost in the quest to achieve academic goals established by the government. Academic achievements fail to matter when students turn on one another and make life hell. Everyone is at fault, yet no one takes the blame. The shadow continues to be repressed.

Immediately following a school shooting, it is interesting to watch the fingers point in all directions as the blame gets shifted from one source to another, ignoring the underlying issues that trigger violence and aggression within the school setting. Easy access to firearms, coupled with the influential nature of violence in popular culture, is where much of the blame is placed when it comes to school shootings (Leary et al., 2003). Webber (2003) disagrees with this reasoning and states that "the reasoning presupposes that the objects themselves motivate students to use them in improper and harmful ways" (p. 12). Simply put, having access to firearms may provide a means for the violence, but access to weapons is not what initiates violent acts. Easy access to weapons is faulty as a scapegoat for aggressive acts because it does not explain the underlying motives that initiate the need or desire to become aggressive. Without access to guns, the aggressive acts could still surface in other manners since the motive would remain present in the psyche of the aggressor. Such is the case with socially aggressive

girls who are not equipped with guns, but with their own psyches which have learned from societal expectations to aggress discreetly or face rejection. If we are to accept the fact that covert aggression causes very real harm and devastation, we must believe that aggression arises from more than simple access to weapons.

Within American society, popular culture has also taken a lot of heat as a primary contributor to the violent and aggressive tendencies of youth. Entertainers have gone to extremes in providing Americans with an array of action-packed video games, movies, and music that push the moral and ethical boundaries of what is deemed appropriate and acceptable according to societal standards. While we cannot ignore the strong influences that popular culture has upon youth, as a motive it is a gross oversimplification for murderous rampages among adolescents. It also fails to explain why more female students, who are also viewers and victims of violence, are not prototypes for brandishing guns and killing fellow classmates and teachers.

### The Hidden Curriculum

Considering that youth spend the majority of their social time within the school setting, it behooves us to look closely at the contributing influences which pervade the school environment itself. The immense priority given to accountability and testing in schools attests to the emphasis placed upon planned curricular objectives. However, many fail to recognize the hidden curriculum, “an abstract term that describes the real conditions of acting and thinking in consumerist culture and democratic society” (Webber, 2003, p. 3). A more detailed description of the hidden curriculum is provided by Orenstein (1994):

The 'hidden curriculum' comprises the unstated lessons that students learn in school: it is the running subtext through which teachers communicate behavioral norms and individual status in the school culture, the process of socialization that cues children into their places in the hierarchy of larger society. Once used to describe the ways in which the education system works to reproduce class systems in our culture, the 'hidden curriculum' has recently been applied to the ways in which schools help reinforce gender roles, whether they intend to or not. (p. 5)

To better understand the social aggression among female students, a closer look at the hidden curriculum will shed light on its contribution to the predominance of covertly aggressive acts among female students. Many social norms are learned within the school setting from a very young age when many students are thrust into social settings for the first time. Considering the fact that students as young as age four begin school, the influences upon their understanding of the society in which they live is taught at an early age and establishes a perspective of their own role within social circles. The influence of school is huge in this regard. In fact, Michael Apple (1995) states that schools are "agents in the creation and recreation of an effective dominant culture. They teach norms, values, dispositions, and culture that contribute to the ideological hegemony of dominant groups" (p. 38). Through the hidden curriculum, students learn what is deemed acceptable according to cultural and societal norms giving schools the power to reproduce the prevailing ideologies that dominate within society.

In *Failure to Hold: The Politics of School Violence*, author Julie Webber (2003) describes the national discourse regarding school shootings as one that attributes school



violence to mimicry. Acknowledging the influential nature of popular culture, as well as the fact that children typically view television “from six to seven hours per day, every day” (Reeves, 2000, p. 56), it is easy for many to believe that students act out violence as they have been exposed to it through movies, video games, and music. However, Webber (2003) states that in incidents of school violence, “the rage itself is fomented by the hidden curriculum of schooling” (p. 19). As students experience alienation within the school setting, it mirrors the alienation that they experience within society. Webber (2003) further explains that “an oversimple reading of the hidden curriculum would have all its effects located at school, but there is ample evidence in these cases that they are more likely situated somewhere in between the school, the public, the home, and the generation” (p. 20).

Parents, and society, buy into the notion that the focus on educational objectives is beneficial in that formal knowledge is emphasized, thus valuing the achievement of established standards. In valuing the importance of an education, and desiring avenues of educational opportunity for their children, “there is tremendous anxiety among many parents about educating their babies” (Karr-Morse & Wiley, 1997, p. 295). A belief such as this overlooks important social skills that are, perhaps, more important knowledge for children to learn than anything that they will encounter in texts. I learned this firsthand when I began the adventure of parenthood.

As a new mother, I can remember being alone with my infant son in the first few weeks following his birth and wondering what I would do to entertain him all day long. Many people had prefaced his birth with “he will sleep a lot during the day, so try to nap when he does.” Not my child. For the majority of the day he was wide awake, his little

eyes staring into mine. Valuing education as I do, and thinking that I would give my baby a cognitive head start, I held in front of his face educational toys in an effort to stimulate his senses through music and texture. After several feeble attempts to get a reaction that would indicate that I had given birth to the next Einstein, I realized that the toys that momentarily distracted my baby did not divert his attention from me. In putting away the toys, I soon discovered that watching my facial expressions and listening to my voice were the only stimulating factors that my baby needed to learn a very crucial skill in life: relating with others.

Our current educational system that focuses so strongly upon accountability measures and testing, following the traditional Tylerian model, limits the cultivation of relationships and social attachment among students and teachers. Students are not encouraged to socialize because their social time takes control away from the teacher and reduces the amount of time spent on educational objectives. As an administrator, I have known of some teachers who would prefer that students not even talk, even within social settings such as lunchtime, recess, and hallway transitions. Such a restriction toward social interaction hinders the relationships that students crave for acceptance as human beings. Webber (2003) asserts that:

At present, schools' objectives (educational, instructional, social, or otherwise) are dictated by the demands of unrestrained consumerist culture. This is not a myth, and the problem this poses for educators and students is a sad fact. When students are required to study a certain curricular content in order to pass an examination, and that examination and the process of preparing for it mean cutting time for social interaction, classroom commentary, and dialogue, and do

not respond to the reality of the students' lives, it is not only pointless, but harmful. (p. 4)

Students should be allowed to learn and explore together in social groups, but that would require the teacher to relinquish a level of control that many are not eager to give up. Sitting in neat little rows and working independently keeps students quiet, passive, and easy to observe. However, it's not conducive to the development of the individual student, nor does it encourage relationships with others. In some schools, technology even replaces general interaction between students and teachers as students are provided with the use of computers, iPads, and CPS systems (classroom performance systems) to record their responses to questions. Efficiency replaces learning together. Winnicott (1986) tells us that "a facilitating environment must have a human quality, not a mechanical perfection" (p. 144). Today's schools do not fit the description of Winnicott's facilitating environment. The use of technological devices, coupled with the pressure to achieve, have blurred the lines of personal relationships with students, taking away the human quality of which Winnicott speaks. Winnicott (1964) also contends that:

The school, which stands for the home, but which is not an alternative to the child's home, can provide opportunity for a deep personal relationship with someone other than the child's parents. It provides the opportunity in the persons of the staff and the other children, and a generally tolerant but steady framework in which experiences can be lived through. (p. 192)

While Winnicott would have school to stand for the home by providing relationships and supportive interactions for the child, changes in schooling have rendered his view

idealistic rather than the norm. The pressures of accountability are consuming educators at the expense of establishing meaningful relationships with their students.

By focusing solely upon educational objectives and limiting social interactions among students, schools deny students the opportunity to learn about the world, to experience the world through interacting with peers and enriching their possibility for developing their own dreams and aspirations in the learning process (Block, 1997).

But the denial of this possibility—the act of violence perpetrated by the school—demands that the individual respond in certain protective ways.

The child is formed as a result of violence and within the regime of school practices is maintained by violence. The child is denied hope of establishing creative and healthy relationships. (Block, 1997, p. 172)

According to Block (1997), schools practice violence against students by constructing the experiences of children according to adult standards. Promoting educational standards for the purposes of evaluation limits the natural curiosity of children to learn, instilling in children the cultural message of competition and emphasizing the importance of achievement. Children, as a result, become further isolated from others in their quest to achieve the prescribed educational goals of schools as they are lumped together through the standardization process. All students are expected to attend school, achieve academically, and promote the educational agenda of the government through the regurgitation of standards and curriculum on high stakes tests. According to this philosophy, all students are the same and must contribute to the status quo; there can be no child left behind. However, not all students attend school with the same underlying

purpose. Consequently, many of them are left behind socially and emotionally as their need to relate to others is not considered important in the quest to accomplish educational goals. Girls may fall into the category of students whose relational needs are not being met since, according to research presented by Chesler (2003), “girls have a greater need for dyadic and expressive interpersonal intimacy than boys do” (p. 80).

Psychoanalytically speaking, Winnicott (1964) explains in “*The Child, the Family, and the Outside World*” that some children come to school with differing purposes. While some have good home environments and expect school to enrich their lives in some way, there are others who depend on school to provide what their homes do not. Winnicott (1964) posits that:

By contrast, the other children come to school for another purpose. They come with the idea that school might possibly provide what their home has failed to provide. They do not come to school to learn, but to find a home from home. This means they seek a stable emotional liability, a group of which they can gradually become a part, a group that can be tested out as to its ability to withstand aggression and to tolerate aggressive ideas. (p. 208)

As a school administrator, I have seen children as these described by Winnicott to significantly struggle in school. Their home environments lack the structure and stability desired to provide them with a foundation for success. While their teachers are often aware of the home situations and would like to help meet the needs of these children, the limitations of the school environment do not afford them an opportunity to do so to the degree that it is needed. Aggression often results. As previously established, research shows that male students tend to be more physically aggressive while female students are

more often socially or relationally aggressive (Olweus, 1993, Pipher, 1994; Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002; Chesler, 2003). Aggression among students as described by Winnicott becomes a discipline issue and further complicates the student's perception of school, and society in general, negatively affecting their ability to relate to others and contributing to social aggression, particularly among the female students who are not granted the freedom to engage in open aggression without fearing rejection for acting in a manner deemed inappropriate for females. Overall, an intensified level of aggressive tendencies within the school setting may be attributed to a culture of fear that is instilled in both students and teachers, thus impeding the development of meaningful bonds between the two.

### Breeding Fear

In Chapter III, the fear of women was discussed in detail as a result of an unconscious fear of the individual, as well as generalized society, of their earliest dependence upon the mother in infancy. Fear is also a common theme in the literature that crops up with regard to students and educators. Through the environment of schooling, students experience fear as it relates to their perceptions of violence, surveillance, and conformity. While teachers are, in effect, pawns in the hidden curriculum, they are also victims of fear when it comes to the government's imposition of accountability and high stakes testing that pressures them to focus upon test scores rather than students. The vicious cycle of fear and conformity tears away at the necessary relationships that both need for success. Further, it exacerbates aggression as students are not able to relate to one another, let alone their teachers.

### *Fear among Students*

One manner in which schools contribute to aggression and violence is by serving as a medium through which society breeds fear. In his acclaimed yet highly controversial documentary, *Bowling for Columbine* (2003), Michael Moore attributes the impulsive aggression and violence of Americans that spills over into schools to the fear pumped into American citizens through the government's use of the media. With constant warnings of national threats of terrorism being splashed across the media, as well as sensationalizing events of violence, Americans live in fear of danger that prompts the urgency to own a gun and to use it as a source of protection from impending attacks. Yearwood (2003) speaks of the exacerbation of this fear "in which the threat of violence looms both internally and externally and contributes to our heightened sense of vulnerability" (p. 131). Van Der Molen (2004) concurs that "the enormous amount of public concern and research effort that has been directed at the prevalence of media violence and at the harmful effects that it may have on children thus far largely has ignored the regularity of real-life violence depicted in television news" (p. 1771). In effect, the constant focus on sensationalized events and the focus upon violence in the media obscure the daily acts of violence to which we have become desensitized.

Moore (2003) further explores the issues of popular culture and easy access to firearms in an effort to dismantle the myths that attribute these scapegoats to violence in America. "He includes an interview with 'shock rock' artist Marilyn Manson, in which the articulate performer maintains that his work may reflect, but is certainly not the cause of, a violent society" (Briley, 2003, p. 1145). Moore also addresses the contention of many that easy access to firearms propagates violence among America's youth. By

venturing to neighboring Canada to prove that guns are easily accessible there as well, Moore points out that Canadians have a significantly lower rate of violence. Moore questions Canadian citizens and discovers that many of them do not even lock their doors at home because they do not live in fear of violence. Overemphasizing violence breeds fear. The need to feel in control of one's safety carries over into schools and turns the tables when students who have been bullied finally feel that they are able to take care of themselves by annihilating classmates who have harmed them, or who represent student cliques who have harmed them.

Webber (2003) also discusses a “culture of fear” that is actually bred within schools when students who are nonviolent are no longer allowed access to cultural influences, such as Internet usage, music lyrics, and video games that have been named as cultivators of violence by experts and the media. Webber (2003) argues that for students in the school environment:

This alienation and culture of fear that is bred within it exposes students to a negative developmental model of education, breeding an entire generation of citizens whose potential for positive societal contributions are lacking and whose fear of freedom will be reflected in a negative form of citizenship, possibly one that is inimical to democratic life. (p. 12)

The control of those in authority—school boards, administrators, and teachers—parallels governmental control and discretionary power to limit access to influences that are deemed harmful. Ironically, the increased hype and eagerness to access cultural material that has been restricted by adults only intensifies adolescent curiosity and interest, contributing to the commodity culture of America where adolescent support is



demonstrated by staggering sales that prompt the increased production of aggressively toned entertainment.

Kirsten Olson (2009) also concurs that fear abounds as students are wounded by their experiences in school. Olson speaks of the pressure of students to conform to the structures of school and society. “Wounds of compliance often are rooted in fear: fear of breaking out of the roles we are assigned by the culture, fear of being perceived as different, fear of not being successful, fear of being an outcast” (Olson, 2009, p. 41). If this mindset is applied specifically to the experience of the female student, there is pressure to comply with society’s expectations that females should not be aggressive. To be aggressive goes against the nurturing model established by mothers in society as they tend to the needs of their families, and it is certainly in opposition to Winnicott’s idealized “good enough mother.” Rather than be a disappointment to their teachers and parents, girls hide their aggressive feelings through covert means which easily go unnoticed by the adults around them.

### *Fear among Teachers*

Not only do students live with fear, so do educators. With regard to testing and accountability, Peter Taubman (2009) tells us in *Teaching by Numbers: Deconstructing the Discourse of Standards and Accountability in Education* that fear is also felt by teachers who are under the pressure of the governing authorities to increase test scores or else. Teachers live and work in fear of losing their jobs and are constantly comparing themselves to their fellow teachers when it comes to the test scores of their students. Taubman (2009) states:

Our obsession with tests, scores, and comparisons arises against the background of enormous fears and uncertainties that have intensified in the last decade. Tests and measurement, the seeming objectivity of quantification, and the knowledge of where one stands in relation to others seem to promise certainty and security in a parlous world. It is, of course, a false promise. (p. 53)

When the department of education employs professional erasure analysts to check behind teachers, administrators, and school superintendents who involve themselves in scandalous accounts of cheating, the pressures of testing and accountability have gone too far. These disgraceful acts by educators clearly attest to the fear of failure and appear to overshadow the needs of the students. Schools cannot represent home and provide for the emotional needs of the students, as Winnicott (1964) desired, when schools are on shaky ground and the educators themselves are experiencing emotional distress.

### Commodity Culture

In his book, *The Scapegoat Generation*, Mike Males (1996) explains that the culture in which American youth are raised is one that blames adolescents for societal maladies. Males contends that adults are not willing to make the sacrifices that are necessary to improve society for our youth, explaining the economic benefits of educational intervention programs and medical interventions that are profitable.

“Teenage problems of the type treatment is supposed to alleviate, from drug and alcohol mortality to violence to suicide, were decreasing in the 1970’s prior to the advent of 1980’s mass youth therapy campaigns. All are now increasing” (Males, 1996, p. 243). These programs profit at the expense of youth, yet fail to improve the wretched conditions of which they offer transformation.

Scapegoats of violence and aggression not only harbor the blame, but they also serve as catalysts for commodifying youth through programs designed to alleviate aggression. Regardless of these futile efforts, parents, schools, and society in general buy into them in the hopes of a miraculous cure for the perils of society. Males (1996) articulates this well and is quoted at length to explain:

Whether for evil or good, regimes have never succeeded in educating, propagandizing, or forcing adolescents to *behave differently from the adults around them*. This continuity, when recognized and harnessed, is a particular strength of *healthy* societies. As is amply documented, the last two decades (if not all human history) show that kid-fixing approaches are badly flawed. The reason is that drugs, alcohol, smoking, and other behaviors do not *begin* with adolescents. They are complex products of adult behaviors within the society in which the youth grows up. This is why the modern concept of youth-targeted ‘prevention’ has not worked and is unlikely ever to work—through politically-driven evaluations increasingly separated from reality may make them appear temporarily successful. (p. 282)

Karr-Morse and Wiley (1997) concur, stating “current efforts to prevent violence typically consist of generating lists of effective programs and disseminating information on them in an effort to rally public support program by program, a strategy that has proved to be ineffective in the political arena” (p. 285). Instead of wasting money on ineffective programs, Karr-Morse and Wiley (1997) call for a “cultural transformation” where change will come from the bottom up. They assert that “the hand that rocks the cradle shapes these outcomes” (p. 286). The initial care and social attachment of an

infant to a caregiver establishes a foundation for the emotional development and personality development of the infant in its earliest stages (Bowlby, 1982, 1988; Chodorow, 1978; Winnicott, 1986). Thus, the “cultural transformation” that Karr-Morse and Wiley speak of relies heavily upon the care given to babies. “The baby, the unpretentious, naked beginning of human development, embodies processes essential to our continuing evolution” (Karr-Morse & Riley, 1997, p. 287). Rather than spending money to “fix” youth, parents and educators need to spend time cultivating social attachments with and among youth, valuing them as members of society instead of accessible commodities.

In the quest to get ahead, the commodity culture of America leaves little time for parents to nurture social attachments with their children. “The current economic pressures of our culture are often in direct conflict with essential needs for adults—as well as for babies” (Karr-Morse & Wiley, 1997, p. 293). Parents, most notably mothers, have the initial opportunity to nourish social attachments in infancy. The establishment of social attachment, or lack thereof, is foundational to an infant’s defining of self in relation to others, a critical aspect of the psychoanalytic theory of object relations. As we are reminded by Block (1997), “from the very beginning of our lives we are defined by others” (p. 85), a fundamental concept that our society has dismissed as a priority.

The lack of personal attachments with youth makes it easy to use them as commodities. Commodification of youth is further evidenced within the school setting through mandatory advertising programs, such as Channel One, that promise schools media equipment. Apple (2001) points out that “since, by law, these students must be in schools, the United States is one of the first nations in the world to consciously allow its

youth to be sold as commodities to those many corporations willing to pay the high price of advertising” (p. 42). Henry Giroux (2000) concurs that programs such as Channel One “substitute corporate propaganda for real learning” (p. 98). The exploitation of youth in this manner is threatening in that “children are relegated to the role of economic calculating machines” (Giroux, 2000, p. 99), the cost of which is immeasurable.

#### Lack of Social Attachment

While there is a belief among some psychologists that physical care in early infancy is all that an infant needs for survival, Winnicott refutes this belief. Instead, Winnicott (1950) explains that interference with the early relationship between an infant and mother is detrimental to the child as well as society in that “a stable home not only enables children to find themselves and to find each other, but also makes them begin to qualify for membership of society in a wider sense” (p. 248). A lack of the foundational attachment between mother and infant exposes the infant to uncertainty and fear of rejection.

Students who are bullied, as has been noted as a common experience among school-shooters, tend to react because they are unable to cope with the social rejection and resulting feelings that they were not good enough or worthy enough to be accepted by peers. Through research into cases of school shootings, this prominent trend of bullying and rejection of school-shooters has been identified as an act of retribution, whether the rejection was from peers or a more personal rejection by a love interest (Leary et al., 2003). We are reminded by Leary et al. (2003) that “most students who experience rejection, even those who are bullied and ostracized, do not resort to lethal violence. Thus, it seems likely that other risk factors must be present in addition to social

rejection” (p. 204). Leary et al. further explain that based on each individual case, other factors that possibly contribute to violence and aggression may vary from personality disorders to depression or suicidal tendencies, to a fascination with guns or death. When students feel ostracized and threatened, the message that they receive is one of rejection that eats away at their self-worth and may manifest itself in extreme cases of violence.

### The Covert Nature of Female Aggression

In the midst of the political and educational hype surrounding sensationalized events of school violence, covert forms of aggression perpetrated by female students go unnoticed. By ignoring the aggression that female students direct at one another, young girls receive the cultural message that their struggles are not worthy of discussion, as society dismisses their anguish and despair. In *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, Mary Pipher (1994) likens adolescent girls to “saplings in the storm,” a metaphor that depicts the vulnerability of adolescence as a critical time in a young girl’s development. Winnicott (1963/1965) concurs that “adolescence itself can be a stormy time” (p. 242). Bombarded with cultural influences and the desire to fit in, Pipher (1994) explains that “wholeness is shattered by the chaos of adolescence. Girls become fragmented, their selves split into mysterious contradictions. They are sensitive and tenderhearted, mean and competitive, superficial and idealistic” (pp. 4-5). Girls struggle to understand their role within society as they battle these contradictions. Society tells girls that they are supposed to be quiet, demure, and passive, leaving no room to express discontent with cultural expectations, leaving no room to show aggression. Yet, through covert means girls have learned how to express aggression without shaking the cultural expectations to which they have been subjected.

Michael Apple speaks of the paradoxical manner in which girls establish their own cultural forms to gain power over boys. Apple (1995) explains that girls can “control boys’ actions (and their own futures) to some extent by enhancing their sexuality” (p. 101). Pipher (1994) tells us that this is evidenced to young girls through the media in that “increasingly women have been sexualized and objectified, their bodies marketed to sell tractors and toothpaste” (p. 14). In this role, girls become sexually exploited by boys, and thus perpetuate the cycle of power that males have over females. More precisely, the objectification of girls maintains their subordination within a patriarchal society. Martusewicz (2001) best sums up this cycle by stating that “laws governing acceptance and affirmation and thus motivating desire derive from the needs and demands of patriarchy that produces for girls (and women) a context of competition for male attention, affirmation, and even possession” (p. 80). By conforming to the objectification of females to gain the attention of the patriarchal society, competition is spawned among girls, reminiscent of the rivalry they once shared with their mothers in competition for their father’s affections during the Oedipal phase. Lamb (2001) contends that the sense of power associated with feminine ideals are granted by the patriarchy, offering a false sense of power to females in this process, as the patriarchy reaps the benefits of their sexuality. Juxtaposed with the ego-boosting benefits of objectifying females who compete for their affections is an insinuation of culpability on the part of the patriarchy for contributing to the perpetuation of social aggression among females.

### Denying Systemic Violence

As a society, we deny our contribution to the national crisis of violence and aggression cultivated in schools by identifying scapegoats to take the blame. Denial, in

psychoanalytic thought, serves as a defense mechanism to protect the ego. Applying that line of thought to our society begs the question: What is our society compelled to hide? The hidden curriculum of schools is a likely answer. Through schools, specific cultural and social expectations are reproduced in the form of the hidden curriculum. The opportunity to learn social skills and to interact with peers is overshadowed by the overt, objective-oriented focus of evaluating standards within schools. A culture of fear, as well as the commodity culture in which we live, perpetuate aggression among students, ignoring the cultivation of social attachments with others, and posing an additional pressure upon female students to comply with societal expectations which force them to hide their aggression to be accepted as feminine.

Frequently overlooked by educators as a common occurrence among both males and females, aggression pervades the student population and manifests itself in the form of bullying. Bullying has, in effect, become a form of systemic violence, a term defined by Epp and Watkinson (1997) to mean:

Any institutionalized practice or procedure that adversely impacts on disadvantaged individuals or groups by burdening them psychologically, mentally, culturally, spiritually, economically, or physically. It includes practices and procedures that prevent students from learning, thus harming them. This may take the form of conventional policies and practices that foster a climate of violence, or policies and practices that appear to be neutral but result in discriminatory effects. (xi)



Often covert in nature, bullying occurs right under the noses of unsuspecting educators. Their own naiveté and denial places educators in a position that inhibits their abilities to intercede in instances of bullying, thus perpetuating the horrific cycle of abuse of students by their peers.

Marano (1995) tells us that “most Americans do not take bullying very seriously — not even school personnel, a surprising finding given that most bullying takes place in schools” (p. 52). Although bullying is not a recent phenomenon, it has only begun to take center stage in the wake of serious issues of school violence. Historically, studies on bullying have focused on male students; however, recent empirical research has shown that bullying is also common among females through covert actions. The recent increase in suicides among students as a result of social aggression is beginning to open the eyes of educators to covert aspects of peer aggression. Bullying requires intervention by educators to combat it systemically. Olweus (1993) explains that:

The attitudes of the teachers toward bully/victim problems and their behavior in bullying situations are of major significance for the extent of bully/victim problems in the school or the class. (p. 26)

Without a doubt, educators must be knowledgeable of the signals of peer aggression in order to identify bullying among students. “Violence and the supports for violent behavior can be very subtle, though measurably harmful, and it is obviously very easy to miss or mask or rationalize one’s own contributions to a system of violence” (Tice, 1994, p. 40). Roberts (2000) reminds us that “adults contribute to the promotion of bullying when they do nothing to counteract such behaviors” (p. 3). As educators, we must learn

to recognize triggers of violence and aggression instead of overlooking them, which functions as a contributing factor to the problem.

Block (1997) warns that, “We deform the child’s development and practice a form of social violence that underlies the very society in which we live” (p. 79). Through recognizing the school’s contribution to violence, it is difficult to accept responsibility for perpetuating these atrocities among our youth, hence our society’s denial of its intensity. However, as educators, it is our indubitable responsibility to educate and protect students while they are in our care, giving credence to both physical and social forms of aggression as bullying tendencies among youth. Not only must students be protected from the frightening world around them, but they must also be protected from each other. The subtle methods of socially isolating peers that is common among most female aggressors should be of equal concern as the physical aggression and rampant shooting sprees of male students, as female students fall victim daily to emotional devastation and social rejection. These daily acts of covert aggression inflict violence on a very personal level, at times resulting in suicide out of desperation to escape the hurt of isolation.

#### Fostering Attachments to Facilitate Change

Combating social aggression among female students poses many challenges, yet it is not a hopeless cause. The suppressed voices and hidden aggression of our female students beckon to be expressed. Young girls must learn how to resolve conflict with their peers in a manner that is acceptable and not harmful to one another. Social rejection and isolation tear away at the emotional well-being of adolescent girls as they simultaneously struggle with the conflicting societal expectations that are imposed upon

them. Splitting between a true and false self wreaks havoc on the psyches of adolescent girls who overtly conform to the culturally scripted “good girl” image in public, yet covertly assert the “bad girl” image through social aggression directed at their female peers. Lamb (2001) tells us that “these private acts can be seen as a form of resistance against the pressures of being good; they can also be seen as examples of their real selves erupting beyond their control” (p. 227). While it is not necessary for girls to ignore their feelings of aggression, the aggression must be handled without harming others in socially annihilating ways. As influential figures in the lives of young girls, parents, bystanders, and educators offer the greatest potential of facilitating change in their patterns of social aggression.

### *Parents*

The influence of parents upon the life of a child is significant. As articulated in the psychoanalytic theories of object relations and attachment, aspects of the child’s relationship with a primary caregiver, as well as the corresponding responses of the caregiver to the needs of the child, become integrated into the child’s psyche. To initiate change in the landscape of social aggression among girls, Lamb (2001) beckons parents to help their daughters recognize and acknowledge their anger and aggression. Beyond discussing the emotions associated with anger, such as frustration and disappointment, parents should also address aggression as it relates to the desire for power. “Aggression can be harmful, but it can also be the foundation for ambition, for fighting for social justice, and for acts of creativity. With maturity, girls can begin to use their aggressive potential in creative and laudatory ways” (Lamb, 2001, p. 229). Helping girls learn to channel their aggression in constructive ways gives girls permission to experience and

own aggressive feelings authentically. Wiseman (2002) concludes that “girls will only reach their full potential if they’re taught to be agents of their own social change” (p. 10). Parents must engage girls in this process, allowing them to own their feelings of anger instead of denying them.

By acknowledging and accepting their feelings of aggression, Simmons (2002) argues that “girls would cease to play out their own fearful prophesies of loss” (p. 262), which Simmons attributes in part to the lack of face-to-face confrontations of girls to constructively address their conflict. Parents can assist by listening to their daughters and empowering them with the ability to discuss their anger to resolve conflicts. Actively listening to their verbalization of frustrations helps girls to understand that conflict is a natural occurrence in relationships and strengthens them to take ownership of their controversy. When mothers engage young girls in this process, it supports the response patterns of object relations by providing a Winnicottian facilitating environment that “holds” the girl emotionally, allowing her to integrate positive response patterns of relationships into her developing psyche. “Some children are, as we know, incapable of making friends at school, and this is because they carry their early conflicts into a new environment,” states Klein (1964) as she presents the significance of early relationships upon a child’s ability to relate to peers within the school setting.

### *Bystanders*

Bystanders form the largest group of students in bullying dynamics, and have the ability to shift the power in bullying situations (Aaron, 2010). While Dellasega (2005) calls bystanders “the Middle Bees” and Wiseman (2002) refers to them as the “the Torn Bystanders”, both describe the position of girls who may choose to intervene, participate,

or ignore acts of aggression. Bystanders are caught between the bully and the victim, and often struggle with the conflict of joining in the aggression to maintain her own status within a clique, or passively ignoring the bully's aggression toward the victim. Bystanders must be taught to use their leverage against the aggression instead of joining forces with the bully.

Simmons (2002) suggests the implementation of antibullying programs in schools that specifically address relational aggression. Several antibullying programs foster relationships among students by actively engaging them in the practice of positive conflict resolution. Named after Mary Pipher's book, the Ophelia Project is an example referenced by Simmons as a school-wide training program that utilizes an intervention among girls called "How Girls Hurt Each Other." Through this program, high school girls are trained to mentor younger girls in combating social aggression. Simmons also describes the Empower Program, cofounded by Rosalind Wiseman, as one that focuses on "interpersonal boundary setting, conflict management, and relationship violence" (Simmons, 2002, p. 252). Another program that was not mentioned by Simmons, but also serves to foster communication among students about aggression is the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program that is utilized in my own school. The Olweus approach calls for regular class meetings between the students and teachers, allowing a forum for discussing aggression experienced at school. What all of these programs do, in effect, is shine the light on both covert and overt aggression as they foster an environment of supportive relationships among peers.

## *Educators*

Leaving the nurturing environment of home is not easy for most children. They find themselves thrust from their cozy nest of home into a large school where they become one of many. While the mother is still influential in the life of the child, she is absent from the school day, creating a void of nurturance and security that school simply cannot offer in the same manner. As argued by Klein (1964), “Teachers are, on the whole, further removed from the child’s feelings, they bring less emotion into the situation than parents do, and they also divide their feelings among many children” (p. 95). With many children in the school setting, the hurried pace, and the push to cover standards, it is not surprising that nurturing becomes an afterthought for the teacher. Grumet (1988) adds, “In our culture and in preindustrial cultures as well, schooling has provided the context where the maternal influence over the child’s development, so pervasive in the domestic setting where mothers have provided so much of the primary nurturance, is denied” (p. 110). As agents of change, educators must work at establishing connections with their students.

By providing the nurturing interactions that students crave, educators can build attachments with their students. This is necessary for bonds of trust to form so that students will be comfortable confiding in educators when they encounter bullying situations. Trust is especially important when covertly aggressive acts are reported to educators since they typically go undetected. For educators, noticing social aggression is difficult unless they are aware of its occurrence as reported by the victims or bystanders. Students who lack a trusting relationship with an adult will most often choose to keep their hurt to themselves. Aarons (2010) concurs that combating bullying behavior will

require not only a change of behaviors among students, but also a change with the supervising adults at school. To make that change, educators must establish a level of trust with students to offer them safety and comfort when there is a need to report a problem (Stancato, 2003).

By shifting the focus from standards to students, educators can help youth establish a better sense of self and belonging. Stancato (2003) explains that large school settings where students are shuffled through is replicative of a factory setting and creates for the student a sense of invisibility. “Feelings of being invisible and lost are tantamount to the pain that accompanies a lack of meaning and a sense of confusion in the adolescent’s search for identity and self-acceptance” (Stancato, 2003, p. 20). The anonymity offered by technology and social media further convolute an adolescent’s sense of self by coupling disinhibition with the interaction of an audience.

The increased influence of technology in today’s society is staggering, and also impedes healthy relationships. While it offers exciting and innovative possibilities for education, it also poses a challenge for girls to distinguish the real attachments that they crave with the ambiguity of virtual attachments. Cone (2001) reminds us that virtual communities established via technology do not replace the need for face-to-face contact with others. “Research indicates that girls often prefer cooperative group activities to exclusive reliance on individual learning exercises” (Penn, 2001, p. 238) The classroom teacher can facilitate the development and maintenance of peer relationships by establishing learner-centered environments and cooperative activities incorporating the use of technology rather than isolating students through repetitive individual activities (Cone, 2001; Allen, 2010). “Students working in pairs or small groups provide increased

communication, collaboration, and ultimately, increased learning subject matter and the technology” (Cone, 2001, p. 182). Cone even suggests the possibility of establishing peer groups of girls who would maintain a connection with an adult mentor to help facilitate their transitions throughout grade levels in school. The establishment of an adult mentor to follow groups of girls and provide guidance and support for them throughout their school careers may be considered tantamount to Bowlby’s secure base whereby the child ventures out into society, yet constantly returns to the attachment figure for security.

According to Winnicott (1965), relationships are important for the security of the next generation in that “it is always a living relationship between persons that gives the elbow room which is necessary for true growth” (p. 33). To elicit change towards the reduction of social aggression, it is necessary for parents, bystanders, and educators to establish supportive relationships with female students who most frequently engage in these acts. Alleviating the reproduction of socially aggressive acts among girls will require systemic change, as it is deeply rooted in our society’s message to females to hide their innate feelings of aggression. Miller (1976/1986) reminds us that “mothers have been deprived and devalued and conscripted as agents of a system that diminished all women. Daughters have felt the confusing repercussions of all of these forces” (p. 139). Helping adolescent girls recognize the conflicting messages imposed by society upon females is a fundamental step in empowering them to challenge those messages and redefine aggression for females to include constructive means of resolving conflict.

### Closing Thoughts

In concluding this psychoanalytic inquiry into social aggression among female students, it would be amiss to overlook the limitations of this study with regard to “the



female experience.” Morris (2001) cautions that “universal claims about human behavior always come up short against the complex landscape of lived experience” (p. 52). I most certainly agree. While empirical research supports the salience of hidden forms of aggression among female students, it is important to recognize that not all female students have the same lived experiences. Jack (1999) reminds us that “while gender appears to be the major system of power that affects women’s aggression, intersections of race and class also position social power and influence women’s behavior” (p. 33). As each female’s psyche is structured uniquely according to the response patterns that served to meet or neglect her fundamental needs in infancy and early childhood, we must also understand the significance of the social world that engages the psyche and influences aggression. In seeking an understanding of why females are prone to engage in covertly aggressive acts, Lamb (2001) ponders whether hidden forms of aggression are resistance against the societal expectation that girls behave nicely, or if such acts may be viewed as an ethe revealing of the real selves of girls. According to Lamb (2001), “Neither and both capture all of what is happening because the differences among girls are vast and irreducible” (p. 227).

The multitude of the factors which affect each individual girl’s lived experience with regard to the psyche, societal expectations and aggression would make it virtually impossible to write about this topic without essentializing in one way or another. My intent through this study was not to exclude females from any particular background or experience with regard to social class, race, sexual orientation, religion or location; nor was it my intent to essentialize all females as having the same aggressive behaviors. Just as Bettis and Adams (2005) “recognize the importance of strategically using girlhood as a

universal construct for the purposes of social change” (p. 276), so do I. My hope through this process has been to lend a collective voice to the social position of the female gender in relation to the patriarchy within the context of aggression, societal expectations, and the effects of the hidden curriculum. The use of a psychoanalytic hermeneutic to gain an understanding of social forms of aggression among female students is significantly influenced by the personal experiences structuring my own psyche, including my lived experiences as a Southern, middle-class, white female. Adding to the complexity of my perceptions of social aggression among female students are my own past experiences with social aggression as an adolescent, the intensity and longevity of a 35 year friendship, my role as a wife and mother, as well as my career in education. Reducing my experiences or those of any other female into a nutshell was never my aim. Future research specific to females of other races, sexual orientations, and social classes would be insightful in understanding the complexities of social aggression and the interplay of power dynamics that are involved in the phenomenon of social aggression among females from a variety of backgrounds whose identities are constructed through their own unique experiences.

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