

INVESTIGATING RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AND BULLYING FOR GIRLS' OF
COLOR IN OKLAHOMA: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study, applying aspects of van Manen's framework for hermeneutic phenomenological research, was conducted to investigate the narratives of relationally aggressive girls of color. The study focused on nine adolescent girls of color who were ages 14-17 years old and exhibited aggressive/bullying behaviors representing the ethnic groups of Black/African American, Latina/Hispanic American, Native American, and other, which included two or more racial identities combined. The participants completed online protocol writing prompts, participated in open-ended interviews and an observation to gain insight regarding relationally aggressive issues that took place in the participants' settings. An interpretational approach to the data analysis clarified the meanings of themes and thick descriptions. This approach revealed a multiplicity of subjects that were situated in a socio-cultural context. The striking findings identified patterns of relational connectedness and/or disconnections in the lives of adolescent girls of color and demonstrated how relational aggression and bullying is a precursor to increased violence among these girls. Implications for behavioral education, teacher preparedness programs, educational research, and school conduct policy and practice include the advancement and implementation of culturally and gender responsive tactics to inform various intervention efforts for girls of color.

Keywords: relational aggression, bullying, qualitative research, phenomenology, hermeneutics, girls of color, female, adolescent, teenagers, observations, conflicts, violence.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my loving mother, Mrs. Alice Christine Miller. Throughout my life, Momma, you have been my most unwavering supporter, defender, and cheerleader. I could count on you to support me physically, emotionally, and financially throughout all of my educational endeavors, both formal and informal, and I must give credit to you for inspiring me to always do my best. I have made many mistakes and taken great chances that you have witnessed with grace and strength and through it all you never failed to encourage me. All I have ever wanted to do is make you proud when I completed the biggest endeavor in my life to this date. I am eternally grateful that God chose you to bring me into this world and train me up in the ways of the Lord. You taught me to depend on Him as my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is my strength and my defense. And I am what I have become because of His love, sacrifice and you! For this I thank you Momma, rest in peace.

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List of Abbreviations

Agreeable versus Antagonistic Behavior Observation Protocol (AABOP)

American Educational Research Association (AERA)

American Psychological Association (APA)

Bullying Prevention Program (BPP)

Department of Education (ED)

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (NAACPLDF)

National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Office for Civil Rights (OCR)

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)

Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy (OICA)

Oklahoma County Juvenile Bureau (OCJB)

Oklahoma Office of Juvenile Affairs (OJA)

Oklahoma Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC)

Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE)

Peer Relational Aggression Victimization (PRAV)

School to Prison Pipeline (STPP)

School Resource Officers (SRO)

School Wide Programs (SWP)

Targeted Assistance Schools (TAS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Relational aggression and bullying have been the subjects of many clinical and scholarly researchers (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006; Jacobson, 2007; Nansel et al., 2001; Willer & Cupach, 2008; Yubero & Navarro, 2006) and popular books (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2008; Prothrow-Stith & Spivak, 2005). Furthermore, these scholars have documented the interpersonal effects of “Queen Bees” and “Wannabees” (Coyne et al., 2006; Wiseman, 2002), which are behaviors that female adolescents are experiencing in school systems across America.

Adolescence in general has long been described by various social scientists as one of the most difficult stages of human development to understand (Fabes & Martin, 2000). Fabes and Martin revealed, “Young adolescents are one of the least studied and least understood age groups” (p. 388). There are fundamental changes that are taking place in hormone levels, brain functions, outward appearances, and attitudes, and each of these areas need to be explored by researchers who can make beneficial improvement in an adolescent’s quality of life. Girls, in particular, may experience the effects from these changes in negative ways that may include isolation, exclusion, and displaced anger (Coyne et al., 2006; Fabes & Martin, 2000). Research conducted by Dellasega and Adamshick (2005) and Jacobson (2007) regarding relational aggression and bullying in teens sought to delve deeper into the challenges concerning a largely missing philosophical perspective. This research has yielded informative prospects to those scholars who wish to assist adolescent teens in developing emotional regulation and interpersonal skills (Jacobson, 2007).

Background

Relational aggression and bullying among school-aged children, which have increasingly been the focus of studies that report the phenomena, are becoming commonplace in American schools (Faris & Felmlee, 2011; Nansel et al., 2001). Aggressive and bullying behaviors are especially important to note when concentrating on the developmental issues that adolescents experience. Scholars have reported that the transition from elementary to middle school is an essential developmental milestone for early adolescents (Garcia, 2010; Haynie, Simons-Morton, & Nansel, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001). Adolescence is a time characteristically filled with uncertainty, increased academic demand, diminished attention in school, magnified social stressors, and a transfer from adult-centered to peer-centered relationships (Garcia, 2010; Haynie et al., 2003; Nansel et al., 2001). The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) reported, “The adolescent population in the United States is growing rapidly and is projected to flourish into the next millennium” (p. 1). Approximately 41.5 million adolescents, ages 10 to 19 years, were living in the United States during the 2010 census with approximately 20.8 million of that number representing adolescent girls. Population figures like these reflect the need for continued research toward the developmental issues that affect the lives of adolescent girls, including the physical and psychological complexities that come across the form of gender, race, ethnicity, class, differing abilities, and sexual orientation. As the American Psychological Association (APA; 2012) suggested, “only by examining each of these complicated layers can the rich diversity of the lives of adolescent girls be understood” (p. 2).

Finally, research has shown that relationally aggressive behaviors and bullying pose serious problems for school environments, especially in communities where there is high-crime, high-poverty, and the disbanding of the family unit (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005).

Therefore, this study was designed to explore and better understand how contemporary girls of color who were ages 14-17 years old and exhibited aggressive/bullying behaviors react and respond in relationally aggressive acts. The results from this study will help to better explain how adolescent girls of color 14-17 years old specifically experience relational aggression and bullying (Garcia, 2010). Furthermore, the results may be useful in developing more gender-and racial-specific supports within schools and communities.

Situation to Self

As a non-profit supplemental education service provider and advocate of the disadvantaged at-risk children in Oklahoma, I am interested in the positive outcomes of the students whom I serve. Many of the children and families I meet come with various needs such as academic weaknesses, economic and social inadequacies, and familial challenges. Therefore, I have a special interest in any scholarly research that may influence the lives of underrepresented families who often make up the disregarded racial/ethnic groups that have long been silent (Morrow, 2005).

Many of my foundational beliefs are seated in a distinctive set of personal ideologies, principles, values, and ideals. For example, it is important to me to positively influence the lives of all the people I meet and serve. Since this potentially means that everyone could come with diverse and special circumstances, it is my desire to take a multicultural approach when dealing with them. There are two multicultural theories that best reflect my desires as an educational researcher: the Transformative Approach, and the Social Action Approach (Banks, 1999). The transformative approach is being utilized in my immediate educational setting because I seek to instill customary American virtues, such as respect for authority, perseverance, loyalty to duty, consideration for others, and sensibleness in my daily dealings with clients. Moreover, I am

challenged in my organization to present these concepts through various ethnic perspectives and points of view (Banks, 1999; Santoli, 2009). Equally, I have adopted the social action approach that combines the transformational approach with pursuits to strive for social change, which instructs the students and their parents to understand and question social change (Banks, 1999). Overall, both approaches declare a respect for personal individuality, which regards people as social beings who jointly participate in the learning process. These students are then motivated to a higher level of critical thinking that includes individual awareness of issues that may challenge the status quo, and encourage questions, and personal reflection in them (Anthony & Benson, 2003; Banks, 1999; Santoli, 2009).

This study also reflected the philosophical axiological values I hold that seek out the good in all things, how good they are, and how their goodness is related to one another. Traditional axiology involves a central question regarding what things are good and what is the intrinsic value of all things (Schroeder, 2008). Ultimately, it was my intent to gain a deeper and richer understanding of the aggression encounters of girls' of color. Thus, I must take the chance on them, listen to them, and report their experiences from their point of view. I am hopeful this exploration could ultimately dispel some of the myths and misconceptions they hold regarding relationally aggressive acts, which is of value to the knowledge base concerning these girls.

Problem Statement

Relational aggression and bullying have become a predominant problem facing girls (Rivera-Maestre, 2010). The literature has shown that relational aggression and bully behavior most often happens in U.S. public schools and is being reported at alarming rates (Faris & Felmlee, 2011; Nansel et al., 2001). Research indicates there is some evidence to suggest that relationally aggressive and bullying behaviors in girls are the precursors to violence between and

among them (Marsee & Frick, 2007); nevertheless, few studies have explicitly examined relational aggression and bullying in the context of the lived experiences of violence among adolescent girls of color (Chesney-Lind, Morash, & Irwin, 2007; Marsee & Frick, 2007; Sharma, 2010; Werner & Crick, 2004).

Crick and Grotpeter, (1995) and Young, Bowe, and Nelson (2006) found when girls are studied, the samples mostly consist of middle class White girls, and few of these studies capture the experiences of urban girls of color that may come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This could mean that the findings from studies conducted with middle class White girls are not generally transferable to and/or may not reflect the experiences of urban girls from inner-city communities. It is important to note here that delving into the increase in any defiant behavior, especially aggression should be of concern to all U.S. citizens. According to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS), administered by the Office of Justice programs and the U.S. Department of Justice (2011), national law enforcement agencies reported an estimated 13,120,947 arrests in 2010 excluding traffic violations. Of those arrests, 25.5% were female, with 14.5% of the females arrested in the U.S. being classified as adolescent girls under the age of 18. Furthermore, the report revealed that 4.2% of the arrested females were adolescent girls under the age of 15. Overall, these statistics place the United States at the top of the list for incarcerating more of its citizens than any other country in the world, and merits a closer look into classifying how many of those arrests in adolescent girls involved aggression and aggressive acts (Sharma, 2010; Winn, 2010a, 2010b).

Information compiled by Puzzanchera, Adams and Hockenberry (2012) for the *Juvenile Court Statistics 2009* report specified, "Overall, the female delinquency caseload grew at an average rate of 3% per year between 1985 and 2009, while the average rate increase was 1% per

year for males” (p. 12). This report reiterates that there is a trend among arrests of female juveniles ages 10-17. Further research showed that in 2011 Oklahoma incarcerated more women per capita than any other state with a rate of 134 per 100,000 female populations (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2011). This study was designed to concentrate on girls of color in particular, because scholars have found that these are the girls who are more likely to be categorized as juvenile high-risk or at-risk (Chesney-Lind et al., 2007; Sharma, 2010). For example, Puzzanchera et al. (2012) confirmed that

Among females, person offense case rates for Black juveniles were considerably higher than those for the other racial groups. In 2009, the person offense case rate for Black females (18.9) was 14 times the rate for Asian females (1.3), more than 3 times the rate for White females (5.2), and more than twice the rate for American Indian females (8.2). (p. 26)

Since juvenile person offenses do include actions such as assault, robbery, rape, and homicide, it is safe to conclude these can involve extreme forms of aggression. The mentioned statistics above as well as others provided in this report merit a closer investigation into the reasons this trend is happening more often to girls of color.

Furthermore, the violent behaviors of girls have been the focus of journalistic interest. Most often, this interest has been on girls who are engaged in non-traditional, masculine behavior-notably, joining gangs, carrying guns, and fighting with other girls. Despite this journalist interest, there has been limited empirical attention given to girl aggression and violence from the perspectives of the participants themselves (Chesney-Lind, 1999). Therefore, in an attempt to contribute to the scholarly dialogue regarding the lived experiences, conditions, and factors adolescent girls of color are facing, this qualitative study was designed to discuss,

uncover, and examine the situational context that surrounds a few of the girls of color 14 to 17 years old who were exhibiting aggressive/bullying behaviors.

Purpose Statement and Focus of Inquiry

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to delve deeper into the articulated narratives for adolescent girls of color 14-17 years old who were exhibiting aggressive/bullying behaviors. These girls lived in Oklahoma County and some were participating in Oklahoma County Juvenile Justice Bureau programs. In order to gain insight regarding relationally aggressive issues that take place in their settings, I listened to what emerged as the participants used voice and language to describe their lived experience.

The study investigated the taxonomies aimed at girls, such as female versus female situational aggression factors and intra-racial components with potential interconnections found in sexuality, race, and social class. It was hoped that the narratives would reveal the nature of the lived experiences for relationally aggressive girls as well as the how and why there are relational aggressive propensities found in them. To date, research on relational aggression and bullying issues has generally been conducted with both male and female participants. This study focused on the conditions and factors of girls of color, in particular, concentrating on the relational and intra-racial bullying implications. Furthermore, to gain insight regarding relationally aggressive issues that take place in their setting, both emic and etic perspectives were used to paint a richer and compassionate picture of the phenomena. Consequently, developing an understanding of increased relational aggression as experienced by the participants as well as maintaining my own perspective as an investigator was instrumental in viewing the phenomena through new eyes to find out what it was like for these girls.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this phenomenological research study was to explore the perceptions girls of color hold when they are the aggressors, instigators, or witnesses of bullying and relationally aggressive acts. The plan was to examine escalating gender situational aggression factors, and intra-racial components to make a contribution to the knowledge base concerning girls of color and their relationally aggressive propensities. Delving into the phenomena within this population was important because the population in general is becoming more diverse in the schools. For example, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Education publication, *The Condition of Education 2011*, approximately 49.3 million students were enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools. This population has become more diverse over the past two decades as the students of color population groups have increased more rapidly than the White student population (NCES, 2011). The report also revealed, between 1989 and 2009, the proportion of public school students who indicated White decreased from 68% to 55%. During this same period, Black students decreased from 17% to 15%; however, concurrently, the percentage of Latino/Hispanic American students doubled from 11% to 22%. In addition, those students of color classified as “Other” (i.e., Asian, Hawaiian, Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, American Indian, or two or more races) increased from 4% to 8%, and these numbers are projected to remain steady through 2020–21 (NCES, 2011). It is important to note the specific demographic changes if students of color represent 45% of the total public school population. It becomes vital that educators and scholars recognize the differences and the need for possible modifications to be made to guidelines, discipline policies, instruction strategies, and relationship expectations based upon the population changes. Moreover, it is reported that public school educators largely female (84%) and White (83%) still

remain the dominant means of learning for many of these children and, therefore, need to respond in an honest and engaging manner to understand, empathize, reach, and protect their students (Gay, 2010; NCES, 2011). This is why taking a closer look at the bullying and relational aggression issues that affect these girls is vital if we wish for girls of color to thrive and develop into healthy and resilient young women who become self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting, and self-regulating. There must be more studies focused on aggression and bullying from their point of view.

Delimitations

Johnson and Christensen (2000) made it clear that delimitations are the boundaries that limit the scope of a study by communicating the specifics not examined during a study. Therefore, the clear scope of this study was to investigate the narratives of girls of color who were 14-17 years old and exhibited aggressive/bullying behaviors that lived in Oklahoma County and participated in Oklahoma County Juvenile Bureau (OCJB) programs. This population was selected because research shows that most of the girls who come in contact with the OCJB are frequently socially disadvantaged youth of color from low-income families (National KIDS Count Program, 2012).

According to Oklahoma Office of Juvenile Affairs' (OJA), *Annual Oklahoma Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Assessment* (2013), there is a need to examine the current system to identify policy, practice, and/or procedures which contribute to racial disparity issues that currently exist with youth of color, and the referrals to the programs most often represent girls who exhibit various behaviors that reflect aggression. For example, as part of the 2013 assessment student demographics report, 64% of OJA participants had been suspended for violence (fighting), with 13% of OJA participants having been suspended for threatening or

assaulting a teacher, administrator or school staff. Consequently, I focused on this population's experiences, conditions, and factors, in particular, concentrating on the relational and intra-racial bullying implications because it was important to know when identifying any changes that could or may be adopted.

The study was delimited so that only the girls of color 14-17 years old who were Black/African American, Latina/Hispanic American, Native American, and other, which include two or more racial identities combined, were included as participants in the study. Scholars have reported these are the girls more likely to be categorized as juvenile high-risk or at-risk (Chesney-Lind et al., 2007; Sharma, 2010).

The girls who represented other racial/ethnic groups and ages were omitted because the literature suggested that other ethnic categories, such as Asian, had low report numbers for juvenile high-risk and at-risk behaviors (Sharma, 2010). Furthermore, the girls from a vast array of other existing programs or schools that were located outside the geographical area were excluded. They were excluded because of concerns regarding travel as a hindrance for the participating families.

Additional things that were not examined in the study were the opinions of the parents, officers and program officials, community leaders, and employees within the bureau. The employees within the bureau included clerical staff, counselors, custodial staff, and numerous others who serve in different capacities at the bureau. Given the phenomenological design, the experiences and voices of the girls were the primary interest for this study.

Research Questions

Research questions are a necessary aspect of any qualitative research study. The questions served to guide the research efforts by influencing the total study design and outlining

crucial focal points throughout the study (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2000).

Qualitative research questions are open-ended, and they include a collection of an assortment of data that assists in the formation of conclusions (Creswell, 2009). Research questions generally serve to restate the purpose behind the study in a question format so that the researcher may examine particular data upon which one may formulate conclusions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2000). To explore the participants' lived experiences of the studied phenomenon, the following questions framed this study:

RQ1: How do girls of color describe their experiences with relationally aggressive and bullying acts?

RQ2: What do girls of color understand about the differences between assertive and aggressive acts?

RQ3: What do girls of color believe regarding their relationally aggressive tendencies and those of their peers?

RQ4: What are the motives behind relational aggression and how does intra-racial conflict influence these motives?

RQ5: What do aggressive girls of color understand about self-identity, self-awareness, and self-knowledge? (Jacobson, 2007)

Research Plan

The plan was to employ aspects of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach (van Manen, 1990) to gain a full picture of relational aggression and bullying in girls of color who were 14-17 years old and exhibited aggressive/bullying behaviors that resulted in their participation or potential participation at OCJB. A phenomenological approach requires the researcher to listen to what emerges as the participants use voice and language to describe their

lived experience (Creswell, 2009; van Manen, 1990). Thus, the relationally aggressive and bullying perspectives, experiences, and behaviors were investigated with qualitative methods, which included protocol writing featuring lived-experience descriptions, observations using experiential anecdotes, and individual interviewing featuring the personal life story approaches (van Manen, 1990). Qualitative techniques such as these can enable a relationship between the researcher and the participants, especially when each participant's individual construction of meaning is respected and valued by the researcher (Morrow, 2005). As Morrow pointed out, qualitative methods can lend themselves well to hear the stories and voices of women and other disregarded groups that have long been silent. Consequently, the qualitative methods used during this study placed the participants in a position where they were considered the experts of their own lives and as a result, they could feel a sense of liberation. It was hoped this feeling of liberty or release in the girls of color translated into a deeper understanding about the aggression phenomenon.

Foundationally, the Social Cognitive Theory with Self-Efficacy that was derived from the work of renowned psychologist and researcher Albert Bandura (1986) was utilized throughout the study as it describes the way in which the development of girls can be shaped by human functioning as a result of cognitive, vicarious, self-regulatory, and self-reflective processes. This theory takes the perspective that individuals are instilled with certain capabilities that define what it is to be human. Primarily, these are the capabilities to symbolize, plan alternative strategies (forethought), learn through vicarious experience, self-regulate, and self-reflect (Pajares, 2002). Generally, relationships are believed to be central in the development of girls. Therefore, this theory suggests that a girl's sense of self and identity as well as the capability to plan alternative strategies and self-reflect is formed because individuals are agents proactively

engaged in their own development, and can make things happen by their actions. With this context in mind, qualitative measures supported in the Social Cognitive Theory, emphasizing an experience-centered, relational approach was utilized for this study. It was of primary importance to capture the experiences of adolescent girls as they resolved and tackled their own relational aggression and bullying behaviors. Therefore, the phenomenology approach was beneficial in interpreting the girls' experiences regarding: (a) how adolescent girls of color experience acts of relational aggression, (b) what they assume impacts, informs and provokes their response to relational aggression and bullying, and (c) what are their views and images of assertiveness.

The research plan was to use a purposive sampling to choose from the available population of the girls of color who were participating or potentially participating in OCJB programs. I proposed to have a sample of 10 girls or more until saturation. Creswell (2009) recommended a range of 5 to 25 as a good number for phenomenological studies. Lastly, to have each voice represented, it was preferable to request at least one girl in each age range from 14 to 17, and to represent equally each racial/ethnic category of Black/African American, Latina/Hispanic American, Native American, and other, which included two or more racial identities. This was important for this study because there are unique experiences within each age range and racial/ethnic category, such as the diverse maturity levels, cultural rearing, and familial backgrounds.

There was no data collected until all the appropriate approvals from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (see Appendices C and D), Oklahoma County Juvenile Bureau (OCJB), and parental and participant consent/assent forms, permissions, and official site clearances were received (see Appendices A, E, and F). After securing the appropriate

approvals, data collection began with the initial contact of the girls. After contact was made via Form CS-11-Probation Services Referral (see Appendix G) an online survey containing protocol writing prompts to determine some of the pre-assumptions and foundational questions they may hold regarding the seriousness of relational aggression and bullying was submitted. The online writing prompt was used as an icebreaker or warm-up to alleviate the initial concerns that might arise with the girls. After the submission of the online writing prompt, an initial interview took place. Upon completion of the interview, follow-up questions were done as needed per individual email. After all initial interviews were completed, an observation was done during a workshop conducted titled, School to Prison Pipeline (STPP) Workshop (see Appendix J) where additional information was collected to develop a deeper and richer understanding of the expressed levels of aggression that the girls displayed. According to van Manen (1990), this step was important when searching the idiomatic phases used in the language itself as a researcher investigates the experiences as the girls lived them.

Given the outcomes from the initial collected data, I analyzed it to determine whether it provided corroborative evidence for constructs and themes that were identified during the processes. The soundness of the data coding was checked by having two other researchers' code samples from the data to determine if they derived like constructs and themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The soundness of the interview data was checked by using active listening skills where I would repeat the girls' responses to the questions paraphrasing what I had heard in feedback to them. To ensure the thoroughness of the data collection, I continued to communicate with the participants until all data was collected. To do this, I created a to-do list regularly and used it to record the people and events I had identified as needing attention. Throughout the entire data

collection and analysis process, I continued to explore all the thematic and philosophical connections.

Definitions

The clarification of certain terms in this study can often vary from researcher to researcher; consequently, to clearly designate the importance and implication of these terms, the following definitions will apply:

1. *Relational aggression* – Relational aggression was defined as a purposeful attempt to harm others, either through physical means such as hitting or pushing, or through the manipulation of a social relationship aimed at the use of relationships to hurt another person (Crick, 1997; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).
2. *Bullying* – Bullying was defined as the process of intimidating and mistreating someone who is seen as weaker as and more vulnerable than you are, and is aggression intended to harm or disturb that occurs repeatedly over time (Nansel et al., 2001).
3. *Girls of color* – Girls of color was defined throughout this study to represent the sample of girls ages 14 to 17 comprised from the racial/ethnic categories of Black/African American, Latina/Hispanic American, Native American, and other, which included two or more racial identities combined. The use of the phrase girls of color versus the term minority girls was purposely selected based on my personal experiences with culturally relevant teaching practices (Ladson-Billings, 1992) as well as based on the scholarly findings included in the book *Research and Multicultural Education: From the Margins to the Mainstream* by Grant (1992). Grant's compilation is made up of various multicultural scholars. Contributors, Soto

- and Ladson-Billings (Grant, 1992), emphasized the need for researchers to highlight the successes of ethnically diverse learners in educational research and methods “in order to counteract the deficit philosophy that is inherent in the many messages that bombard families and students of color” (p. 3). Consequently, this is an effort to speak to the necessity of including non-marginalization discourse that is often apparent in the existing scholarly work referring to people of color (Grant, 1992).
4. *Minority* – Minority was a term utilized in this study but it was applied sparingly because according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) minorities represented more than half of America's population who were under the age of one year old and the Census Bureau currently defines minority as “anyone who is not “single race White” and “not Hispanic.” Traditionally this term was used to describe racial or ethnic groups; however, the sample population involved with OCJB services represented majority racial and ethnic groups and the White girls as defined by the census bureau were in the minority.
 5. *Race and ethnicity* – Race and ethnicity was used in this study to categorize general statistics in accordance with *The Condition of Education 2011* (NCES, 2011) standardized classification scheme that was based on 1997 Office of Management and Budget (OMB). These classifications are based primarily on the respondent’s self-identification, as is the case with data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau (2012). Therefore, under the OMB standards, race and ethnicity are considered separate concepts. “Hispanic or Latino” is an ethnicity category, not a racial category. Consequently, Hispanic or Latino was defined as: A girl who reports of Cuban,

Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.

Race and Racial groupings were defined as:

- *Black/African American*: A girl having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.
- *Native American*: A girl having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.
- *Other*: A girl who selected two or more of the following racial categories when offered the option of selecting one or more racial designations: White/Caucasian, Black/African American, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, or Native/American Indian or Alaska Native (NCES, 2011).

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

It was not so long ago in the recent history of the United States that the most prevalent issue in a typical girl's life was the weekly changes in her friends and foes, admiring some girls, despising other girls, and gossiping about both. There were a few occasional verbal fights that usually ended promptly, or if the disputes became physical, there was only a scratch or two (Brown & Tappan, 2008). However, today more girls are showing particularly violent and aggressive behavior (Brown & Tappan, 2008). Prothrow-Stith and Spivak (2005) explained,

Girls have become a part of the epidemic of youth violence and not just as victims. Girls are fighting, and they are not just fighting back in self-defense they are fighting like boys, not as much (yet) but with a similar willingness to use physical violence. (pp. 3-4)

Currently, the research has begun to reflect this change, and in order to understand the increase in female aggression, researchers (Dellasega & Adamshick, 2005; Yubero & Navarro, 2006; Willer & Cupach, 2008) have conducted studies to classify this behavior and highlight the origin of its emergence.

Subtle methods of aggression in girls have been utilized for centuries, and one might question the need for further research concerning this behavior. However, for the 21st century girl, the techniques utilized are becoming overtly brutal with the effects of this aggression creating psychosocial damage to those who are the aggressors and for those who are the target of the aggression (Nansel et al., 2001; Prothrow-Stith & Spivak, 2005; Roth & Cohen, 1986). Therefore, to clarify the current depth of malicious acts made by girls, clinical researchers have elected to define this social trend as relational aggression. This classification, according to The Ophelia Project (2007), stated "Relational aggression encompasses behaviors that harm others by

damaging, threatening to damage or manipulating one's relationships with his or her peers, or by injuring one's feelings of social acceptance” (para. 2). Because the literature reflects that aggression can take on many forms, parents and school officials alike should be understandably concerned about the evolving aggression in girls (Bowie, 2007; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Olweus, 1995; Young et al., 2006; Zahn et al., 2008).

Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2008) have assembled a comprehensive collection of resources about girl culture, and they revealed several factors implicating aggression in girls. These researchers noted, “The data indicate that the aggressive trend can be linked to a couple of direct societal changes. First, the evolving of the feminist movement and second is the expansion of the media” (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2008, p.3). While the enduring feminist movement has had an extraordinary impact on women and girls, there is not ample conclusive data to suggest that an increase in aggression can be correlated to being a feminist (Brown & Tappan, 2008). However, this may not be the case for a discussion about the media influence because Prothrow-Stith and Spivak (2005) explained, “Girls are also responding to the violence in media with signs of anxiety, irritability, and intolerance of delay” (p. 91). Likewise, there is other scholarly research in agreement (Brown & Tappan, 2008; Crick, 1997; James et al., 2011; Lamb & Brown, 2006) that speculates the massive growth in media forms could also be uniquely linked with the rise in girl aggression. Nevertheless, there are mixed outcomes concerning correlations as well in this matter.

Overall, what the studies do suggest is that in early adolescence, girls in general experience the heightened need to experience popularity and recognition because they wish to be well-liked and accepted by their peers (Fabes & Martin, 2000; Goldstein, Young, & Boyd, 2008; Willer & Cupach, 2008). Unfortunately, these desires can lead to disappointment and “meanness

due to competition both between and within girls' cliques" (Willer & Cupach, 2008, p. 415). Consequently, when your identity is wrapped up in the need to be liked and accepted, relational manipulation becomes the resource to protect this valued position by any means available.

Theoretical Framework

Relational aggression in girls involves negative human behavior. The nature of the lived experiences, including how and why this behavior is becoming more prevalent in adolescent girls, is the underlying theme of this research study. Therefore, this study intended to extend on prior research in two significant ways. The first way was based on the Social Cognitive Theory, including the Self-Efficacy component as it is applied to girls of color. The second way was by analyzing the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who is noted for his work in "Philosophical Hermeneutics" as it is applied to the cultural array of girls of color (Jacobson, 2007).

Social Cognitive Theory and Self-Efficacy

The Social Cognitive Theory with Self-Efficacy was derived from the work done by renowned psychologist and researcher Albert Bandura. In his publication, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*, Bandura (1986) explained human functioning as a result of cognitive, vicarious, self-regulatory, and self-reflective processes. From this theoretical viewpoint, human functioning is viewed as the product of dynamic interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1986). Furthermore, Bandura's research on human functioning takes the perspective that individuals are instilled with certain capabilities that define what it is to be human; and primarily among these are the capabilities to symbolize, plan alternative strategies (forethought), learn through vicarious experience, self-regulate, and self-reflect (Pajares, 2002).

Overall, Pajares (2002) explained in his *Overview of Social Cognitive Theory and of Self-Efficacy* that Bandura's theory stands in clear contrast to theories of human functioning. He believed theories of human functioning overemphasize the role of environmental factors in the development of human behavior, human adaptation, change, and learning (Pajares, 2002). Instead, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory is rooted in a view of human agency in which individuals are agents proactively engaged in their own development, and can make things happen by their actions. He believed that self-efficacy provides the foundation for human motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment, which is a crucial determinant in self-regulation (Pajares, 2002).

If the literature is correct, this theory will support the belief that relational aggression in many girls must be viewed with a human agency perspective. This perspective takes the position of viewing individuals as self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting, and self-regulating, and not just as reactive creatures produced by environmental and biological forces or driven by their inner impulses. Given negative human behavior is involved, this phenomenological qualitative study opted to focus on self-efficacy beliefs that included the following issues: (a) choice behavior, (b) efforts, expenditure and persistence, (c) thought patterns and emotional reactions, and (d) humans as producers rather than simply foretellers of behaviors (Bandura, 1986).

Overall, utilizing this theoretical concept as a guide, the data found demands action concerning the prevention of this behavior in the form of providing the sources of self-efficacy as detailed in the social cognitive theory of Bandura. Finally, this study will be instrumental in establishing a protocol that can involve parents/guardians, schools, and communities to provide authentic mastery experiences, genuine vicarious experiences, social persuasions, and broad physiological states to all adolescent girls (Bandura, 1986).

Hans-Georg Gadamer Works in Philosophical Hermeneutics

Jacobson (2007) examined relational aggression and bullying occurrences with a philosophical perspective of which may contain an explanation for the increases in the aggression phenomenon. While analyzing the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who is noted for his work in “Philosophical Hermeneutics,” Jacobson (2007) was led to conclude, “Typical anti-bullying strategies at times simply train bullies to be better at bullying (i.e., learning to bully more covertly, and expertly to inflict the same devastation without adult detection)” (p. 297). Utilizing the work of Gadamer invites us to think about bullying in new ways. While certainly involving the thinking and skills of the bully and the victim, Gadamer contends that bullying does not fundamentally result from a problem within the participants, but is fostered by certain spaces between them. These terrains cultivate specific experiences of an “other” (Jacobson, 2007). Overall, this research opens up the playing field to include the “space between students” and recognizes that we must foster certain inter-personal skills leading us to form atypical interventions to address this problem (Jacobson, 2007).

Review of the Literature

The review of literature in this study sought to discover, associate, and conceptualize those relationally aggressive behaviors found in girls of color in their surroundings, and is organized into three sections. The first section defines relational aggression and bullying and describes the phenomena in terms of developmental behavior, the evidence of relational aggression and bullying in girls, the media, existing stereotypes or biases, and technology. The second section discusses underlying issues in resource-deprived schools that lead to bullying and school violence, educational issues like economic disparity, the existing school-to-prison pipeline, school laws and extreme discipline policies that are punitive in nature. The focus of the

third section of the literature review provides an examination of the existing strategies recommended for reducing bullying and relational aggressive acts, which encourage perspectives involved in self-efficacy, self-regulation, mentoring, and advocacy that may improve the relationship skills of girls.

What is Relational Aggression?

Subtle methods of aggression in girls have been utilized for centuries in some form or another. Yet, until fairly recently, researchers (Bowie, 2007; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Olweus, 1995; Young et al., 2006) have conducted relevant research on measuring, determining, describing, and differentiating relational aggression from other forms of aggression. Bowie (2007) noted that former research studies done before 1969 on children and adolescents regarding aggression focused on overt or physical aggression, and were primarily done on males. It was not until the 1970s that Dr. Dan Olweus (1995), a Swedish researcher, who was a psychology professor at the University of Bergen in Norway, completed the first comprehensive, structured study of bullying and victim dilemmas among school-aged children. His study was instrumental in alerting society to the magnitude of the problem (Olweus, 1995). Although the Olweus' study was significant, it was lacking an emphasis on gender and racial specifics.

For this study, I used the clinical definition coined by Crick and Grotpeter in 1995 as relational aggression to refer specifically to non-physical and covert aggression utilized in intimate friendships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Combined with the explanation for relational aggression in girls as suggested by Bowie (2007) who declared, "Relational aggression, or the purposeful intent to inflict harm on another through a social relationship, has been identified as a form of aggression that is most often exhibited by females" (p. 107).

Literature about the topic of relational aggression as it affects girls of color was limited in the various search engines. Therefore, proposing a study on the topic and phenomena addressed a gap in the literature concerning the nature of this lived experience for relationally aggressive girls of color, including how and why girls of color, in particular, exhibit aggression, which is not explored by scholars (Bowie, 2007). Nevertheless, this study aimed to uncover the how and why of relational aggression and bullying from the standpoint of the girls who deal with it most often. Equally, the rationale behind this choice was also based on the few studies found to address issues concerning girls of color and aggression. The plan was to build on and produce a thicker description of the challenges inherent in the social relationships of some girls. This study sought to understand in detail the practices of a few girls of color dealing with bullying and relational aggression, rather than to understand at the surface level the experiences of many girls represented in the studies found in the literature review.

What is Bullying?

Bullying and the frequency of bullying behaviors have received more attention recently as the media has begun to highlight the bullying cases of late that have ended tragically for some children. According to the statistics compiled by Horowitz (n.d.) for the National Center for Learning Disabilities, different sources may reveal a mixture of numbers. Horowitz found that “75% [of students] report being bullied at least once during the past 10 months [and] 25-50% [of students] report being bullied at some point during their school years” (para. 1). Furthermore, scholars from across the country and worldwide report that bullying is an international issue of concern (Horowitz, n.d.; Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1995). For this study, I used the definition developed by the pioneer researcher on the topic of bullying, Olweus (1995). Olweus’ (1995) groundbreaking systematic research on bullying revealed,

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. Negative actions can include physical contact, words, making faces or dirty gestures, and intentional exclusion from a group. An additional criterion of bullying is an imbalance in strength (an asymmetric power relationship): The student who is exposed to the negative actions has difficulty defending him or herself. (p. 197)

The Olweus studies have been used as blueprints for more recent studies that seek to provide guidance and positive behavioral interventions and supports (Davis, 2007; Spivak & Prothrow-Stith, 2001; Sugai & Horner, 2009).

Generally, the origins of bullying can be traced back to the beginning of time. As bullying takes on a biblical perspective we see scripture that tells us of Esau who held great resentment against his brother Jacob in Genesis 27:41 (NKJV), and of Joseph's brothers who despised and bullied their little brother to such a level that they betrayed and sold him into slavery to Egypt: "They hated him and could not speak a kind word to him" (Genesis 37:4). Likewise, regrettably children today may face bullying most often because from the time they enter the public school system they are taught to be the best at their studies and to also create relationships within that social environment. According to Davis (2007) who looked at bullying through the eyes of a trained therapist, many bullies are regarded as more popular. Davis maintained that young people who see their peers receive a higher social status in school and receive no consequences will likely feel that the behavior is condoned and acceptable. Bullying behaviors exhibited in the school environment which are being ignored and not stopped by the adults responsible for safety convey mixed messages to them (Davis, 2007). Therefore, it was a

goal of this study to succeed in exposing a few of the reasons that aggression and bullying expressed in girls of color may become satisfying to them.

The Developmental Stages of Girls

To understand how aggression and bullying can affect girls of color there should be a fundamental examination of the developmental phases girls experience, in particular those that involve cognitive, emotional, and social development. According to some scholars, the developmental changes that happen at early adolescence are dramatic, and this is apparent to anyone working with this age group (Chesney-Lind et al., 2007; Davis, 2007; Susman & Rogel, 2004; Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005). The biological changes are quite different between girls and boys. Wigfield et al. (2005) found that “Girls enter puberty approximately 18 months before boys do, which means that during early adolescence, girls and boys of the same chronological age are at quite different points in their physical development, which can complicate their relationships” (p. 2). Furthermore, it is reported that girls who are early maturing can have the most trouble adapting to school transitions, particularly the changes from elementary to middle school (Wigfield et al., 2005). The literature reports for some of these early maturing girls, pubescent development might interfere with an early adolescent girl’s focus on school, as well as it can impact their social relations and overall adjustment (Wigfield et al., 2005). Overall, the literature reflects that adolescent girls’ mental, physical, and sexual development profoundly affects the way in which they view themselves and the way in which they are viewed and treated by others (Creasey & Jarvis, 2012; Wigfield et al., 2005).

Cognitive development. During adolescence, girls and boys in general undergo considerable cognitive change. The thinking patterns become more complex, more abstract, and less concrete. Current research has indicated, “These cognitive changes allow adolescents to

simultaneously consider multiple aspects of their actions and decisions, assess potential positive and negative consequences of a decision, and plan for the future” (Creasey & Jarvis, 2012, p. 66). The differences in how adolescent girls think, make judgments, and empathize can be misunderstood even more dramatically than the more obvious physical changes they experience. It may appear that the drastic change from black-and-white concrete thinking to the ability to think abstractly and in shades of gray may prove to be challenging to the adults around them (APA, 2002; Keating, 1990; Piaget, 1950; Vasquez & de las Fuentes, 1999). Therefore, if scholars wish to gain insight into the challenges adolescents face with new cognitive skills, perhaps researchers who concentrate on girls of color and their diverse responses can provide professionals with sound information regarding them. To include the girls’ voices would make it a bit easier to communicate with youth who are struggling, in order to offer them the services they need to redirect and transform negative behaviors related to aggression and bullying. Of course, no one girl can truly be fully understood by only looking at the cognitive challenges she may experience. Scholars have pinpointed areas in general that can assist in the transition. For example, in *A Reference for Professionals Developing Adolescents* report compiled by the American Psychological Association (2002), an adolescent’s cognitive development involves certain normal occurrences that can be backed by research in the area. This APA (2002) report verifies that yes, it is normal for adolescents to:

1. Argue for the sake of arguing in which they go on tangents seeming to argue the side issues for no apparent reason (Walker & Taylor, 1991).
2. Jump to conclusions, even with their brand-new capacity for logical thinking can jump to startling conclusions (Jaffe, 1998).

3. Be self-centered. Adolescents can be very “me-centered.” It takes time to develop empathy for others’ perspectives (Jaffe, 1998).
4. Constantly find fault in the adult’s position, because the newfound ability to think critically encourages them to look for discrepancies, contradictions, or exceptions in what adults say (Bjorklund & Green, 1992).
5. Be overly dramatic, because everything seems to be a big deal with exaggerated behaviors and opinions (Jaffe, 1998). (APA, 2002, p. 11)

Although all of the above characteristics may be challenging for most adults and professionals alike, this rapid development for higher-level thinking in adolescent girls must be acknowledged and understood because they still need the help and guidance from the adults available to them to develop into their full potential (APA, 2002, p. 12).

Emotional development. Just as grownups can make bad decisions and mistakes so can the adolescent; many times those decisions lay the groundwork, good or bad, for emotional development. Emotional development in adolescence should involve a sensible and rational sense of individuality in the context of connecting to others and learning to handle pressure and manage one’s emotions (APA, 2002). A girl’s individuality or self-concept involves first what she believes about herself, and this can include attributes such as, height, weight, and intelligence. Additionally, the roles and goals she believes are important, and her interest, values, and beliefs are forming (2002, p. 15). Next, she develops confidence or self-esteem, which involves evaluating how she feels about certain parts of her self-concept, such as her athletic ability, physical attractiveness, or popularity (Santrock, 2009). With all of this happening simultaneously it is not surprising the adolescent girl can feel anxious, insecure, and overwhelmed. In a recent study about bullying among girls, Besag (2006) found

Most of the conflicts among the girls stemmed from emotions triggered about their friendships such as jealousy, suspicion, disappointment, and anger. Some were jealous of the close friendships of others and some felt in danger of losing a close friend to another girl. (p. 548)

Overall, when we deal with girls it is essential that researchers recognize that an adolescent girl will need to learn to navigate through the maze of relating one to another. They must begin to master the emotional skills that are necessary to connect to others, all while managing the stress, disagreements, and conflicts that are inevitable in personal relationships (Santrock, 2009). This study intended to give voice to the emotional intelligence of girls of color instead of avoiding the conversations that have led to the aggressive and bullying behaviors displayed by some of them.

Social development. The literature indicated that just as the adolescent girl goes through drastic physical, cognitive, and emotional changes, their social development as well is directly entwined (APA, 2002; Crick, 1997; Santrock, 2009). One of the most apparent changes seems to be the obvious shift from family importance to their peer group's importance. Besag (2006) found in her study that "It was clear that all the girls valued their friendships highly" (p. 548). Likewise, other scholars agreed that socially most girls may vary in the number of friends they possess, however, friendships can and do serve an important function in an adolescent girl's world (APA, 2012; Besag, 2006; Santrock, 2009; Susman & Rogel, 2004). Girls place great stock in relationships, especially by late adolescence when peer groups may be replaced by more one-on-one relationships and new romantic ones (Santrock, 2009). Furthermore, those relationships can be a hotbed for conflict. Social development can include peer relationships, family relationships, school, community, faith, and various forms of media. According to Prothrow-Stith and Spivak (2005), "Girls do better when they exist in nurturing environments;

Feeling safe, loved, and supported promotes healthy behaviors and constructive coping mechanisms” (p. 73). The researchers also report that “none of us are innately or biologically programmed to use violence when angry or facing conflict, we learn to do so and we teach our children to do the same” (p. 73). Other scholars (APA, 2002; Besag, 2006; Santrock, 2004) agreed with this stance and recommended that a number of factors can help with an adolescent girl’s positive social development in peer relationships, family relationships, school, community, faith, and various forms of media. They include the following:

1. Provide warm and involved support.
2. Provide secure guidelines and boundaries.
3. Encourage, explain, and discuss issues of conflict while listening respectfully.
4. Have appropriate developmental expectations. (APA, 2002. p. 23)

Overall, in order to be proactive regarding aggression and bullying one should interact regularly with an adolescent girl and address any negative behaviors at the time you are first made aware of them. It was the intention of this study to reveal some factors that are involved in an aggressive girl’s social environment that may be helping or hindering her positive social development.

The Evidence of Relational Aggression in Girls

Recently, the evidence of relational aggression and bullying can be seen in schools all across the nation. Relational aggression can be defined as “a purposeful attempt to harm others, either through physical means such as hitting or pushing or through the manipulation of a social relationship” (Crick, 1997, p. 610). The evidence of aggression has become very apparent through the means of media and technology. The popular books such as *Odd Girl Out* (Simmons, 2002), *Queen Bees and Wannabees* (Wiseman, 2002), and movies like *Thirteen*,

Mean Girls and Mean Girls 2 (2004), are based on the trials and misfortunes of female aggression and bullying. The storylines and themes they addressed come from the standpoint of the girls who are suffering from aggressive and bullying behavior, and desire relief or retribution from it (Waldron, 2011). However, the idolized media stories and reality television could be setting girls up for more failure and heartache than can be expected as the stories end with fairytale like gratification. The suggestions of retaliation in some of the fictional tales can possibly lead girls to more damaging psychosocial behaviors and ultimately incarceration, which is particularly important to the case of girls of color.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is the chief federal entity for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data related to education in the United States and other nations (NCES, 2010). Moreover, according to the most recent report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics' (BJS) *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2010*,

In 2007, about 32% of students reported having been bullied at school during the school year. Twenty-one percent of students said that they had experienced bullying that consisted of being made fun of; 18% reported being the subject of rumors; 11% said that they were pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on; 6% said they were threatened with harm; 5% said they were excluded from activities on purpose; and 4% said that someone tried to make them do things they did not want to do, and their property was destroyed on purpose. (p. 42)

Furthermore, this same report reflected 33% of female students reported being bullied at school compared to 30% of male students. They said there were a higher percentage of White students (34%) reporting being bullied at school in 2007 than Hispanic (27%) or Asian (18%) students (NCES, 2010, p. 42). Yet, it is important to note, what seemed to be missing from each report

and many of the chief studies found, were the statistics that reflected bullying for Black/African-American and Native American students. Time after time, during this literature search, this was the case. When researching Black/African American statistics solely, I found relational aggression and bullying issues for certain girls to be absent from the reports. Even information provided through the Office for Civil Rights (OCR; 2010) tended to stress the importance of compliance and only clarified the relationship between bullying, and discriminatory harassment under the civil rights laws enforced by the Department of Education's (ED) OCR. This office seemed to only "remind schools that failure to recognize discriminatory harassment when addressing student misconduct may lead to inadequate or inappropriate responses that fail to remedy violations of students' civil rights" (p. 1). Overwhelmingly there is a gap in the literature regarding Black/African-American and Native American adolescent girls provided by the chief reporting agencies.

To better explain this gap according to the APA (2012) in a report entitled, *A New Look At Adolescent Girls*, "One-third of the 18.5 million girls between the ages of 10 and 18 living in the United States are Black, Latino/Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, Eskimo, or Aleut. They remain virtually invisible in the psychological literature on adolescent girl development" (p. 4). The APA also revealed there is a lack of data and information about girls of color. They conveyed this major concern because the missing information on adolescent girls of color raises questions about the reliability of significant studies on adolescent development. Furthermore, research conducted without the inclusion of the voices of adolescent girls of color included cannot be instrumental in addressing the needs of all girls, and can be detrimental to the public images, which can often be stereotypical (Brown & Tappan, 2008). It is apparent the literature gap confirms the need for more studies concerning the development toward self-

definition, self-identification, and enhanced self-esteem in girls of color. There has been very little research conducted on the specific challenges girls of color face. This study served to open the dialogue concerning the difficulties girls of color can face relationally from their standpoint.

The media. The media has played a major role in promoting competitive beauty pageants, reality television stars, fashion models, music-video vixens, rap and hip-hop culture, gang activity, and social status. Some research studies (Brown & Tappan, 2008; Crick, 1997; James et al., 2011; Lamb & Brown, 2006) have indicated most of the items mentioned above play a significant role in developing present-day girls' behaviors, self-worth, and esteem. From early on, girls are taught what is important as a result of these various images. What is attractive or not? What is popular or not? This is in addition to what value is assigned to attractiveness and popularity in American society? To aid young girls with the tools it will take to address the issues they experience, researchers must attempt to take a critical look at the phenomena from the perspectives of the girls themselves who are the participants in aggressive behaviors. Researchers frequently cite there is a widespread concern in schools all across the nation and the world concerning aggression, bullying, and other forms of physical and psychological violence among students (Bright, 2005; Brown & Tappan, 2008). Therefore, educators who work with girls, in particular, should make an attempt to understand how influential a girl's social and personal identity is in the school environment. Furthermore, it is important to note that any systematic attempt to reduce the instances of relational aggression and bullying should "deal with the fact that our cultural stories and media images about gender, and particularly about girls' and women's relationships, actually cultivate girl-fighting behavior" (Brown & Tappan, 2008, p. 56).

Stereotypes and biases. The focus of this study was to investigate the possible experiences of girls of color involved in some manner with aggression and bullying, and why it is important to explore the literature regarding stereotypes or biases girls are confronted with regularly as they navigate relationships. According to Wallace, Townsend, Glasgow, and Ojie (2011),

Stereotypes are important to consider when examining how gender and race influence self-concept in the lives of African-American females. Stereotype images are based upon the belief that there are certain appearances, behaviors, or attributes shared by all members of a certain group. (p. 1316)

The literature has shown in general that girls can sometimes have a preoccupation with the images found throughout the media and society. With this preoccupation, biases are inevitable. Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, and Jackson (2010) explored this preoccupation in their study that explores the relationship among stereotypic images, beauty standards that are consistent with “colorism,” and identity components of African American girls (p. 273). This study reported that across all ethnicities, women have been objectified through media images, and those images can have an effect on their behaviors in relationships. Generally, as girls rely on close, intimate friendships to move them through life, and because girls often place more value on friendships than boys do, relational aggression can have a devastating impact on them (Waldron, 2011). The Wallace et al. (2011) study provided a closer look at the stereotypes that affect African-American girls, in particular. Although the study did not cover relational aggression, it did provide a glimpse into the cultural and societal effects of the African-American girl. This study reminded us of the history of negative stereotypes about Black/African

Americans, which were often used to help justify maltreatment throughout slavery and segregation. Wallace et al. (2011) affirmed,

Women's and African-American studies, among other disciplines, have led to the identification of several historical stereotype images of African-American women, including the promiscuous "mulatto" Jezebel; the asexual, dark-skinned Mammy; the emasculating matriarch; the disagreeable sapphire; and the breeding welfare mother. (p. 1316)

Current research has shown that the historical versions of biases still exist in the updated forms of the stereotypes made popular by the media with similar attributes being represented in the contemporary video vixen images, and the hip-hop diva images, that convey extreme sexual overtones that girls seek to emulate (Townsend et al., 2010; Wallace et al., 2011).

In addition to the overt relational instances covered in the prior literature, there is also a need to investigate a little known type of aggression and one that this study attempted to delve deeper into as well. Intra-racial ethnic aggression and bullying is noted by researcher J. S. Hong (2009). This type of aggression is prevalent among African-American and racial/ethnic minority children (Hong, 2009). For instance, he revealed,

African-American children perceived as "not being black enough" due to high achievement and career aspirations are picked on by their lower-achieving peers for "acting White." Likewise, for many Hispanic and Asian immigrant children, there tends to be a major division between assimilated children who are typically second-generation American-born children and immigrant children with limited English proficiency, which have perpetuated social exclusion. Derogatory labels, such as "whitewashed," "FOBS,"

and “wet-backs” have generated bullying behavior among racial/ethnic minority children (e.g., Pyke & Dang, 2003) in school and in their communities. (p. 92)

The literature overwhelmingly suggested that girls receive all types of messages. Given the powerful effects those messages can have on them, educators and other stakeholders should try to understand that girls confessing participation in aggression, girl fights, and bullying ought to be encouraged to understand that their behaviors are intricately tied to femininity, sexuality, race, and social class. Moreover in this regard, if educators understand that racism, classism, and heterosexism influence how girls understand aggression they must alter the school culture to challenge these perceptions (Waldron, 2011).

Technology. The recent influx of devices such as computers, iPads, Androids, cell phones, the internet through the use of YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Myspace, and other social-networking websites in general, have been blamed for the surge in relational aggression and bullying perpetrated by all students globally and girls, in particular. A review of pertinent literature indicated that cyberbullying seemed to be particularly severe and relentless during the middle school and high school period (Li, 2008; Maher, 2008; Walrave & Heirman, 2011). The popular ABC movie *Cyberbullying* (2011) reflects the seriousness of bullying through the means of technology frequently done without regard for personal peer relationships. The literature reflects that with the introduction of technology in current society one can view its use in the classroom as something of great worth, but it also has a negative aspect as well. On the one hand, to be competitive globally educators must encourage and provide students with the tools required to compete. On the other hand, heavy electronic and internet use produces cyberbullies and cybervictims (Maher, 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). According to American researchers,

Ybarra and Mitchell (2004), most cyberbullies and cybervictims assign great importance to the Internet. In addition, in their study,

Almost one in five (19%), young regular Internet users in the sample were involved in online harassment in some capacity within the previous year. Three % were aggressor/targets. An additional 4% reported being targets of aggression, and 12% reported aggressive behavior towards others online. (p. 1311)

Results from this study were common to other studies that have been conducted abroad among Belgium, Chinese, and Australian students (Li, 2008; Maher, 2008; Walrave & Heirman, 2011). However, out of the recent studies found pertaining to cyberbullying and aggression in America, the literature failed to produce correlations that were specific to girls of color attending U.S. urban public schools. Thus, an important step toward providing information concerning the use or misuse of the available technologies that girls of color in the U.S. may be using is a gap that certainly needs to be explored.

Resource-Deprived Schools

Because the literature has reported that unchecked relational aggression and bullying can lead to negative consequences for those who are the aggressors as well as the targets (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004), it is important to review the educational environments that may give rise to this behavior. A review of the related literature regarding public schools showed

School district boundary lines play a pivotal role in shaping students' educational opportunities. Living on one side of a school district boundary rather than another can mean the difference between being able to attend a high-achieving resource enriched school [versus] having to attend a low-achieving resource-deprived school. (Wilson, 2011, p. 625).

Moreover, scholars who examine the prevalence of bullying and aggressive behavior in impoverished neighborhoods had consistently found that children of low socioeconomic status have a higher incidence of behavior problems, compared to the upper or middle-class populations (Hong, 2009; Wilson, 2011). Likewise, reports established by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF) (2005) explained that in resource-deprived schools perceptions persist among the public that school violence is a growing problem, in response to the sometimes-unfounded fears of violence. Educators have established an assortment of extreme discipline policies—including mandatory “zero tolerance” policies—that remove students deemed to be “problem children” from their schools (NAACPLDF, 2005, p. 3). Where do these students most often end up? The literature declared, “Suspended or expelled students are increasingly finding themselves arrested or referred to law enforcement or juvenile court and prosecuted for behavior at school” (p. 4). In too many cases, the school-to-prison pipeline is where they end up (Christle et al., 2005). Achieving a more accurate and complete understanding of the school-to-prison pipeline relationship is urgent (Wald & Losen, 2003) given the growing overall numbers of prison inmate’s especially female inmates in Oklahoma now at a record 8.6% of the total inmate population (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2011).

More current research conducted by Crenshaw (2015) reported the punitive settings which are more prevalent in resource-deprived schools have a detrimental consequence in the United States and can negatively impact Black girls and other girls of color. Yet much of the existing research literature has excluded these girls from the analysis. The problem with leaving girls of color out of the analysis can lead many of the important financial stakeholders to infer that girls of color are not also at risk in an already resource-deprived school (p. 5).

Bullying and school violence. Various researchers have noted key characteristics that can tie relational aggression and bullying to school violence (Bennett-Johnson, 2004; Brown & Tappan, 2008; Bucher & Manning, 2005; Dellasega & Adamshick, 2005; Olweus, 1995; Zahn et al., 2008). For instance, there are characteristics of behaviors and risk factors that are consistent throughout the literature when citing potential for violence. First, a school's climate and environment, negative or positive, can promote or inhibit bullying and aggression. Secondly, the school's response to aggression and bullying is also a factor associated with the violence in a school because it is extremely important that the bully does not gain social prestige from their actions (Konstantina & Piliou-Dimitris, 2010; Olweus, 1995). In general, conclusive information regarding whether violence can be directly linked to relational aggression and bullying is limited. Researchers Blosnich and Bossarte (2011) are in agreement with this finding by revealing they were the first, to their knowledge, to specifically "look at the effects of school safety measures in relation to low-level violence specific to particular forms of peer victimization related to bullying—from verbal harassment, to vandalism, to physical assault" (p. 111). With this in mind, the search for literature pertaining to school violence produced mixed findings; however, the statistics in the literature are enlightening. For example, in a study conducted by Molnar, Roberts, Browne, Gardener, and Buka (2005) concerning violence in girls, 36 girls or 64% of the sample of 61 urban adolescent girls aged 11-17 were involved in a recent episode of violence; and, they contended that the violence is most often with or against other girls. The study also reports that girls who are violent are more likely to assault a sibling, parent, or other girl.

According to the National School Safety Center's (2008) *School Crime and Violence Overview: National Statistics Report*, "The violent crime victimization rate at school declined

from 48 violent victimizations per 1,000 students in 1992 to 28 such victimizations in 2003. Even so, violence, theft, bullying, drugs, and weapons are still widespread” (p. 3). Other key findings include, “Fourteen percent of students reported being the victims of bullying and sex differences were not detected in most types of bullying” (p. 3). Moreover, it is important to note that the literature stated, “White, non-Hispanic students were more likely than Black, non-Hispanic students and other, non-Hispanic students to report being bullied” (p. 3). This finding alone raises questions as to why there is a hesitancy of Black and Hispanic student reported behaviors and warrants a closer look at the reasons students of color failed to report aggressive and bullying behaviors. To explore these phenomena will certainly contribute to the dialogue of school violence and add to the perspectives concerning interplay between cultures, social, family, and community structures that potentially influence aggressive and bullying behaviors (Benbenishty, 2011; Lunenburg, 2011).

Educational Issues

In order to address how various educational issues affect girls of color who are challenged by relational aggression and bullying, we must take a look at the literature concerning the dilemmas that have been noted to matter most in their environments. Specifically, the literature reflected that if there are fewer resources and attention given to students, this will yield poor classroom achievement and poor behavioral outcomes (NAACPLDF, 2005). Moreover, the literature showed that shortcomings in public education, especially in areas of concerted poverty, can set students up to fail; and, if this is an accurate portrayal in the case of girls of color then the question becomes why? In accordance with this theory, scholars Bucher and Manning (2005), Christle et al. (2005), Hong, (2009), NAACP Legal Defense, and Educational Fund (2005) revealed in general there are five deficiencies found in resource deprived schools:

- In-experienced or non-certified teachers and professional school counselors
- Advanced instruction classes limited or not available
- Early intervention programs limited or not available
- Limited extracurricular activities
- Absence of safe and secure, well equipped facilities

In much of the literature reviewed there was a longstanding agreement regarding the lack of sufficient resources and systemic problems that lead to poor academic performance, failure, school exclusion, harsh discipline policies, risk for delinquency, and dropout. Christle et al. (2005) revealed, “In fact, academic failure, exclusionary discipline practices, and dropout have been identified as key elements in a “school to prison pipeline,” especially for minority students and those with disabilities” (p. 70). In general, it does matter where the school district boundary lines begin and end for many students; and, girls of color more than ever are ending up in educational programs that likely do not expose, discuss, or address the relational aggression and bullying issues they experience. Consequently, the unchecked aggression issues become a problem that can cause school suspension or expulsion under many of the new “zero tolerance” disciplinary policies (Christle et al., 2005; Hong, 2009). In some respects, the literature reflected that there are dire problems in education discipline policies. Yet, according to Crenshaw (2015) the existing research, data, and public policy debates often fail to address the degree to which girls face risks that are both similar to and different from those faced by boys. Thus, this silence about the behaviors of at-risk girls of color rarely receives the full attention of researchers, advocates, policy makers, and funders. Therefore many scholars, educators, activists, and community members have remained under informed about the consequences of overtly punitive

school policies on girls as well as the distinctly gendered dynamics of zero-tolerance environments that limit their educational achievements (Crenshaw, 2015).

Overall, the state of Oklahoma has been very proactive when creating bullying legislation and laws designed to protect students. According to the Oklahoma State Department of Education's (OSDE, 2009) *School Laws of Oklahoma 2009*,

The Legislature finds that bullying has a negative effect on the social environment of schools, creates a climate of fear among students, inhibits their ability to learn, and leads to other antisocial behavior. Bullying behavior has been linked to other forms of antisocial behavior, such as vandalism, shoplifting, skipping, and dropping out of school, fighting, and the use of drugs and alcohol. . . The purpose of the School Bullying Prevention Act is to provide a comprehensive approach for the public schools of this state to create an environment free of unnecessary disruption which is conducive to the learning process by implementing policies for the prevention of harassment, intimidation, and bullying. (70 O.S. 2001, Section 24-100)

The law then highlights the terms used in the School Bullying Prevention Act in detail so that there is no question regarding the definition the state has adopted to describe bully behaviors. For example the School Bullying Prevention Act indicated that , 'Harassment, intimidation, and bullying' means any gesture, written or verbal expression, or physical act that a reasonable person should know will harm another student, damage another student's property, place another student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or damage to the student's property, or insult or demean any student or group of students in such a way as to disrupt or interfere with the school's educational mission or the education of any student" (70 O.S. 2002, c. 149, § 2).

Having this legislation enacted into law was first viewed as a positive step towards keeping the students safe in the state of Oklahoma. However, some advocates have questioned what the laws have initiated in terms of policies developed to police Oklahoma schools (NAACPLDF, 2011). According to the OSDE *Consolidated State Performance Report: Parts I and II* during the 2009-2010 school year there were 15,319 statewide bullying and/or harassment incidents reported in Oklahoma schools. Furthermore, there were 8,927 out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for violent incidents without physical injuries, and 1,557 out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for violent incidents with physical injuries. It is important to note that the report did not delineate the characteristics outside of injury versus non-injury incidences, nor does the report separate by gender or racial/ethnic makeup. Yet, out of a total student population of 654,511, there were 369,107 of the students in the population classified as students served by Public Title I, School Wide Programs (SWP), or Targeted Assistance Schools (TAS) programs at any time during the regular school year. Confirming these findings is literature (Bucher & Manning, 2005; Christle et al., 2005; Hong, 2009; NAACPLDF, 2005) showing the possibility of shortcomings in public education, especially in areas of concerted poverty and zealous discipline policies that can promote out of school suspensions and expulsions. Taking a closer look at the existing education structure from a scholarly, researcher-based perspective that includes the perceptions of the students of color they affect, can potentially save society from expending vast resources along the school-to-prison pipeline (Hong, 2009; NAACPLDF, 2005; Zahn et al., 2008).

School to Prison Pipeline

Research showed that in Oklahoma the incarceration rate of women is one of the highest in the country, Oklahoma incarcerated more women per capita than any other state with a rate of

134 per 100,000 female populations (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2011). In addition, statistics found in the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) report called *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report* revealed the amount of young women in the juvenile justice system has risen considerably in spite of a drop in the overall juvenile crime rates (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). Overall, scholars (Sharma, 2010; Winn, 2010a, 2010b) reported that young women are the fastest rising segment of the juvenile justice populace with a nationwide percentage surge of 83% between 1988 and 1997, and are reported to grow rapidly in the next decade. The revealing statistics on juvenile crime alone suggest an urgent need for a proactive approach regarding the nature of this lived experience, including how and why these women are being locked up.

In an attempt to answer the how and why, recent literature (Crenshaw, 2015) suggested that there is a hidden toll of race that girls of color suffer that has not received the attention of scholars and researchers that contribute to the school to prison pipeline occurrence as well. The Crenshaw (2015) report *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced And Underprotected* revealed findings that support many of the existing zero tolerance policies that are in place in studies conducted in Boston and New York school districts; the 2011-2012 school year exposed major disproportionate treatment of Black girls versus White girls. The most telling accounts from the Crenshaw (2015) findings show that Black girls face a statistically greater chance of suspension and expulsion compared to other students of the same gender. This study found that expulsion rates in New York City during the 2011–2012 school year showed 90% of all the girls who were subjected to expulsion were Black with no White girls being expelled. The researchers explained the magnitude of this disparity can be captured by simply imagining that one White girl had been expelled. If that were so then in this case, the ratio would be 53 to 1.

Because statistics like this could potentially be seen as a nationwide underreported occurrence. Making this inequity a regular part of the dialogue could potentially help researchers and scholars confront the problem of girls of color supplying the school to prison pipeline at its core.

Strategies for Reducing Bullying and Relational Aggressive Acts

The literature reflected relational aggression and bullying as prevalent in the majority of schools in the United States (Bennett-Johnson, 2004; Young et al., 2006); and there is a wealth of empirical, clinical, and applied research methodology designed to address bullying in schools. One should examine some of the strategies that are recommended to address the phenomena. Researchers Dellasega and Adamshick (2005) and The Ophelia Project (2007) affirmed there are four simple strategies that can be used to remedy relational aggressive and bullying behaviors in girls when in the school setting:

1. Create safe environments of reporting for girls to learn positive relational skills.
2. Utilize peer groups in a supportive way to assist the bully or victims.
3. Relate relational aggression to their everyday lives, and develop alternative behaviors.
4. Integrate new healthy relationship behaviors they have identified as feasible for them into their everyday life.

The scholars stressed that when schools recognize and implement the four simple steps, relationally aggressive and bullying issues in students can be redirected and soon decline (Dellasega & Adamshick, 2005; The Ophelia Project, 2007). According to some stakeholders (Bennett-Johnson, 2004; Crick, 1997; Dellasega & Adamshick, 2005), when applied properly, the above suggestions are reasonable, possible, and beneficial in most educational settings.

However, educational settings are not one-size-fits-all systems, and each location may come with their own set of unique problems. Therefore, other studies have declared that there

are two risk factors that are consistently cited in the potential for violence in American schools: (a) the school's climate, and (b) the school's response to the violence (Hong, 2009; Konstantina & Piliou-Dimitris, 2010; Olweus, 1995). When conducting successful anti-bullying and aggression interventions, both factors must be addressed. Overall, this is the case with one such school-based intervention called *The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (BPP)*. This program suggested a whole-school approach in response to problems related with aggression and bullying in schools, and many schools have implemented its preventative programs or policies.

According to Hong (2009),

The core components of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program are implemented at the individual, classroom, and school levels. The major components of the program consist of the following: parents' involvement through discussion and information sessions; intervention with victims and perpetrators of bullying; regular classroom meetings with students to increase knowledge and empathy; school-wide rules against bullying; intervention programs must be directed at the entire school rather than individual bullies or victims. (p. 87)

Likewise, Black, Washington, Trent, Harner and Pollock (2010) reported this program to be successful when implemented with fidelity, and they show that modest signs of success can be made with the program, but they also caution as Hong (2009), that BPP is not a quick fix and requires effort when implemented properly. Furthermore, because there has been little follow-up research done in low-income urban school environments where girls and boys of color attend more often. Hong (2009) raised the question as to how beneficial this program may be when it is applied to an atypical environment stating,

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (1983) is one of the few programs that has proven efficacy in upper/middleclass areas for reducing the incidence of bullying and improving attitudes towards school and academic achievement, but the effectiveness of the program has not been tested in low-income schools. (p. 81)

With this in mind, what are the best interventions for relational aggression and bullying when applied to the adolescent girl population?

Overall, since the actual studies are limited for girls of color and the existing findings are mixed, effectiveness should be a predictor that must be evaluated in order to select the best strategies that will help girls of color to manage relationally aggressive behaviors. Conclusively, Hong (2009) insisted that an important issue regarding minority children is the little-known conduct he referred to as “intra-racial/ethnic bullying” (p. 92). Equally, this study intends to explore these phenomena as they have gone unexplored as reflected throughout the literature to date and warrant closer examination before strategies are implemented that include students of color. In the case of bullying strategies, most of the literature cited in this review has been based on empirical methodologies that have included quantitative and a few qualitative measures. Each study reviewed dealt with positioning students who are bullying and those who are their targets to adapt better and approach human relationships with more self-regulation and self-efficacy. In general, all strategies have included tactics to adopt while using individual and peer group practices. Whether schools use simplistic guidelines and incorporate them into their program or schools take a more aggressive whole-school approach, one thing remains clear: There are still gaps that remain in the literature concerning girls of color and the need for philosophical perspectives that can lead to more self-regulating behaviors.

Summary

The literature review continued to be developed over the course of this study and was designed to examine and report upon the various bullying and relational aggression risk factors, indicators, signals, trends, related theories and models. This review sought to investigate several perspectives linked to the phenomena of race and gender relative to relational aggressors and their targets to identify key indicators and risk factors associated with this activity. The primary sources included a variety of scholarly works that discussed various bullying and relational aggression-related issues, which covered the implications of the media, stereotypes, biases, technologies, and educational issues. Many sources cited the scarcity of specific studies dedicated to girls of color, and identified the need to address the issue in schools. The overwhelming majority of the articles and other works examined were written from a scholarly, researcher-based perspective, with the intent of discussing the phenomena of bullying and relational aggression from a clinical and factual perspective. However, very few studies were conducted from the viewpoint and experiences of the individual girls who are considered to display the aggressor behaviors. Consequently, this study was designed to explore the perceptions of a diverse group of adolescent girls to discover, associate, and conceptualize those relationally aggressive behaviors that are found in them through their personal lived experiences, along with numerous other aspects that may have influenced their interpretations of their experiences in relationships.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

A phenomenological design was used to explore how girls of color who were 14-17 years old and exhibited aggressive/bullying behaviors that then resulted in their participation or potential participation at OCJB would open up and communicate their life experiences.

Phenomenological research was selected because according to Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen (2006), it “interprets the meaning of the participants’ experience” (p. 453).

Furthermore, phenomenological research contains key characteristics, such as its roots in philosophy, is concerned with the essence of the phenomenon, and includes the investigator’s firsthand experiences (Ary et al., 2006; van Manen, 1990). Aspects of van Manen’s (1990) framework for hermeneutic phenomenological research was used in this study to try to make a “distinction between appearance and essence, between the things of our [the girls] experience and that which grounds the things of our [their] experiences” (p. 32). Thus, this study made inquiries utilizing protocol writing featuring lived-experience descriptions, observations using experiential anecdotes, and individual interviewing featuring the personal life story approaches (van Manen, 1990). Chapter Three details the research design, questions, participants and setting, researcher’s biography, data collection tools and analysis procedures, and trustworthiness and ethical consideration used for this study.

The purpose of this study was to investigate and provide a deeper and richer understanding regarding the individual and psychosocial processes by which adolescent girls of color navigate female versus female situational aggression factors and intra-racial components with potential interconnections found in sexuality, race, and social class. The literature suggested that bullied girls are at risk of academic failure, social isolation, manipulation, and are

more likely than their peers to have higher rates of absenteeism and lower GPAs (Faris & Felmlee, 2011; Goldstein et al., 2008). Therefore, aspects from the hermeneutic phenomenological approach were used to explore and create a unique picture of the lived experiences of relational aggression and bullying in girls of color. The rationale behind this choice was to produce a thick description of the challenges inherent in the physical and psychological processes these girls use to develop self-identity, self-awareness, and self-knowledge. The aim was to identify in detail the relational practices of a few girls of color dealing with bullying and relational aggression, rather than to recognize at the surface level the experiences of many girls who were represented in the existing studies that were found.

Research Design

A phenomenological approach requires the researcher to listen to what emerges as the participants use voice and language to describe their lived experience (Creswell, 2009; van Manen, 1990). As such, hermeneutical phenomenological research is appropriate because in this research genre, interviews of multiple subjects, close observations, and protocol writing are key characteristics when investigating experiences as they are lived. Using qualitative research methods, the investigator is likely to determine some of the underlying meanings and philosophical perspectives of relational aggression and bullying among girls of color, whether it be same gender or intra-racial in nature. Thus, these phenomena were investigated with qualitative methods, which included: protocol writing featuring lived-experience descriptions, observations using experiential anecdotes, and individual interviewing featuring the personal life story approaches (van Manen, 1990). Qualitative techniques such as these can enable a relationship between the researcher and the participants, especially when each participant's individual construction of meaning is respected and valued by the researcher (Morrow, 2005).

Consequently, the qualitative methods that were used in the study placed the participants in a position where they were considered the experts of their own lives and as a result, they felt a sense of liberation. It was anticipated this feeling of liberty or release in the girls translated into a deeper understanding about the aggression phenomenon.

Furthermore, this study employed aspects from the hermeneutic phenomenological approach to gain a full picture of relational aggression and bullying behaviors exhibited by these girls. In the book, *Researching Lived Experiences: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*, van Manen (1990) discussed hermeneutic phenomenological research may be seen as a dynamic interplay among six methodological research activities:

van Manens' Methodical Structure

1. Turning to a phenomenon, which seriously interest us and commits us to the world;
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it.
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting.
5. Maintain a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon.
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (van Manen, 1990, pp. 30-31).

Each of the suggested activities by van Manen (1990) is helpful when conducting hermeneutic phenomenological human science research. However, van Manen warned that each of the activities is not meant to be performed in isolation, but should be utilized in partnership as a prescription that animates inventiveness and stimulates insight in a scholar during research (p. 30).

Foundationally, the Social Cognitive Theory with Self-Efficacy that was derived from the work done by renowned psychologist and researcher Albert Bandura (1986) was utilized throughout this study as it describes the way in which the development of girls can be shaped by human functioning as a result of cognitive, vicarious, self-regulatory, and self-reflective processes. This philosophy takes the perspective that individuals are instilled with certain capabilities that define what it is to be human and primarily among these are the capabilities to symbolize, plan alternative strategies (forethought), learn through vicarious experience, self-regulate, and self-reflect (Pajares, 2002).

Overall, because relationships are believed to be central to the development of girls, this theory suggested that a girl's sense of self and identity as well as the capability to plan alternative strategies and self-reflect is formed because individuals are agents proactively engaged in their own development, and can make things happen by their actions. With this context in mind, qualitative measures grounded in the Social Cognitive Theory, emphasizing an opinion-centered, relational approach, was utilized to capture the experiences and encounters of adolescent girls of color as they resolve and tackle relational aggression and bullying behaviors. This approach proved beneficial in interpreting the girls' experiences regarding how adolescent girls of color experience acts of relational aggression, what they assume impacts, informs and provokes their response to relational aggression and bullying along with their images and views of assertiveness.

Research Questions

To explore the participants lived experiences of the studied phenomenon, the following questions framed this study:

RQ1: How do girls of color describe their experiences with relationally aggressive and bullying acts?

RQ2: What do girls of color understand about the differences between assertive and aggressive acts?

RQ3: What do girls of color believe regarding their relationally aggressive tendencies and those of their peers?

RQ4: What are the motives behind relational aggression and how does intra-racial conflict influence these motives?

RQ5: What do aggressive girls of color understand about self-identity, self-awareness, and self-knowledge? (Jacobson, 2007)

Setting and Site

The research study was conducted in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, the capital and the largest city in the state of Oklahoma. According to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2010, Oklahoma City ranked 31st among United States cities in population with 579,999 people; the racial composition of Oklahoma City was 62.7% White/Caucasian, 15.1% Black/African American, 17.2% Hispanic American, 3.5% Native American, 4.0% Asian American, 9.2% claim some other race, 0.1% Pacific Islander, and 5.2% of the population were two or more races. According to the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy (OICA) that provides data regarding special indicators in the state, Oklahoma City alone had 22,000 children ages 6-16 that were classified as living in poverty. The data also revealed 2,000 or 17% of teens who were 16-19 in Oklahoma City were not in school and were not high school graduates (National KIDS Count Program, 2012).

The targeted sample of participants was selected from among the OCJB programs. The programs were developed in response to an ever-increasing proportion of females being referred to the juvenile justice bureau system that includes an 80-bed temporary detainment facility for juveniles under 18 for the District Court. The overall objective of the bureau was to develop the girls' knowledge of the resources available to them when they need help, and to promote a relationship with community agencies. Thus, it is the goal of OCJB to release into the community youth who can return to a productive and healthy routine in their local schools, and who will keep out of further contact with the juvenile justice system and ultimately diminish the numbers of girls who supply the school-to-prison pipeline.

Participants

The pool of participants was selected from among girls of color who were formerly or currently involved with the OCJB. The girls were referred by the probation and intake officers from the OCJB and the Oklahoma City Municipal Court, as well as referred by parents and other social services agencies. To qualify, the young women needed to be between the ages of 14 and 17 (OCJB, 2004). In an ideal situation, I proposed to have a sample of 10 girls or more until saturation. Creswell (2009) recommended a range of 5 to 25 as a good sample size for phenomenological studies. Also, it was preferable to request at least one girl in each age range and equally represent each racial/ethnic category of Black/African American, Latina/Hispanic American, Native American, and other (which included two or more racial identities), because scholars have reported these are the girls who are more likely to be categorized as juvenile high-risk or at-risk (Chesney-Lind et al., 2007; Sharma, 2010). Therefore, recruitment of the girls who exhibited aggressive and bullying behaviors or those who claimed association with aggressive and bullying behaviors within the last six months were invited to participate.

Overall, nine girls total consented to participate in this study. Five participants were current direct referrals from OCJB, via Form CS-11-Probation Services Referral (see Appendix G). Four participants were recruited through contact with parents or guardians who received the study flyer from OCJB officials and who appeared to be at risk of contact with the juvenile and criminal justice system. The girls who consented to the study ranged in age from 14-17 years old, two of which celebrated birthdays and turned 18 after the completion of data collection. Four girls were Black/African American, two were Latina/Hispanic American, one Native American, and two who were classified as other, which includes two or more racial identities (see Table 1). Two girls identified as foster care participants, four of the girls were from female-headed households, and two resided in guardian-headed households where aunts, uncles or grandmothers took custody. Only two girls resided in a two-parent household.

Table 1

Study Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Race /Ethnicity	Family Context
Neveah	17 years old	Black/African American	Aunt
Jordyn	14 years old	Black/African American	Mother
Madison	17 years old	Black/African American	Mother
Lisa	17 years old	Other, (Latina/Hispanic & Black/African American)	Non-Kinship/Foster care
Nia	14 years old	Native American	Kinship/Foster care
Candy	15 years old	Latina/Hispanic	Two Parent Home
Jada	14 years old	Other, (Black/African American & White)	Mother
Sydney	16 years old	Latina/Hispanic	Mother
Rae Lynn	16 years old	Black/African American	Two Parent Home

Researcher's Biography

At the time of this study, I was a full-time doctoral candidate and the founder and director of a local non-profit supplemental educational provider who advocated for the at-risk under-privileged families within the Oklahoma City community. I was a former student of Oklahoma City public schools and a former employee of the Oklahoma public school district who had witnessed countless changes within the district firsthand. Reflecting upon my days as a high school student, I recalled many instances of physical violence and girl-fights, some of which I was an unwilling participant. There were daily inter- and intra-racial bullying occurrences between girls and boys being reported within the system. While I do not dare to assert my

opinions on others, as a student, I was sensitive to the aggressions displayed regularly; and at that time, there were angry episodes almost daily in my former school. I now understand some of the tumult in my school began because we were students of color in the early 1970s whose families were mandated by the Oklahoma State Supreme Court to desegregate the district schools by a compulsory busing plan. Therefore, to be forced out of a comfortable formerly tight-knit community atmosphere into an unfamiliar, angry, racially charged environment had its lasting damaging effects and can still be recognized in some form within the student body at present.

After my high school graduation, I attended the state university and graduated with honors; however, upon graduating college and interviewing continually in the state, I was told repeatedly there was limited opportunity for me in the district. Therefore, I moved to the state of California where I found an abundance of work in the educational environment. There, I chose to work in adult training until the late 1990s when I decided to fulfill a desire to complete a postgraduate degree.

On my return to the state of Oklahoma to pursue a postgraduate degree, I found that I was greeted with many of the former barriers that were in place during the 1970s and 1980s. Consequently, I served as a substitute teacher for several years as I was alternatively certified in the state. It was while substituting that I witnessed the bullying and aggressive behaviors firsthand and realized that the forms of aggression had taken on more vicious and violent measures in girls, in particular.

Soon, I was hired as a full-time alternative charter school educator where at-risk students comprised the majority of the enrollment. My first two years of teaching there were eye-opening and marked by several incidents involving physical fighting, school vandalism, and youth gangs; and, I will honestly admit that I was in no way prepared to address the major issues. At no point

had I been prepared or received any instruction or training pertaining to how to identify bullying and relationally aggressive acts or how to address them. However, since I was a part of the local community and because my home was located near the school, in a short period of time, I developed relationships with the worst of the relationally aggressive students by using my own experiences to mentor and address the issues from the perspective of my own anger and pain.

As a new teacher, I found myself working with violent offending students who openly discussed bullying and aggression issues in a nonchalant manner. Furthermore, it was part of my job to address them the best I could; and in many cases, this meant involving the authorities. There were numerous retaliations aimed at me because I would try to intervene in relationally aggressive acts, and as an educator that concerned me.

Although this alternative program was no longer servicing students in the targeted district as of 2007, my experiences there continued to be the motivation behind my work with the non-profit foundation, social service organizations, and community programs that serve at-risk children of color. I firmly believed my experiences and the other instances that affect at-risk students who seek my services, as an advocate, is why this study was specifically warranted. With certainty, I trusted that there was more that parents, educators, and community stakeholders could do to counter the rapidly rising effects of relational aggression and bullying in girls of color. In many cases, to my dismay, I found the students who were the most chronic aggressor/bullies and abusers had gone on to enter the adult prison system. I often wondered that if we had recognized the initial signs of relational aggression and bullying in those students and addressed them, those students could have avoided the adult penal system. As an educational leader, I believed that every student had an untapped potential, and if we simply considered these

phenomena from their situational points of reference, there can be enlightening solutions that could facilitate effective reforms to the school environment.

Finally, this phenomenological study was foundationally based in my personal worldview that was rooted in a traditional Christian foundation. Hence, my axiological, epistemological, as well as a metaphysical perspective has developed after years of studying the Word of God. In particular, Psalm 15:1-5 (NKJV) reveals the personal character traits of those who will dwell with the Lord. The summarized verses explain that a Christian should possess integrity and do what is right. The Christian should be honest, trustworthy, and refrain from gossip. The Christian does not harm others and speaks out against wrong. The Christian honors others that walk in truth and is not greedy for gain at the expense of others (Flynn, 2010). In general, the virtues that are covered in this passage of scripture encouraged me to consider the phenomena of relational aggression and bullying in girls of color with distinctive insight that focused on the unique experiences of girls who have all been created after the image of God.

Data Collection

In this study, no data was collected until all the appropriate approvals from the Liberty University IRB (see Appendices C and D), OCJB (see Appendices E, F, and G), parental and participant consent/assent forms (see Appendices A and B), permissions, and official site clearances were granted (see Appendices G and H). After securing all the appropriate approvals, data collection began. During data collection, I sought to develop an understanding of the phenomena as experienced by the participants' viewpoint that is called, in qualitative research, the emic perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010). Furthermore, it was beneficial in the study to maintain my own perspective as a woman of color who was the chief investigator of these phenomena, including my viewpoint as an outsider as well as former

aggressor/target myself, which is an etic perspective. It was hoped that both emic and etic perspectives were instrumental in painting a richer and compassionate picture about the nature of this lived experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Gall et al., 2010).

In order to assure credibility, the validation strategies of data triangulation, investigator reflexivity, thick rich description, and peer probing was used. These strategies were used with the intent of focusing on some of the conflicts that were exposed during the study process and how the girls eventually resolved the conflicts. Therefore, multiple strategies to study these phenomena were warranted, which included a combination of sources: online protocol writing featuring lived-experience descriptions, observations using experiential anecdotes, individual interviewing featuring the personal life story approaches and researcher reflective field notes (van Manen, 1990). The multiple data sources were utilized to provide a comprehensive examination of each participant lived experiences.

Protocol Writing Prompt

The data of this phenomenological study was the human experiences of girls who exhibited aggressive/bullying behaviors. Therefore, to investigate the nature of the girls' experiences, the most straightforward way to go about the inquiry was to ask the selected participants to write down their experiences (van Manen, 1990). Open-ended writing prompts, or protocol writing as it is recommended by van Manen, were used in an online format and based on my assumptions, observations, and review of literature in this study. According to van Manen, in order to gain access to other people's experiences, I should have asked them to write down a direct account of a personal experience as they lived through it describing the state of mind such as feelings, the mood, and the emotion involved. The participants were asked to respond to questions related to relational aggression and bullying as it applied to specific events

in their lives. However, since I was dealing with adolescents who were a more technologically advanced generation the protocol writing prompt questions were administered in an online format through the SurveyMonkey.com website (see Appendix P).

The Protocol Writing prompt questions were:

1. In your own words what is relational aggression and what does it look like to you?
2. In your own words what is bullying and what does it look like to you?
3. Do you commit relational and physical aggressive acts on others? If so why?
4. Where do you see aggression occur most often?
5. How often does relational aggression turn into physical violence?
6. Have you ever been a victim of relational or physical aggression if so, how did it make you feel?

Observation

The purpose of the observation was to gain information about how the participants reacted while thinking, interacting, studying, enacting, and reflecting on changes that they must make to be successful during the programs, because according to van Manen (1990), “The human science researcher tries to enter the lifeworld of the persons whose experiences are relevant to the project” (p. 69). In the study I used the close direct observations of the girls in a workshop setting because it was my intention to build empathy and trust through becoming a participant observer much like van Manen suggested, “The best way to enter a person’s lifeworld is to participate in it” (p. 69).

The agreeable versus antagonistic behavior observation protocol (AABOP, see Appendix I) data was collected as the girls interacted in naturally occurring sequences of agreeable versus antagonistic behavior as it was displayed during the session. I developed the instrument after

years of working with and observing students in an alternative education environment as lead teacher. The instrument was created based on culturally relevant teaching techniques and used as a tool to help novice teachers become aware of the nuances of cultural versus behavioral queues that were naturally exhibited by the students who were enrolled in an alternative charter program designed to take on volatile academically high-risk students (Grant, 1992). This direct observation tool provided a guideline for me to witness the dynamics that took place when the participants dealt with the challenges that arose during the School to Prison Pipeline (STPP) Workshop (see Appendix J). As a researcher who was involved in the observation, I observed situations for their lived meanings as a gatherer of anecdotes. According to van Manen (1990), “An anecdote is a certain kind of narrative with a point, and it is this point that needs honing” (p. 69).

The observations were carried out during the STPP Workshop (see Appendix J) which was conducted without video or audio taping as planned. Although it was informative, this workshop was extremely difficult to organize. It was an unexpected challenge to convince the girls to attend together, and I was not prepared for the push back and resistance I received from them. Although, the girls individually consented after the individual interviews were completed to one observation in a group setting that would be audio or video recorded. Before the date that the workshop was scheduled to take place most of the girls did not want to participate if the session was recorded. As a researcher I did not know why there would be a change in the girls’ attitudes about the workshop; however, in an attempt to move forward I had to make a last minute decision that I would not audio or video record the girls’ interactions that day during the workshop. From an emic perspective it was more important at the time that I took the opportunity to collect some information and record responses in writing versus collecting no

information at all. Consequently, there were only handwritten notes made on the girls' behaviors in the workshop on the AABOP observation tool (see Appendix I). The notes from the observation were combined and reported in Chapter Four findings.

Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

The semi-structured conversational individual interview protocol was utilized to gather data from the participants to delve deeper into their experiences, opinions, feelings, and beliefs regarding the aggression issues girls of color in Oklahoma face (Gall et al., 2010). The individual interviews were comprised of a sequence of open-ended conversational questions (see Table 2) so the participants could freely respond in their own words for thirty minutes each. During the interview, each girl was advised that she had the option to skip or not answer any questions she felt uncomfortable responding to. All issues concerning privacy and anonymity were reviewed with each girl before beginning the interview process. Additionally, each girl was reminded that she could stop the interview at any time.

The purpose of the questions pertaining to and describing the experiences of the girls were used to gather information about the girls' peer, familial, cultural, and aggression experiences prior to their involvement with the OCJB. Interview questions 1 through 10 were developed to account for the examination of possible coping responses and understanding of how an individual's victimization, societal and cultural background, and prior life experiences can facilitate behaviors (Gomes, 2011; Gomes, Davis, Baker & Servonsky, 2009).

Table 2

Open-ended Conversational Interview Questions

-
- 1) Please describe your experiences or your involvement in aggression and bullying with other girls your age?
 - 2) What was your understanding of the cause of this relational aggression and bullying? How did it start? When did it start?
 - 3) What happens during the aggression and bullying episodes? Who was involved in the aggression and bullying episodes? What did you do?
 - 4) How did others support you? Influence you?
 - 5) How did you feel about the encounter?
 - 6) How did you deal with this experience?
 - 7) What are the reasons that you think keeps girls from getting along? Why do the encounters become violent?
 - 8) How has this aggression experience changed your life? Where do you think the blame lies?
 - 9) What do you think will improve the aggressive behaviors of girls? Who can help girls who are angry?
 - 10) What are the problems in American society that contribute to your anger? How do the media and computers encourage your behavior?
-

Interview questions 1, 2, and 3 were specifically designed to capture the general picture of the aggression involvement and life experiences the girls encountered prior to their involvement with the OCJB. This was important to delve into because scholarly literature suggested that there are correlations of the experience of peer relational aggression victimization (PRAV) and depression among African-American adolescent populations in particular (Gomes et al., 2009). Consequently, this deeper exploration of relational aggression through this line of questioning aided in the understanding of what were the detrimental consequences of the acts of

violence that were committed by girls of color who show aggressive behaviors (Gomes, 2011; Gomes et al., 2009). Furthermore, understanding the factors involved in specific violent acts may shed light on how rumor spreading, gossip, backstabbing, or socially isolating behaviors are used to manipulate relationships among and between girls of color. Gomes et al. (2009) revealed in their study that the experience of “Peer Relational Aggression Victimization (PRAV) and depression do exist as a detrimental phenomenon” in this girl of color (p. 180). Therefore, filling the gap of knowledge concerning girls of color who exhibit aggression may lend credence into the nature of the relationship girls can have with their peers, parents, social and community supports and the educational environment.

Interview questions 4, 5, and 6 were designed to reveal more about the description of experiences such as untapped feelings, influences, maltreatment, and coping mechanisms. Studies have shown that although relational aggression and bullying are experienced by both boys and girls, girls in particular are affected by the psychosocial experience of relational aggression the most because peer group connections are extremely important to them (Cullerton-Sen et al., 2008; Gomes, 2011). Cullerton-Sen et al. (2008) findings revealed that “Maltreatment was associated with physical aggression for boys and relational aggression for girls. Physical abuse was associated with physically aggressive behaviors, but sexual abuse predicted relational aggression for girls only” (p. 1736). Overall, these findings suggested that further investigating the associations involving familial risk or maltreatment of the girls as well as gender is important in understanding aggressive behaviors (Cullerton-Sen et al., 2008).

Interview questions 7, 8, 9, and 10 were constructed to open the dialogue and assist the girls in viewing the behaviors and responses they may have exhibited in terms of the larger social implications and consequences. For example, in the victimization research study conducted by

Gomes (2011) she explained, “it has been demonstrated that the negative experience of peer relational aggression is as equally damaging as physical aggression and can have long-lasting effects beyond the initial experience, affecting feelings of self and future relationship development” (p. 5). Consequently, researchers and educators must be mindful of the impact relational aggression and bullying can have on an individual to respond positively and move past the experiences. While relational aggression research has been traditionally aimed at producing lists of risk and protective factors that concern boys and girls, contemporary researchers need more information to ascertain if and why girls of color may be more likely to become aggressors who victimize.

Email Correspondence

With the expressed permission of the participants’ parents and participants, I utilized email to communicate with the girls to let them know about the progress through the research and to ask further questions to clarify some of their answers when needed. The responses were sporadic at times but each girl did reply to my request.

Researcher Reflective Field Notes

The etic perspective, which is also referred to as the perspective of the researcher, was an important component of this study. Keeping a reflective journal allowed me to describe my feelings associated with conducting the research in this study. The rationale behind the journal comes from Morrow and Smith (2000), who revealed that the use of a reflective journal adds rigor to qualitative inquiry because the investigator can record his or her reactions, assumptions, expectations, and biases concerning the research process. Moreover, the investigator will keep detailed written records of the interaction between participants as stated in Ary et al. (2006),

Field notes contain what the researcher has seen and heard. They have two components: 1) the descriptive part, which includes a complete description of a setting, the people and their reactions and interpersonal relationships, and accounts of events (who, when, and what was done); and 2) the reflective part, which includes the observer's personal feelings or impressions about the events, comments on the research method, decisions and problems, records of ethical issues, and speculations about data analysis. (p. 435)

Data Analysis

In this study, I began the analysis of the data by following the organized techniques developed for hermeneutical phenomenological inquiry that can be divided into three general sections: reduction of data pieces, description of categories, and lastly a search for themes, or understanding in order to communicate its essence (Cohen, Kahn & Steeves, 2000; van Manen, 1990). Cohen et al. (2000) described these processes of analysis can be portrayed as the movement

Between two metaphors: that of a field text, constructed through the activities of data collection, and that of a narrative text which is meant to convey the researcher's present understanding and interpretation of data to all other readers and which stands alone as the findings of a hermeneutic phenomenological study. (p. 71)

The movement between the two metaphors was the best way to analyze the data based on the research questions and designs because in this study the principle of "intentionality" was of chief importance (van Manen, 1990, p. 5). Furthermore, the goal of the analysis was to obtain a thick description that accurately captured and communicated the lived experiences of the girls from their point of view (Cohen et al., 2000; van Manen, 1990).

Keeping the metaphors in mind, the data analysis began with the data collection. Analysis began to happen naturally since I was actively listening and thinking about the meanings of the comments and explanations that were shared by the girls during the interviews and the workshop observation (Cohen et al., 2000).

Overall, the tentative understandings that surfaced from the initial analysis did continue to be subjected to scrutiny as more data was collected. This then in turn led to the refinement of themes that were in written form (Cohen et al., 2000). Cohen et al. (2000) and van Manen (1990) revealed not only do these writings serve as a record of the analytic process but also the act of writing itself forms the research in hermeneutic phenomenology.

It was anticipated that there would be a significant amount of data generated in this study; as such, an organized system of management was required. Therefore, I adopted a few organizational steps to maintain the data (Cohen et al., 2000). First, I made sure the interview data and field notes were converted into digital form as soon as possible after it was gathered. The audio or digital tape recordings of each interview were transcribed personally verbatim and I checked them thoroughly for accuracy as soon as possible after participant contact. Doing this allowed me to have multiple copies, to begin with both digital and hardcopy for easy access; after I turned the data into readable typed transcripts the digital copy was erased. Then the transcripts could be manipulated digitally with margins wide enough to accommodate writing notes where I was able to see common themes develop. Additionally this led to the use of a selective and highlighting approach to analyze the interview transcripts. Using van Manen's (1990) "structures of experience" (p.79), I saw there were structures of thematic phenomenon. I began searching for essential and related themes that each girl mentioned to find a thing that was inter-related and placed them in a table (see Appendix L).

After the first read through of all of the transcripts for my clarity and to make sure there were not any omitted phrases and mistakes in the transcription, I read each participant's transcript at least four or more times to highlight similar statements, phrases, and terms used that were vital and enlightening about the experience of relational aggression and bullying from the perspective of the girls. Van Manen (1990) described this as immersing oneself in the initial data. The aim of this immersion was the establishment of *gestalt* or *geistig*, in other words, a set of things such as a matter of the depth of the soul, spirit, embodied knowing and being (van Manen, 1990, p. 14). As I continually reviewed the transcripts I was able to develop themes with structures of experience that were based on van Manen's instruction, "theme describes an aspect of the structure of lived experience" (p. 87). Then the final themes were recognized based on the major connections among most of the girls who participated. The data was soon transformed and reduced by making decisions regarding what I thought was important and relevant or not. This means I made the decision to edit and eliminate all digressions that were clearly off the topic as much as possible. Van Manen (1990) also stressed the need for data reduction in order for the phenomenon to be represented specifically. After the themes were narrowed down I sent emails and Facebook instant messages to clarify whether my descriptions and themes accurately captured what the girls were telling me. Throughout the analysis I wanted to be familiar with the data as it unfolded into essences and lifeworld descriptions that could only be developed fully by reading and re-reading the transcripts personally.

Next, the process used for writing up the findings in this study was referred to by van Manen (1990) as hermeneutic phenomenological writing. Van Manen explained writing as imperative in phenomenological research because "to write is to measure our thoughtfulness ... writing separates us from what we know and yet it unites us more closely with what we know"

(p. 127). I structured the written work in this study both thematically and existentially as suggested by van Manen who explained that a researcher can structure written work thematically, analytically, exemplificative, exegetical, and existential, or more often a combination of these. While writing the text it progressed thematically as I identified commonalities in the experiences the girls spoke about. At this point I began to consult the notations I made in the margins of the transcripts and researcher reflective field notes (see Appendix M) that would help me develop related ideas that created section headings and paragraphs. I soon began to organize the discussions of the same topic, eliminated aspects of the interviews that veered off-topic, and simplified the girls' spoken language by removing particular verbal ticks (Cohen et al., 2000). Writing in hermeneutic phenomenology involves shifting from the field text, created by the data collection, to a narrative text that is meant to stand alone for the readers (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 76). Following this step, the writing naturally fell into thematic and existential phrases that could be used in the text. According to van Manen (1990), the process of writing and rewriting is crucial to interpretive phenomenology because this allows the data to be more concise without affecting the overall essence of the data. These procedures were repeated over and over again until the data, field notes, and relevant narratives that I obtained generated a vivid picture of some of the unique lived experiences of the girls.

Trustworthiness

In order to assure credibility of this study, the validation strategies of data triangulation, researcher reflexivity, thick rich description, and peer probing were used (Gall et al., 2010). The criterion used for judging credibility and trustworthiness of the results in the study was accomplished by creating a chain of evidence (see Appendix N). I built a record of all of the dates the data was collected and contact notes during the study by pseudonym, age, and ethnicity

in an attempt to describe in full the context for the girls. The constructs and themes recognized in the data analysis were related to specific examples of data sources from which they were inferred (Gall et al., 2010). I wrote detailed vignettes of the relationally aggressive events and resolutions or changes in participant behavior, so that the process became clear and real for readers of this study.

The participants involved throughout the process were asked to read and evaluate their interview transcripts for accurateness in terms of soundness. The primary methods of data collection were interviews, and observation of relational events, resolutions, and the changes due to them as well as the inspection of documents that were generated as part of the official stakeholders' assistance during the process. The collected data was analyzed to determine whether it provided corroborative evidence for constructs and themes that could be identified during the process. The soundness of the data coding was checked by having two other peer associates' code samples from the data to determine if they derive like constructs and themes from the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The soundness of the interview data was checked by using active listening skills where I repeated the girls' responses to my questions paraphrasing what I had heard in feedback to them.

To ensure the thoroughness of the data collection I continually communicated with the participants until all data was collected. To do this, the creation of a to-do-list was used regularly to record the people and events that I had identified as needing attention weekly. Throughout the entire data collection and analysis process I read through the data regularly looking for thematic and philosophical connections.

Credibility/Validity Procedures

The elements utilized to judge the accuracy of this qualitative investigation included following the examples of other qualitative investigations concerning aggression in adolescent students (e.g., Adamshick, 2006; Crenshaw, 2015; Jacobson, 2007; Willer & Cupach, 2008; Yubero & Navarro, 2006). Further criteria used to judge the accuracy of the study were those defined by Ary et al. (2006) and Bogdan and Biklen (2007) who detailed how to increase the accuracy of the qualitative process using constant comparison procedures as the information gathered is obtained. To establish a precise audit trail, I maintained documentation of how the research was conducted, with whom the interviews were completed, and why they were completed, which will allow an independent auditor to examine this study for accuracy and trustworthiness (Ary et al., 2006). Next, it was important to the nature of this study that the relevant conversational units established in interviews and observations were arranged together in conformity to determine patterns, themes, categories, and sub-categories. If the measures of an audit trail, constant comparison, and coding were conducted with accuracy, these processes resulted in the exploration of philosophical perspectives I sought as well as opened the door for transferability to other subjects and scenarios (Yubero & Navarro, 2006).

Ethical Considerations

It was extremely important for this study to identify measures to protect the human subjects (e.g., confidentiality) and to ensure sound research. Hence, all the participants for this study were treated in accordance with the ethical standards of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Liberty University IRB. There were important considerations that were kept in mind when dealing with the participants for this study because during conversational interviews, the girls could experience discomfort, anxiety, self-doubt,

regretful reactions, moral stimulation, guilt, and increased awareness. Thus, every consideration was made to stop at any point of frustration and discomfort continuing only with their expressed knowledge and permission. Debriefing information was provided for all participants that included resources to help with any questions encountered (see Appendix K).

In accordance with both the AERA and Liberty IRB, all the official stakeholders were assured of confidentiality and safety. Every caution was taken to ensure that all participants felt safe, comfortable, and had the freedom to withdraw completely from the study if she felt the need to (see Appendices A and B). All physical copies of gained information from the study were locked in a file cabinet only accessible by me and one peer designee, and electronic versions were kept on my password protected home computer and an extra dedicated 16GB USB flash drive that was locked in the file as well.

Confidentiality

During the study, the girls were asked to provide a pseudonym to be used in reporting to ensure that their identities were concealed. Any audio/video-recordings, documents, and written comments were assigned to the pseudonym that was selected during the study. The demographic information requested in the study did not identify the participants. A codebook was kept separate from the data collected and kept on a password protected 16GB flash drive that was locked in a file cabinet in my home office. Audio and video tapes were only used to transcribe the interviews and observations. Once the interviews were transcribed, the tapes were erased; only transcripts and the copies of any documents used were stored in my locked file cabinet. With the exception of two participants who decided to discontinue the study, the documents will be kept for a minimum of three years after the end date of this study as required by federal regulations. All electronic data was kept on my password protected home computer. It was

agreed by consent of participants all the data obtained during this study could be published in professional journals or presented at professional meetings, but the data will be prepared as aggregated data when possible and no audio/video could be used. After the transcript data has been stored according to federal regulations, all existing physical data will be shredded.

Freedom to Withdraw

All participants were free to decide not to enroll in this study or to withdraw at any time without this decision adversely affecting her relationship to the researcher or Liberty University. The participants' decisions did not result in any loss of benefits to which they were otherwise entitled. Only two girls decided to withdraw after the online protocol writing was completed.

Summary

In the method section, it was my intent to discuss fully what took place in this study by explaining the program and participants that were selected from among the OCJB programs. Furthermore, this section explained what took place, why, and how within the frameworks of hermeneutical phenomenology. Included were the details regarding the Oklahoma setting, student population, and program features. In this section, the planned instruments that were used for data collection and analysis were covered and explained. I investigated the perspectives of the girls, even those that were specifically linked to intra-racial or gender related concerns. Reporting those factors relative to social identity, environmental and familial indicators associated with their experiences. In doing so, I expected that there would be some assumptions that could arise during the data collection phases. Consequently, I was always mindful that this analysis was likely to be modified both during and/or after data, collection began.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter reports the findings to the foundational research questions presented in this study with adolescent girls of color. For this study, to analyze the phenomenon van Manen's (1990) phenomenological approach was followed. With this approach I was able to make sense of certain aspects of the girls' human existence to gain a fuller understanding of what it meant to be a girl of color who exhibited aggressive and bullying behaviors in urban Oklahoma City. This process was an integral part of van Manen's activities. Van Manen called the phenomenological research process the attentive practice of thoughtfulness where one develops mindfulness, is caring and attentive to the mission of living, and takes the ordinary experiences, and the taken for granted phenomena and highlight them. The general phenomenon of interest was to record the experiences of what it feels like to be characterized as an aggressor/bully and what the girls thought about their encounters of relational aggression and bullying. To better understand their viewpoint of why they think girls experience both phenomena, overall in this analysis I utilized "bracketing" and the data itself shaped the findings because according to van Manen (1990) a researcher must first acknowledge, then hold in abeyance or suspend any beliefs while investigating the phenomenon. He described this "bracketing or reduction" as suspending one's beliefs in order to freely and spontaneously discover the essential structure of the life-world of the phenomenon under study. Therefore, I approached the collection and analysis with the OCJB and the participants with an honest open mind, heart, eyes, and ears.

The data collection phase was continuous throughout this study and the analysis of the data collected was extensive; however, the stories provided by the participants appeared to focus on four general themes or areas of lived experience: (a) indifference and consequences, (b)

relational victimization and misunderstandings with other girls and the authorities, (c) environment and sociocultural contexts, and (d) foundational and systemic barriers that promote aggression. There were numerous other issues that emerged from the findings of the study; however, those fell outside of the four general areas of concentration and focus in this study but are certainly possibilities for future research.

In this chapter, I address the main themes resulting from analysis and coding of the data. Overall, the themes emerged as I discovered specific words, ideas, and opinions that the participants in this study spoke of again and again. In van Manen's (1990) method for researching lived experience, he suggested one of the means for understanding a phenomenon in the beginning is to trace etymological sources. Consequently I began by seeking out etymological resources which were numerous to obtain a deeper understanding of the words aggression, aggressor, and bullying. According to the combined resources of the *Online Etymological Dictionary* (Harper, 2015) the word aggression can be traced back to early 1610s meaning an "unprovoked attack" from the French; and from the Latin (16c) word *aggressionem* "a going to, an attack"; to attack comes from the Middle French *attaquer*, that is from the Old Italian *estaccare*, meaning "to attach," which is from *stacca*, or "stake." The etymology of the word bully dates back to the 1530s, and originally it was applied to either sex as "sweetheart" from the Dutch *boel* "lover; brother" it was not until 17c that the meaning deteriorated to "harasser of the weak." The etymology of these words would help me to sort out the stories of the relationships the girls described. For example, in some of the interviews the participants explained in order "to attack" their victims many times she needed to get closer to other girls in some instances when gaining confidential information to then use against her victims. For the girls in this study this "attachment" was used to attack and permitted them to gain access to

become more powerful than those they saw as the weaker girls. For these participants, aggression somehow became the tool each girl used to determine whether or not another girl was someone who was worth their time, effort or trust. Otherwise those girls became an opponent.

Once I determined from the etymology of some of the words the girls used to explain themselves, the intent of the participants was clearer and I was able to see general themes that developed from the conversations because according to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) “A theme is an implicit idea or topic that a group of repeating ideas have in common” (p. 62). In addition, Saldaña (2009) stated that “a theme is an *outcome* of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection” (p. 13). Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) and Saldaña (2009) agreed that it is by studying the content of these themes that a researcher finds meaning in the words of their study participants. As a result, in this chapter, I will revisit the studies guiding questions from Chapter Three, as well as provide the participants descriptions in a narrative format. Throughout the findings I will use quotes from participant interviews and the STPP observation to show similarities and differences within and across the girls’ narratives. Lastly, in order to honor the girls’ voices in the study, the findings are presented in the participant's own language.

Participants

The findings of this study were derived from a purposive sample of nine adolescent girls of color, 14-17 years old from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. First, a general demographic profile was collected of each participant, and included name, address, phone numbers, age, race, height, weight, and eye and hair color, date of birth, and parents or guardian information. After all the demographic information and a brief records history was collected each girl was given a short explanation regarding the study and its goals and then were asked to sign consents to participate

along with their parents or guardians. After all consents were signed and returned, pseudonyms were selected for each participant and kept separately from the original demographic profile.

The participants in this study all reported in their records history atypical conduct of relating with others which included behaviors such as (a) Physical fighting, (b) Cruel or threatening actions on school grounds or during school affiliated activities, (c) Chronic truancy, (d) Misconduct worthy of suspension or expulsion, (e) Disrespect for authority, including persistent violation of student conduct policy and rules, and f) Bullying that was essential to defending themselves or fitting into their surroundings. In some cases the family conditions appeared to tolerate conduct that was aggressive in nature. A brief background about each girl follows in the pseudonyms selected.

Participant Neveah

Neveah was a 17-year-old Black/African American girl. She was referred by OCJB via Form CS-11-Probation Services Referral due to fighting, chronic truancy, and bullying that was essential to defending herself or fitting into her surroundings. Neveah admitted to attitude problems and arguments. She was from a family where her aunt had temporary guardianship and was frustrated with the behaviors Neveah displayed. Neveah was a small build cute girl, and thought it was extremely important to dress fashionably, and maintain an attractive appearance. Neveah admitted to displaying low tolerances when it came to other females and she would fight to protect herself.

Participant Jordyn

Jordyn was a 14-year-old Black/African American girl. She was referred by OCJB via Form CS-11-Probation Services Referral due to fighting and problems with teachers at her previous school. She admitted to attitude problems and arguments with other girls, her mom,

stepdad, and teachers. Jordyn disrespected school authority, including persistent violation of student conduct policy and rules. Jordyn's grandmother was highly influential in her life and supported moving her from the home to live with her so she could attend an alternative school. Jordyn was pretty and focused on her hygiene and appearance. She appeared to carry herself with a confident attitude and with maturity beyond her age.

Participant Madison

Madison was a 17-year-old Black/African American girl. She was referred by OCJB via Form CS-11-Probation Services Referral and she admitted to verbal aggression and arguments with other girls. Madison's claim to fame was she was known to be "a ride or die chick" and included herself into others' personal business regularly, which confirmed her as an initiator of fights in most situations. Her mom did not understand why Madison chose to be an instigator of trouble. Madison primarily played the victim at school and disrespected school authority; she had persistent violations of student conduct policy and rules. Madison's physical appearance reflected marginal attention to healthy eating and exercise habits. Although her fashion sense reflected that some attention was given to self-care and hygiene.

Participant Lisa

Lisa was a 17-year-old girl who identified herself as other, half Latina/Hispanic and half Black/African American. Lisa was a foster child and had been in and out of foster homes since the age of 8. Lisa had been with her current foster mom for the last four years and was a referral from the study flier that was distributed at OCJB. Lisa experienced being a victim of relational aggression and bullying from teachers and students. Lisa stated as she got older she decided that she would take matters into her own hands and get other girls before anyone had a chance to hurt her. Lisa admitted to behaviors such as fighting, cruel and malicious threats made on school

grounds and during school sports activities, and being confrontational with and disrespecting teachers. She was an attractive girl who loved poetry and appeared to be really confident in her looks but was unhappy with her weight and her ability to keep up with the newest fashions due to the lack of finances.

Participant Nia

Nia was a 14-year-old Native American girl. Nia was a foster child who admitted to habitual truancy in school due to fights and arguments; she did not listen to authority, and she talked back to those in authority. Nia revealed that she was a smart student early on in her life and used to like school. Nia had been in alternative school for four months and was a referral from the study flier that was distributed at OCJB. She grew up in a kinship foster home with extended family where there were a lot of men and cousins. Nia reported nobody went to school and they just hung out all day and drank and smoke weed. Nia used a lot of slang and was quiet spoken until she felt she was in danger. She was a small build girl who wore oversized masculine clothing most of the time. Nia admitted that she was not very attentive to her hygiene or appearance and the latest fashion trends because that was not what mattered to her.

Participant Candy

Candy was a 15-year-old Latina/Hispanic girl. She had been in alternative school for several months. Her mom and dad visited OCJB with another sibling and noticed the study flyer that was also provided in Spanish and contacted me. Her mother was non-English speaking and her father spoke limited English as well. Candy admitted to following down the path of habitual truancy with her siblings. She admitted her parents worked a lot and she had little parental guidance so she was in charge most of the time. Her siblings had gang affiliation and she desired to follow that path. Candy admitted to taking advantage of her friends with secrets sometimes

and when somebody made her mad she would turn that information into rumors and cause girl drama. She was an attractive girl that strived to appear more mature than her years. Candy appeared to be overly concerned with looking fashionable at all times and at all cost.

Participant Jada

Jada was a 14-year-old girl who identified herself as other, half White and half Black/African American. She was referred by OCJB via Form CS-11-Probation Services Referral due to fighting and problems with teachers at her previous school. Jada admitted to fighting, cruel behavior on school grounds, drinking and misconduct worthy of suspension or expulsion and bullying used to defend her. She believed she was picked on by both the Black/African American girls and the White girls. Jada stated she was not black enough to hang out with the Black/African American girls and she was not white enough to hang out with the White girls. She appeared to be disturbingly quiet and aloof when around other girls. Jada admitted she did not trust anyone. Jada's mom was her only support and felt her daughter's behavior was often misunderstood by the school authorities.

Participant Sydney

Sydney was a 16-year-old Latina/Hispanic girl. Her mom was her only support and contacted me from the OCJB study flyer. Sydney was the oldest girl of six siblings and admitted to being very bossy and not listening to her school teachers and principal. Sydney admitted she was not confident with her appearance and thought she needed to lose weight. Sydney was popular with the guys but stated she "doesn't put out though." She dealt with her anger and rage by fighting and cursing. Sydney struggled with her academic schoolwork and stated that she had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and had trouble with her special education teachers ignoring her when she asked for or needed help. Sydney loved fashion but stated she

could not afford to buy what she liked to wear so many times she took or steals what she wanted and had not gotten caught by the authorities yet.

Participant Rae Lynn

Rae Lynn was a 16-year-old Black/African American girl. She was referred by OCJB via Form CS-11-Probation Services Referral. She admitted to attitude problems and arguments with other girls. Fighting and disrespect of authority were also things she had done. Rae Lynn disrespected all authority and appeared to not care about the consequences of her actions. She was a plus size attractive girl who used frequent non-verbal communication methods that could cause other girls to be intimidated, behavior that she explained as “Punk’in’ and Mean Mug’in.” Rae Lynn did not talk much but when pressed she got loud and defensive. Rae Lynn liked to text constantly, gossip, and talk about her favorite television programs and she loved to communicate via Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram.

Results

To explore the participants’ lived experiences of the studied phenomenon probing open-ended questions were used as a guide to assist the participants to think in terms of their existing behavioral responses and much of the time those questions then led to other conversations. However, the initial questions were formatted as protocol writing prompts that were open-ended so that the questions could be answered in the girls’ own words in an online format via Survey Monkey (see Appendix P) to evoke thoughts based on their personal experiences. The first protocol writing prompt question was: In your own words what is relational aggression and what does it look like to you? This question was asked originally to target the specifics each girl knew regarding the phenomena of relational aggression and to reveal possible pathways to the motivations, meanings, or roles the girls may possess regarding the phenomena of relational

aggression. The younger girls, Nia, Jada, Jordyn, and Candy appeared to give exact definitions that could be found on the internet which could have possibly been an unexpected result with allowing them to answer the prompts in an online format. Nevertheless, the textbook answers that were given did include the individual girls' vernacular added to emphasize the statements meaning. For example: Candy wrote,

To me relational aggression is aggressive behavior between so called friends, family, or acquaintances. To me it's when your family members is picked on or at school when a girl or boy is overly aggressive towards people like those around them.

Candy's statement included her interpretation along with the meaning unlike the other younger girls' responses. The older girls, Neveah, Madison, Lisa, Sydney, and Rae Lynn answered this question with the general understanding that relationally aggressive behavior was specific to their relationships that had gone bad. Furthermore, the older girls realized the negative impact of this behavior can have lasting effects that all of them have experienced before.

The second protocol writing prompt question was: In your own words what is bullying and what does it look like to you? Here is where the older girls Neveah, Madison, Lisa, Sydney and Rae Lynn spoke with more insight about the issue. Neveah and Madison both summed up this question with almost exact statements, paraphrased both wrote, "Bullying is a power struggle inside an individual. Sometimes a person may not know how to express what they are really feeling so they get real angry and transfer their anger onto others that they feel they can be superior over." Sydney wrote, "Bullying can be mental, physical, & verbal abuse...like shunning somebody can also be a form of bullying cause I feel you do not meet my standards or expectations therefore I do not acknowledge you."

It is important to note here that before the protocol questions were presented to the girls during intake the initial instructions stated to them and online was, “Your opinions may be expressed through poetry, rap lyrics or song lyrics.” This was done because in van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutic data analysis approach he encouraged the researcher to search sources in existing music, literature, and art that may increase practical insights on the phenomenon. Therefore, the instructions were used to encourage the girls’ comfort and creativity and to evoke honesty when answering the questions. However, when answering the questions only one of the nine girls took the opportunity to express her thoughts about bullying through writing poetry on question 2 which was insightful and encouraging. Lisa wrote,

Hey y’all see that b*tch sitting in the corner like a misfit.

All cause she has spent lots of years being bullied and hit.

She only wishes one of these days her protection will come.

Then all of her trouble will soon be done.

You know all it takes is just one voice to make her unhappy heart rejoice.

The use of poetry gave Lisa the opportunity to share her talent and was helpful in the way she would conduct herself during the observation.

The third protocol writing prompt question was: Do you commit relational and physical aggressive acts on others? If so, why? This question evoked unexpected responses in two girls and three decided to not complete their answers without an explanation as to why. However, Lisa seemed to re-live an event but recorded she felt that she was so out of control she did not even remember how bad it was. She wrote,

First of all this female was talking bout me all the time since school started...I finally got pushed to my limit so I walked up on her asked her if she had a beef wit’ me and before I

knew it we was fightin'. I punched her dead in the face and pushed her down kicking her in the back. It took the teachers and coaches to get me off that Ho'...and after that when my foster mom came to pick me up from school. I don't know what happened I just started going off bad on everybody in my way and on her too...cause she was fussing bout me fighting again so the SRO called the cops.

It was interesting to see that although each girl who shared experiences recalled how violent the episodes would become, each girl wrote about her experiences with a sense of justification honestly believing aggression was acceptable because she was defending honor or position at the time. Every girl revealed her aggressive behaviors were normal, necessary, and appropriate in order to fit into her surroundings. Another example of this defense was Jada who wrote about being badgered constantly by a few Black/African American girls, who she felt were really jealous of her. Jada wrote,

Like, females say slick stuff tryin to get at me to fight them back. Yella b*tch and callin' me a Ho' and everything...an I get bullied cause of my good hair it's long hair an I'm light-skinned, female haters and just say she think she fine. But I don't care cause I do look good an I ain't shame of that! When I try to just keep it movin they get in my face in the bathroom...then I just like black out and start swinging cause I ain't nobodies b*tch.

In this instance, Jada revealed that as an aggressor she experienced intentional torment regarding her appearance, hair, and skin color. So in order to dominate and take up for herself she used the same tactics on other girls. The race theme surfaced in other conversations with Jada, Lisa, and Rae Lynn, who felt socially humiliated and embarrassed at times just because their skin was not

dark enough to be accepted in the popular Black/African American girls' crew where they appeared to be reluctant outcast very often.

The fourth protocol writing prompt question was: Where do you see aggression occur most often? The location mentioned most often was on school grounds with social media taking a close second place with all of the girls. Candy summed it up best writing,

School! Most females don't know that they are aggressive towards others because most of the time it's considered to be funny. That's just my generation I guess. But females get a rise out of seeing people fight or being angry towards one another at school. I mean don't get me wrong kids can be very disrespectful towards the teachers and vice versa. It's like the teachers are looking for me to go off cause they know they been ignoring me so much until I snap. Also it's bad on social media [Instagram, Facebook and also Twitter] I don't have a twitter but I know it has to be happening there too. But females go on rants bout how angry they are with the person then at the end of all of this mean and hateful stuff they'll tag or @ the person to let them know that they said things about them. This is where most of the fights of my generation come from.

Overall, Candy's comments were similar to the other participants' comments where they too simply chalked up the behaviors to the normal occurrences in their generation.

The fifth protocol writing prompt question was: How often does relational aggression turn into physical violence? All of the participants in this study wrote that relational aggression usually leads to some type of physical violence whether that violence was viewed as extreme or not (i.e., fighting, cutting, hair pulling, tripping someone in school hallways, throwing items in classrooms, and self-harm). All of the participants referenced some type of physical contact most often in hallways or bathrooms in school. Two of the girls specifically referenced outside

of school activities such as teen clubs, basketball or football games, and track meets. In the following narrative, Neveah described how easily physical violence can happen all because she needs to protect herself and fight for respect:

Like, mainly when females be trying to show off in front of other females that just pisses me off. Cause when you not from my hood you don't insult and put me down. My guard automatically goes up like that's mainly why everything starts because people don't want to be no punk. I always protect number one...If I gotta fight another female I'm gone fight.

The others girls' answers contained instances where threatening facial and physical cues and negative body-language were regularly misread which escalated physical violence.

The sixth and final protocol writing prompt question was: Have you ever been a victim of relational or physical aggression? If so, how did it make you feel? Overwhelmingly each girl commented on being a victim of relational and physical aggression themselves. Madison and Sydney reported constant harassment about their weight. The history of mistreatment started in elementary school where they reported being pushed and shoved at recess regularly by the boys. Madison's writing detailed the unwanted attention coupled with irritation and frustration about boys thinking they can hit on girls when she wrote, "But boys can't hit on me and they shouldn't be hitting on no females cause I will fight them too." Also, the girls reported remembrances of "no one [other girls] ever wanting to sit with them in the lunch room" and constant name calling. Both Madison and Sydney reported that the boys in elementary school made fun of them and would lie on them and say that they "put out." When asked during their personal interviews about what they meant by the statement "I don't put out" the girls referenced oral sex. When placed in the victim role all of the girls mentioned feelings of helplessness, anger,

defenselessness, sadness, isolation, hopelessness, irritation and frustration that they have felt at times in some situations. However, the girls were not readily able to see that those were the same emotions some of their victims could have experienced without regard for them at all.

Using the foundational protocol writing prompt questions proved to be a powerful introduction tool because each additional interview question could then be tailored to dig deeper and then focused the girls and gave context to their personal experiences that led to the discovery of four broad themes; (a) indifference and consequences, (b) relational victimization and misunderstandings with other girls and the authorities, (c) environment and sociocultural contexts, and (d) foundational and systemic barriers that promote aggression.

Research Questions

To explore the participants' lived experiences of the studied phenomenon, five research questions framed this study. After collecting and managing all the protocol writing prompts, interviews, observation notes, and examining all remarks from the girls, the five questions were answered through commonalities obtained from the participants' conversations regarding their relational aggression and bullying experiences. The research questions were:

RQ1: How do girls of color describe their experiences with relationally aggressive and bullying acts?

RQ2: What do girls of color understand about the differences between assertive and aggressive acts?

RQ3: What do girls of color believe regarding their relationally aggressive tendencies and those of their peers?

RQ4: What are the motives behind relational aggression and how does intra-racial conflict influence these motives?

RQ5: What do aggressive girls of color understand about self-identity, self-awareness, and self-knowledge? (Jacobson, 2007)

The first research question was: How do girls of color describe their experiences with relationally aggressive and bullying acts? All of the participants were able to describe in detail the timeframes, dates, and circumstances that led to their experiences. Sometimes the conversations led to personal accounts that reflected pain, anger, and confusion. Three of the participants described their experiences with a neutral response of “Oh Well.” All of the participants admitted they had physical fights with two out of nine girls admitting she used a weapon (i.e., a razor and a brick). Seven of the girls admitted to manipulating relationships with lies to make sure she was the most popular girl in the peer group. When all of the participants shared their thoughts and memories about the specific fighting or aggressive experiences they began with coldness emotionally. At first I was concerned about how much the girls shared with me because of the lack of emotion I witnessed at the start of the interviews. However, the indifference and coldness was common but did decrease once I opened up to them and explained I only wanted to listen and not judge them which led to the first theme.

Indifference and Consequences

The first common theme revealed from the personal interview questions was in the area of personal indifference and consequences which there were specific personal interview questions that captured the general picture of the aggression involvement and life experiences the girls encountered prior to their involvement with OCJB. Using van Manen’s (1990) approach, this theme was arrived at by tracing etymological sources regarding the history of the words *indifferent* and *consequences* and according to the *Online Etymological Dictionary* (Harper, 2015) the word indifferent dates back to the late 14c. Indifferent comes directly from the Latin

indifferentem "not differing, not particular, of no *consequence*, and neither good nor evil." The word was extended in early 15c as "apathetic"; that of "neither good nor bad" and in the 1530s, on notion of "neither more nor less advantageous." Accordingly, my contact with the participants in this study exposed personal narratives from their point of view which was often discussed apathetically and of neither good nor bad in consequence. Moreover, it was important to continue this study with an emic perspective; thus, all of the questions I asked the girls were designed knowing they would help lead them to describe the relationships in their lives without being ashamed to voice them regardless of their personal emotions, biases or prejudices. For example, after, each girl described a personal experience with the details regarding when and how the aggression or bullying episode was caused. Interview question 3 opened deeper dialog as the girls described in detail what happened during the actual aggression and bullying episodes. In addition, the people involved played a part in how violent or not the episode became and revealed in detail what the girls did. Although each story was different in context every girl responded in the beginning with indifference and coldness regarding the violence that somehow took place. Most described defensive stories that reflected victimization at some point as justification for retaliation aggression or violence. When asked specifically, please describe your experiences or your involvement in aggression and bullying with other girls your age, common statements included, "I don't really hang with females they messy...but I can take care of me!", "They words can't hurt me...them b*tches don't matter", "Females always be hatin it's just the way it is", "You got me messed up: I can't have nobody cross me...", "Females can fight too an ain't nobody gone disrespect me and mines...", and "Some of them b*tches just be askin' for an ass whooping." In general, since my role as an interviewer was active in this study it was my responsibility to provide the structure only. That allowed me to let the girls flow naturally by

simply listening to them and this was crucial for me to build a protected and engaging atmosphere without my personal pre-judgments about their comments and how they would make them.

The findings revealed it was beneficial to begin with this line of questioning because it was important to find out beforehand the level of relational maturity of each girl, along with the temperament and disposition of each girl. The first three interview questions (see Table 2) asked the girls triggered responses of indifference and a kind of detachment in each girl no matter what age she was. But, later questions caused them to open up further and reflect more on their experiences at a deeper level. By the time question 4 was asked in the interviews, how did others support and/or influence you? All five of the older girls, Neveah, Madison, Lisa, Sydney, and Rae Lynn appeared to recognize how the negative patterns that were displayed in the examples shared had often been encouraged by others and could have been handled differently in many cases if the girls had stopped for a moment to connect their experiences with other girls rather than to dissociate other girls. However, by the time these girls had become known as girls who displayed aggressive/bullying behaviors in their settings each had embraced the title proudly and rejected the notion that a female is expected to be passive and non-confrontational in society. These participants consciously displayed a fight mentality as more preferable than being passive and submissive because that could be seen as weak and dangerous in their neighborhood. The findings suggested even when this negative reputation attracted punitive consequences and unwanted attention of the authorities or school officials the girls chose not to critically consider viewing aggressor/bully behaviors differently. Thus the girls reported that being known as having the reputation of a fighter, or as Neveah stated, “being a ride or die chick” was more

important than worrying about the consequences of getting caught up in the systems of the OCJB.

The second research question was: What do girls of color understand about the differences between assertive and aggressive acts? All of the participants were able to understand the differences between assertive behaviors and aggressive behaviors. All of the girls had a clear understanding of the definition of being assertive and seven out of the nine gave me the impression that they believed assertiveness was something positive that one should be proud of. Seven participants claimed they were assertive and not really aggressive because others in authority usually misread their intentions and confidence as aggressive. All of the participants that shared relational stories personally believed their responses were simply assertive in some cases because they were only taking up for themselves. This misunderstanding that the participants shared regarding the blurred line felt between assertive and aggressive behaviors led to the discovery of the second broad theme.

Relational Victimization and Misunderstandings

A general picture of victimization and misunderstandings of common cues in behavior was a continuing theme especially for the Black/African American girls. Again, using van Manen's (1990) approach this theme was arrived at by tracing etymological sources regarding the history of the words *victimization* and *misunderstanding* and according to the *Online Etymological Dictionary* (Harper, 2015) the word *victimization* dates back to the late 1830s figuratively (of passions, battle, etc.) in Old English, meaning to "cheat, swindle, victimize" and to burn one's bridges (behind one), or "behave so as to destroy any chance of returning to a status quo." The word *misunderstanding* is first attested in mid-15c., meaning "want of understanding," then evolving in 1640s as "dissent, disagreement." For instance, Madison

reported being regularly misunderstood at school just because she was outspoken and assertive. She spoke about teachers targeting her as if she was a victim and regularly treating her unfairly which caused her insecurity at school. She spoke of feeling hopeless and penalized often for defending herself against the harassing behaviors of her peers and teachers. Madison reported, “They [teachers] always saying that I’m mean. They don’t even know me to be saying s*it like that bout me. That’s why I can’t stand to be around these fake people.” The younger girls, those 14 and 15, spoke about the feelings of maltreatment as well, and disappointments regarding their teachers who take sides, ignore, and target them openly. For example, Jordyn’s coping mechanisms in response to her teachers “taking sides” was to backtalk and ignore the requests made by her teachers. Nia remembered being made fun of constantly in her classroom without her teacher’s protection. She felt her teachers did not give her the academic support she needed. Nia stated,

Why should I respect they [teachers] rules when they don’t even respect them, they are the ones who is always breaking um...I don’t care if they don’t care the whole class is rowdy and loud and we ain’t learning nothing anyway cause as soon as I open my mouth I get sent to the office.

Both girls’ comments regarding their unstable educational environments were typical scenarios that came up in some form while interviewing with all of the participants in this study. Rae Lynn’s response identified her struggles with school authorities as well.

I just get tired of seeing fake ass teachers who just want to get paid that’s all, if they see something wrong with you, they won’t bother asking if you’re OK, or if you need something...they don’t care about me and what I think.

And so, this questioning aided in the understanding of the detrimental consequences an overly punitive teacher or school authority can have on girls of color who feel as though they are the victims in their settings. Consistent with the conclusions in the Crenshaw (2015) study, *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected*, this literature supported what Madison, Jordyn, Nia, Rae Lynn and the other girls' reactions were to their teachers and school environment. In this study there were key observations made regarding issues that contributed to the participants' detachment from school and confirmed that when girls of color feel that teachers misread and do not value them or celebrate their individual achievements, they are more likely to respond with negative behaviors and disinterest.

Overall, the girls shared information that was important to learn because their narratives suggested that there are connections between relational aggression, victimization misunderstandings, and depression among girls of color in particular (Crenshaw, 2015; Gomes et al., 2009; Jones, 2010); and, according to Crenshaw (2015) "punitive rather than restorative responses to conflict contribute to the separation of girls from school and to their disproportionate involvement in the juvenile justice system" (p. 10). Each of the participants in this study made comments regarding negative experiences with their teachers who they felt were not invested in their development or in teaching them at all and each girl admitted to feelings of low tolerance, anger and rage, detachment from other girls, and uncaring or aloof responses. All would shed light on the back stories before the actual acts of aggression occurred without much concern about the consequences that the fighting, rumor spreading, gossip, backstabbing, or socially isolating behaviors were used to manipulate other girls.

Regarding victimization overall, it was most important to the girls that they were not seen as victims but behaved aggressively to enhance their social power and to protect their reputation

with their peers at all cost. The findings in this study confirmed Crenshaw's (2015) results that misconceptions about girls of color and the cultural insensitivity of school authorities contribute to the ways in which these girls are viewed, how they respond to other girls, and why they can be overdisciplined or ignored regularly. The narratives from the participants in this study show that much of the aggression, rage and apathy can often be traced to an overemphasis of penalizing discipline policies, misunderstanding of cultural habits and cues, and lack of trust in those who govern the school environment. Validating literature indicating zero-tolerance environments are neither safe nor conducive to learning. On the contrary, the emphasis on discipline leads many girls to become disengaged from the learning process and from school altogether (p. 9).

The third research question was: What do girls of color believe regarding their relationally aggressive tendencies and those of their peers? All of the participants said that it was beneficial to them in some way to have the reputation of being the biggest and baddest girl in the "hood." Seven of the participants said that they were accepted by their peers mainly because of the reputation they had as the "girl you don't want to mess with." All of the participants noted that it was not unusual to see a fight in the community and it was no big deal to them. This community atmosphere and acceptance appeared to nurture the aggressive tendencies in the participants which led to the development of the third theme regarding the environmental and sociocultural contexts and also caused candid discussion about the fourth theme foundational and systemic barriers that promote aggression.

Environment and Sociocultural Contexts

The etymology of the word *environment* dates back to c. 1600, meaning "state of being environed"; sense of "the aggregate of the conditions in which a person or thing lives." When searching for etymological source for *sociocultural*, the *Online Etymological Dictionary*

(Harper, 2015) revealed dual assumptions regarding the culture of a thing in reference to the cultivation of the mind, from 1875; hence, "relating to civilization or a civilization." This source revealed this word is a "fertile starter-word among anthropologists and sociologists, for example cultural diffusion, which was in use by 1912." Generally this theme was derived from the participants' comments related to the girls' living conditions that in a sense were creating a mood or mental environment that dealt with the girls' culture and whether that culture could be defused into the mass culture and standards of behavior (Harper, 2015).

Interview questions 5 and 6 (see Table 2) revealed details that displayed untapped feelings the girls may have experienced and suppressed for years before they finally displayed overt aggressive behaviors that were commonly seen in their environment. When asked details such as how did you feel about your aggression encounter and how did you deal with this experience, the findings revealed dialogue that reflected things that each girl was accustomed to hearing and seeing done to others in their circle of acquaintances (i.e., cultures). The girls generally spoke about living in neighborhoods filled with chaos and violence. One of the girls felt it was normal to see fights between girls with box cutters, knives, and bricks in her "hood." Madison even challenged my thinking as a researcher during her interview by telling me "of course it is difficult for people like you [the interviewer] who live in safe and stable neighborhoods to look at them like they are animals. But I can't help where my family lives I'm a child." Furthermore the socializing of Black/African American girls in many families was best described by Jordyn who stated,

I'm gonna just tell it like it is cause it ain't much hope where I was living with my momma people get killed in my old neighborhood if you don't fight! My granny told me to survive you better be tougher than anybody else. Don't let nobody beat you up or

when you get home imma beat yo ass myself. My momma and my granny don't play either cause to me it ain't no such thang as a fair fight where I come from.

Sociocultural and environmental influences like these played a part in many of the decisions the girls would make regarding their participation in aggression episodes. For instance, Madison claimed,

When I'm gonna fight I'm gonna bring my girls and a crowd with me...Just in case they try to jump in somebody is there that got my back too. And it don't mean we a gang but I'm gonna have backup for 'sure...Especially if I get tripped or knocked down and the other girls jump in and try to kick me in the face or something.

Similarly, Rae Lynn added to the dialog the importance of her neighborhood affiliation and reputation. Since popularity and protection is part of her neighborhood image she stated, "We take care of our own...If you were raised in my hood...You ain't got to worry about nobody hurtin' you or talking about you! We got you!" She continued to explain how in her environment it was not unusual for her to see fights every day between different neighborhood peers. However, Rae Lynn spoke as if this was normal behavior and spoke about the physical violence in a nonchalant manner because it gave her street credibility. This attitude was reflected time and time again with all of the girls who were interviewed in this study.

The environments that the girls spent the majority of their time in seemed to nurture and reward survival of the fittest mentality in them, which allowed them to comfortably thrive when they expressed aggressive/bullying behaviors. If you were not seen as a person from their "hood" it was not uncommon to be met with threatening and guarded interactions especially with those who were deemed as strangers to them. In social situations such as ball games, teen clubs, parks and recreation centers, and even during religious activities the girls reported in their

experiences instances where it was common and acceptable to respond with guarded, territorial, and defensive behaviors that led to aggression. In some of the encounters the adults that were in charge of supervising the girls at the time turned away and allowed, ignored, or took part in the aggression experiences. Seven of the girls interviewed mentioned in their experiences that some teachers in their schools regularly expected physical fights, and expected the girls to always lose control while physically expressing anger. For example, Jada summed up how her immediate environment daily fostered aggression,

That's just the way it is for my generation...it's a fight every day...an everybody knows it's gone [gonna] be I guess. Dudes be like spreading the stuff around the school that this one like him and he know other girls like him too...before you know it somebody is called a "Skank" [Trashy Female] or a "THOT" [That Ho Over There] but the teacher's didn't hear all the stuff going on before the fight starts. It be starting right in class cause we not working on nothing anyway in class most of the time just writing notes and stuff. That's how it gets started. Then you also got to deal with females rolling their eyes, and mean mugging you trying to start something every day for no reason.

The above comments showed that the settings that the girls spent the majority of their time in had a great influence on when, why, and how often they showed aggressive tendencies. Just as the literature has shown a girl's use of aggression towards other girls is an expression over issues of power in their environments (Rivera-Maestre, 2010).

Foundational and Systemic Barriers That Promote Aggression

It was clear to me the findings in this study sometimes reflected a different point of view about the whys and motives relationally aggressive and bullying behaviors begin and that was the case when interview questions 7, 8, 9, and 10 (see Table 2) were asked the participants. The

questions were all constructed to open deeper dialogue about motives and assist the girls in viewing the behaviors and responses they exhibited in terms of the larger social implications and consequences. And this line of questioning revealed a common theme regarding similar barriers felt personally by each girl. Each girl commented at least twice about the duality felt when teachers and administrators would govern the classroom and school with the existing school policies and conduct codes. Each girl mentioned they felt there was an implicit expectation that they were not really expected to do well in classwork, and that there was an explicit expectation they were going to automatically respond rudely, loudly, and/or aggressively. For example, Rae Lynn was the most vocal about the differences in treatment she felt at school especially when there was a fight or disagreement between Black girls and White girls. Rae Lynn stated,

It don't matter what happens. I could be minding my business. I'm always gone be the one that get put out of class in the fight cause when the White girls start stuff you better know that I'm gonna finish it. We can have on the same shirt but they [teachers] don't tell them about they breast being out but I get sent home when my shirt is low cut or not buttoned up. They don't send them home they just get a warning. That is why fights start cause the White girls know we gone get put out but they [White girls] get to stay at school for the same exact stuff.

After hearing Rae Lynn's comments I became mindful of the existing school settings, institutions, neighborhoods, and organizations each girl could possibly take part in and how these experiences effected how they recognized and developed relationships in their lives. The findings in this study revealed that there were areas in the school and community settings that might have encouraged violence among girls of color and could be addressed with simple solutions in the way we communicate relationship building skills. Overall the participants in this

study seemed to lack positive reinforcement of the proper skills it takes to make new friends and communicate with other girls. In many of the participants' backgrounds were generations of family members who boasted about the tough women street reputations passed down to the girls and these family members had inserted themselves into the conflicts of their children, nieces and sisters. Consequently the participants in this study were overwhelmed by the pressure to live up to those angry expectations.

Another example of an existing systemic barrier was reported by all girls in some form or another and was described most effectively by Sydney when she commented on the metal detectors in her school as well as the school resource officers' (SRO) treatment of her at the front door as she entered the school daily. Sydney stated,

They [SROs] make you feel like you are at prison already. I mean cause I don't want nobody going through my purse, pockets and stuff. Them metal detectors always are going off. You can have a hair pin or tracks in your hair and they almost make you undress in front of everybody...it aint that deep to me! Sometimes I just turn around and go back home if the line is long to get in the door cause it gets on my nerve. They be tripping cause you can get what you want through the door if you need to. Cause I brought a razor I use on my eyebrows in the school a bunch of times before and the metal detectors didn't find it.

In general all the girls were extremely sensitive to the harsh treatment at the front door of their schools. This frustration was most apparent when Madison, Lisa, Candy, and Jada were observed during STPP workshop (see Appendix J). The girls who participated appeared to echo Sydney's feelings. In the workshop the question was asked: Have you had a negative encounter

with a school resource officer (SRO)? This question evoked passionate comments from all four of the participants, such as,

They [SROs] are targeting us when we get to the front door. They always be like saying smart stuff tryin to bully us into saying something back so they can send us right to the office. Even when I try to keep it moving it is hard when they just want to push my button and make me go off on them. Aww like y'all don' know me you best believe I ain't no B*tch.

Candy added her comments and stated, “Them fake wanna-be police want everybody to think they are so tough. We just in high school not prison at least not yet they acting like we are though.” Additionally, Jada stated, the funny thing about it is when we [Black girls] come to the door in a group. We always get stopped and wanded. That don't happen to them [White girls] in a group. Finally, Lisa joined in and stated,

It's like we are expected to be a dope runner and bring weapons in the school. Don't they know that the front door would not be how we get anything in the school? That's stupid? It's plenty of other ways to get what you want to get in without going through the front door scanner...Ugh duh.

While the girls shared their comments the peer recorder in every case recorded on the AABOP tool (see Appendix I) how the girl's body language and cues were escalated and showed more antagonistic behaviors exhibited than agreeable behaviors. As the questions were asked they began to support each other by not taking responsibility for much of their own behaviors and were quick to blame the established structures that were in place for many of the problems that happen during school hours. Overall, the STTP workshop was useful in identifying some of

the systemic barriers, whether real or perceived, that the girls found challenging in their environments.

The STTP workshop appeared to encourage a more racialized critique of why the girls who participated felt anger toward the OCJB and former school officials. Candy's perception of the juvenile justice system and of the police had been informed by the involvement of her older siblings who are known truants and gang affiliated young men. Therefore, Candy formed her opinions based on the direct observations of the police interactions with her brothers whom she idolizes. Candy was concerned that I was somehow trivializing her experiences as the workshop proceeded when she shared,

You asked me to move one step forward if you are Hispanic/ Latina, and you asked them [other participants] to move three steps forward if they was Black/African American. I feel like you should have told me to do three steps too. Because when it comes to the cops in my neighborhood it don't matter either...the plan is for all us to go to prison to me! Stuff like getting suspended from school is why my brothers get hassled all the time...They don't want us in school and they want us to go to prison or be dead one.

This kind of distrust of the authorities and the police was troublesome to hear as an educator and Candy's comments alone can provide scholars with some of the reasons why there may continue to be an understandable increase in aggressor/bully behaviors in girls of color who often feel marginalized and unhappy. The findings showed that one girl had difficulty managing to respond positively no matter where she went outside of her immediate community for social activities. Neveah stated,

Seems like when I get ready to go out to like the club. It always is something that's gonna go down when it is a lot of kids and females there. It's like they [adults in charge]

be looking for us to fight and we just want to have someplace to go meet people and have fun. But drama always gets started and then after a while fights start. It's like we can't have no place to go no more cause somebody always gone be fightin'.

Overall the girls made negative comments about the simple rules and guidelines that are generally set in place in any school organization/culture as if the rules were personal barriers that were put in place just to make their lives difficult. The participants stated many times school rules, guidelines, and conduct codes were used to punish them for being who they were and the attitudes of each girl regarding the rules were clearly developed through their individual experiences. It was evident by the remarks made during the interviews that many of the personality conflicts that caused the aggression episodes the girls recalled started because of a misinterpretation that took place with physical cues or mental cues when they would interact with other girls, and the adults who govern them. Participant Neveah explained how easily she was misinterpreted at school when she stated,

Teachers always think I'm fixing to start something cause when I'm in the hallway and talkin' I be using my hands a lot to explain what I mean...then they start saying break it up...break it up! and I just be talkin' to my friends...UGH! Then when I roll my eyes at um they send me to the office...and it seems like it started all for nothing to me.

Madison also reported frustration when dealing with authorities and school officials:

“They [school officials] are trippin' when you just be explaining something they say you too loud and aggressive an you move your hands and stuff...they be trippin.” Both participants tried to clearly explain that she felt those adults and sometimes her peers appeared to misread their faces, emotions and temperament from time to time. At this point in the research it was easy to empathize with Neveah and Madison because I too have experienced others misreading my

passion, animation, and drive as aggressive and intimidating which I noted in my reflective journal notes (see Appendix M).

The fourth research question was: What are the motives behind relational aggression and how does intra-racial conflict influence these motives? During the interviews there were times the participants veered off to side conversations that supported some of the motives that I believe were looming behind the fights and power struggles exhibited in the participants. All of the participants mentioned the female to female struggles with jealousy, popularity, the desire for male attention, and racial tensions that appeared to play a part in the development of healthy relationships.

At the start of this study it was my intention to obtain concrete support for the Social Cognitive Theory with Self-Efficacy that was derived from the work of renowned psychologist and researcher Albert Bandura to describe the way in which the development of the participants could be shaped by human functioning as a result of cognitive, vicarious, self-regulatory, and self-reflective processes. Generally this theory takes the perspective that individuals are instilled with certain capabilities that define what it is to be human. Primarily, these are the capabilities to symbolize, plan alternative strategies (forethought), learn through vicarious experience, self-regulate, and self-reflect (Pajares, 2002). However, as the interviews wrapped up I was not readily able to clearly designate in the participants certain instilled capabilities that came natural.

The findings revealed the girls' capabilities were more often chosen because of the teaching or modeling of coping strategies in their immediate cultural environments. Moreover, the sociocultural context theme that developed in this study would resemble facets of Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective. Vygotsky focused on how cultural beliefs and

attitudes impact how individuals respond to instruction, and discipline. For example, Nia spoke about being a bright student in elementary school and how she loved school when she was younger. However, as Nia has gotten older she is now influenced regularly by both her cultural environment and school settings. She stated,

When I was in elementary I used to like to go to school. I was real smart and was good in math and reading...I always got good grades and awards but everybody in my hood would make fun of me and laugh at me because I liked school. Most of my homeys and cousins weren't doing good in school like me and they don't be going now, that's how I started getting in trouble. They just hang out all day and drink and smoke weed and I don't want to be a nerd. It ain't no gang or nothing just my homeys so I hang with them too...Sometimes it ain't nothing else to do an I get bored though. But they are my fam' they look out for me.

This statement revealed that although Nia may have wanted to take another path or move in a positive direction (i.e., concentrating on better attendance at school), her family surroundings and peers had a negative influence on her choices. Another example of underlying motives were expressed by Jordyn who admitted the main source of female to female aggression happens because of the boys they like she stated,

I just think they [girls] haters because I'm new to the school and they don't even know me but the basketball dudes were cool with me. Dudes must like what they see and at first they [girls] was just whispering and laughing when I pass them in the hall and bathroom so I decided one day I have had enough and like walked up in they face and mugged them...after that they tried to stay away from me then because now they know I won't take no mess! I think at my age the main thing it's the dudes cause we tryin to get

they attention and stuff...and umm...things like what you look like...if you too skinny an stuff Like me cause I aint got no butt.... [Laughing] and if you too fat too..... Females just messy sometimes they pretend to be yo girl until you get they dude.

It turns out in the findings of this study the motives behind relational aggression and bullying can vary from very trivial topics to major issues that deal with events that will impact the participant's future well-being. Three of the participants spoke directly about the motives behind intra-racial struggles making comments such as,

I ain't dark enough to be around the Black girls and not light enough to hang with the White girls and they ask me all the time are you mixed? I was just trying to get to know this one girl because she had pretty hair and I love hair and she dressed good....I don't fit in with anybody cause I'm too mean they say to want to hang with me.

Comments regarding race came up repeatedly when some of the participants described various situations in the school setting and in their sociocultural environment. The interviews revealed the girls felt there were low expectations and over monitoring sometimes in response to them. Overall, comments like: "they [teachers] always say I'm confrontational and loud if I just ask a question sometime I get in trouble" (Madison) and "all I gotta do is open my mouth sometimes and I get a [discipline] referral...but if a White girl do the same thing or wear the same thing they don't get none [referral]" (Jordyn). Each girl spoke about a similar experience and would express her treatment as a no-win situation in many cases. In addition to feeling the pressure in the school environment a couple of the older girls spoke candidly regarding their encounters with the police authorities. Lisa who identified herself as other, half Latina/Hispanic and half Black/African American girl, was extremely outspoken about how living where she lives the

police do not respond the same way with her Black friends as they do when she is not around Blacks. Lisa stated,

One time it was a fight where I live and it was two girls and one girl got jumped on and hit in the head with a brick. The cops drove by the crowd cause it was a lot of us watching them fight till that girl got hit and started bleeding and holding her head. Them cops didn't even stop the car they just yelled out the car at us to break it up. That girl could of died and they don't care cause they think we just killin' each other. Huh...it's Black on Black so they don't care!

The other girls mentioned feelings of not receiving the proper protection if a simple fist fight turned into a blood bath when various weapons like sticks, bricks, knives, and razors became involved. Some of the girls spoke about the authorities as if the authorities should be blamed for their anger and were a major threat to their well-being and not their peers or living circumstances.

The fifth and final research question was: What do aggressive girls of color understand about self-identity, self-awareness, and self-knowledge (Jacobson, 2007)? In this study this question was created in reference to the research I found that existed to this point (Dellasega and Adamshick, 2005; Jacobson, 2007) that started the dialogue regarding scholars needing to cover the assumptions that an adolescent displaying relationally aggressive and bullying behaviors might benefit from looking at the behaviors from a philosophical viewpoint in order to help them develop positive self-identity. The findings in this study were mixed because although seven of the nine girls reported boastfully that appearances and popularity played a large part in the girl on girl conflicts that they reported. It was not apparent the girls had a clear understanding of what it meant to have a healthy self-identity. Only one of the participants spoke positively

regarding her self-awareness as competent and belonging. Overall all of the girls' stories reflected they were struggling with the concept of feeling worthwhile to society.

The results further indicated the stories each girl shared appeared to be filled with mixed emotions even as they were observed reading through the transcripts containing their own words. This question regarding self-identity was answered within each broad theme. When the participants shared stories that included their own victimization there was a clear understanding that they were more self-aware when they were placed in the position of the victimized. For instance, Madison was the most vocal participant when it came to self-awareness than most because she could identify the characteristics of a healthy self-identity. She shared her ideas about how she thought she should be treated regardless of her behaviors. Out of all participants, Madison was able to clearly communicate that she was comfortable with herself, she felt good about the relationships she had with her friends, and she exhibited self-respect. It appeared what was missing in all of the participant's experiences was their ability to understand and transfer those feelings of self-knowledge when they were interacting with others.

Summary

In the findings section, it was my intent to represent fully what each girl contributed in this study by explaining the overall themes their answers to the study questions represented. Although it was a challenge at times to keep them focused and to not veer off of the subject I found that the discovered themes were crucial in helping new researchers and scholars understand what could be the thought patterns and reasoning's behind an aggressive encounter in educational settings. Furthermore, in this section it was my intent to give voice to the participants in their own words explaining what took place in their environments, why, and how episodes of relational aggression and bullying occurred within the frameworks of hermeneutical

phenomenology. Included were the details regarding each of the nine participant's demographic information, familial or peer backgrounds, and living arrangements. In this section, the planned questions that were used for data collection and analysis are covered and explained from the viewpoint of the participants. I investigated the perspectives of the girls even those that were specifically linked to interracial, intra-racial or gender related concerns that would come up in the interviews. Reporting those factors relative to their social identity, environmental and familial indicators associated with their experiences. In doing so, I expected there would be some assumptions that would be revealed in this section that could only be explained in the participants' words because the findings were the self-reported direct experiences of each girl. As the narratives of the participants suggested, girls of color can have relationships that are sometimes unexplainable, often unexpected, explosive, and contradictory such as rowdy and thoughtful, hurting and supportive. However, the root causes of the aggressive and mean behaviors are clearly complex in the girls' environments where poverty and violence tended to rule. These participants who were involved in aggression and bullying episodes appeared to be girls who were living and struggling to survive in some complex situations of distress, where lack and systemic failure played a big role in their development.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used for this study to investigate and gain insight on certain aspects of the girls' human existence to increase understanding of what it means to be labeled a girl of color who has exhibited aggressive/bullying behaviors in Oklahoma. Van Manen (1990) declared the phenomenological research process as the practice of thoughtfulness where one becomes mindful, caring and attentive to the project of living, by experiencing the everyday taken for granted phenomena. This group of participants provided a focus on the phenomenon of aggression and bullying from their lived experience. The research findings raised concerns about girl aggression, some themes that have been addressed in recent literature, and some themes that have had limited attention. In Chapter Five I provide an overview of the study, with a discussion of the findings and the implications in light of the current relevant literature and theory I found in the literature review. Lastly an outline of the study limitations, and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Summary of Findings

The goal of this research was to paint a picture regarding relational aggression and bullying from the narratives of adolescent girls of color who exhibited relationally aggressive and bullying behaviors while answering five research questions about the phenomena. Below is a summary of the findings. Through extensive analysis of the data I collected, I was able to identify four themes that helped to summarize the experiences through the eyes of the participants. The four themes were (1) indifference and consequences, (2) relational victimization and misunderstandings with other girls and the authorities, (3) environment and sociocultural contexts, and (4) foundational and systemic barriers that promote aggression.

Themes one and two helped to answer the first and second research questions in this study.

Themes three and four helped to answer research questions three and four and question five was answered generally as I sought to tie the narratives together in each theme to arrive at the participants existing self-awareness.

Research Question One

The participants in this study were a unique purposive sample; the girls were labeled aggressive and disregarded in the sense that they were identified for their belligerent and troublemaking behaviors. The girls' descriptions of their life-world revealed they were accustomed to talking back and opposing authorities, giving others little respect, hanging out regularly with trouble makers or gangs, fighting with others in a heartbeat, and struggling with self-control and their self-worth in all of their relationships with family and peers.

All of the participants were able to describe in detail the timeframes, dates, and circumstances that led to their experiences. Sometimes the conversations led to personal accounts that reflected pain, anger, rage, and confusion. Three of the participants described their experiences with a neutral response of "Oh well." All of the participants admitted they had physical fights with two out of nine girls admitting she used a weapon (i.e., a razor and a brick). Seven of the girls admitted to manipulating relationships with lies to make sure she was the most popular girl in the peer group. When all of the participants shared their thoughts and memories about the specific fighting or aggressive experiences they began with coldness emotionally.

Research Question Two

In this study the participants were not the typical girls who are regularly studied ethnically, economically, socially, and educationally nonetheless hidden deep within the impolite facade of mean behaviors was one ongoing theme. That theme was the girls of color in this

study just wanted to be heard which is not so different from any of the other girls their age. Overall, the participants in this study were able to express the same desires and uncomfortable feelings of not fitting in and wanting friendships just like other adolescents (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003). But the girls in this study revealed they had experienced very little positive success in the areas of dealing with healthy girl-to-girl or female-to-girl relationships. All of the participants were able to understand the differences between assertive behaviors and aggressive behaviors. All of the girls had a clear understanding of the definition of being assertive and seven of the girls gave me the impression they believed assertiveness was something positive that one should be proud of. Seven of the participants claimed they were assertive and not really aggressive in their own eyes but others in authority usually misread their intentions and confidence as aggressiveness. All of the participants that shared relational stories personally believed their responses were simply assertive in some cases because they were only taking up for themselves.

Research Question Three

Overall what became unique with the participants in this study was the approach they appeared to take when trying to achieve and retain friendships with other people and other girls in particular. Many times the aggressive tendencies were constantly in the foreground with these participants because the girls were already members or potential members of the juvenile justice system and headed down a destructive pathway. At the same time the full intent of the study was based on finding support and solutions to their behaviors that could be grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory with Self-Efficacy as well as existing philosophical perspectives in the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Keeping this in mind it was crucial that I dig deeper than the surface to establish the humanity connections found in the girls' stories. Therefore, I looked for the common threads of understanding when the girls shared their stories. All of the participants

said that it was beneficial to them in some way to have the reputation of being the biggest and baddest girl in the “hood.” Seven of the participants said they were accepted by their peers mainly because of the reputation they had as the “girl you don’t want to mess with.” All of the participants noted that it was not unusual to see a fight in the community and it was no big deal to them. This community atmosphere and acceptance appeared to nurture the aggressive tendencies in the participants.

Research Question Four

During the interviews there were times the participants veered off to side conversations that supported some of the motives that I believe were looming behind the fights and power struggles exhibited in the participants. All of the participants mentioned the female to female struggles with jealousy, popularity, the desire for male attention, and racial tensions that appeared to play a part in the development of healthy relationships. It turned out in the findings of this study the motives behind relational aggression and bullying can vary from very trivial topics (i.e., girls bumping in to you in the school hallway, girls having on a similar piece of clothing or shoes, and boys speaking or dating more than one girl at a time) to major issues that deal with events that will impact the participant’s future well-being. For example, three of the participants spoke directly about what they believed were motives behind inter-racial and intra-racial struggles. Comments regarding race came up repeatedly when all of the participants described various situations in the school setting and in their sociocultural environment. The interviews revealed the girls felt there were low expectations and over monitoring sometimes in response to them and during their discipline.

Research Question Five

The findings in this study were mixed regarding the girls having a general understanding about self-identity, self-awareness, and self-knowledge because although seven of the girls reported boastfully that appearances and popularity played a large part in the girl on girl conflicts that they reported. It was not apparent the girls had a clear understanding of what it meant to have a healthy self-identity. Only one of the participants spoke positively regarding her self-awareness as competent and belonging. Overall all of the girls' stories reflected they were struggling with the concept of feeling worthwhile to society. The results further indicated the stories each girl shared appeared to be filled with mixed emotions even as they were observed reading through the transcripts containing their own words. This question regarding self-identity was answered within each broad theme. When the participants shared stories that included their own victimization in the beginning there was a clear understanding that they were more self-aware when they were placed in the position of the victimized. Six of the participants appeared to respond with immaturity when challenged and they did not acknowledge and were not mindful that those feelings of anger, hopelessness, and isolation experienced were the same for other girls especially those girls who have become sworn enemies to them.

For instance, as the data analysis evolved in this study it became apparent often in the beginning that it could be easier for this research to become largely directed toward strategies that might address the girls as problem students in need of fixing poor social behaviors that were expressed outwardly. However, using Hans-Georg Gadamer's (2004a, 2004b) philosophical perspectives the individual girl was not viewed as being a relationally aggressive/bully with a problem "within" the participant, it became my intent to fundamentally grasp the terrains that cultivate the girls specific experiences whether that meant observing the social and

environmental surroundings “between” the participants that may have encouraged certain behaviors or to simply track similarities between the girls stories (Jacobson, 2007).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to delve deeper into the life-world narratives for adolescent girls of color ages 14 to 17 who exhibited aggressive/bullying behaviors that live in the Midwest. The findings suggested a relationship with existing empirical and theoretical literature that tied relational aggression and bullying to physical violence that was reviewed in Chapter Two as well as with other more recent studies reviewed regarding relational aggression and bullying in adolescent girls that is tied to the existing structures these girls participate in regularly. It was my intention to find areas of support in those studies and open the conversation to include the voices of the girls themselves like some of the existing research noted (Chesney-Lind et al., 2007; Crenshaw, 2012; Crenshaw, 2015; Marsee & Frick, 2007; Sharma, 2010). This study differs from many of the earlier studies (Bowie, 2007; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Maher, 2008; Walrave & Heirman, 2011) because it concentrated on the voices of a unique purposive population that are not regularly studied ethnically, economically, socially, and educationally. This study pointed to the impact of the non-verbal cues in relational aggression in the form of mean mugging, smirking, and dirty looks like rolling your eyes with a negative facial expression. The participants in this study shared how something as insignificant as a look or gaze would lead them to physical violence. This study further pointed to how significant inter-racial and intra-racial context added to the exclusion and manipulating behaviors involved in relational aggression and bullying and would cause the most damage in this population of girls. Although each participant was labeled as an aggressor the findings show that they did not start in the role of an aggressor/bully but their negative personal experiences, and often their living environment

and social inadequacies led them to target those who they felt were weaker. For example the statement that summarized the emotions behind intra-racial or inter-racial conflicts came from Jada when she stated,

Them [White girls and Black girls] THOT's [That Ho Over There] be hatin on me all the time, females be talking badly about me & cursing at me when they are with they friends trying to make people Hate me! Telling everybody I be trying to be White but I'm really Black and I'm trying to be Black when I'm White they say I'm ugly...I'm tired of it and I wasn't gonna take that from nobody because that's disrespecting me cause I'm "Both" Black and White!

It is clear from this statement that there are tensions that have not been addressed in some of her environments relating to the blending of ethnicities as well as the insecurities that are found in many of the girls who try to navigate how their appearance becomes really important in their relationships.

All of the previous research confirms that there is no consensus on why adolescent girls such as the participants in this study are relationally aggressive or choose to take on the role of the bully (Adamshick, 2006; Crick et.al, 2001; Dellasega and Nixon, 2003; Jones, 2010). However, the findings in this study were enlightening and did corroborate through the narratives of the girls that each of them held a different norm around why they used aggression to increase their status in the environments they live in. The risk factors that were identified in research conducted by Chesney-Lind and Shelden (1998) Stevens, Morash, and Chesney-Lind (2011) most closely corroborated with the girls in this study as their research focused on the delinquent acts in young women. These researchers suggested that girls with such risk factors as lower economic status, lack and unstable familial conditions can use aggressive behaviors as a way to

draw attention to them in order to gain recognition. The girls of color in this study often spoke about the “bad girl” image they were labeled with in their school environments and neighborhoods. However, the participants in this study presented their aggression and bullying experiences as if they were a tool of survival that revolved around the themes of forming cultural/social bonds and ways of protecting those bonds rather than utilized as an attempt to gain recognition. The narratives of aggression were deeply connected with each girl’s cultural and family standards, biases, and values. The girls of color in this study were not the typical candidates that are often used in recent research and for many reasons they proved to be challenging to study. They were undoubtedly not the mainstream girls of many of the studies I researched; however, the findings here clearly gave some credence to the current research conducted by Crenshaw (2015) which elaborates on a societal “challenge that is real” (p. 6) girls of color are experiencing harsher treatment as a group and are over-disciplined as well as the over-policing of girls of color could potentially be causing a shift in their beliefs regarding what is expected and acceptable human behavior.

An example of the changes in societal norms was found in my personal experiences as my reflective notes revealed. Reflecting back when I was of school age I had to acknowledge the vast changes in how I chose to communicate as I spoke with the girls in this study. Whereas when I grew up in one of the same neighborhoods two of the girls currently reside, I recognized how differently those girls Madison and Sydney dealt with what my generation called horseplay and teasing by the boys in the neighborhood. It appeared that Madison and Sydney saw the boys’ comments and teasing regarding their appearance as overtly harassing and the wounds from the experiences would cut deeper than the surface. Madison and Sydney both turned that discomfort they felt into rage and aggression as they reported ending up wrestling and hitting the

boys as an everyday occurrence in order to take up for themselves. As a researcher with an emic perspective I saw the elementary school behaviors the girls described as simply the way some of the boys might have chosen to play with the girls and seek their attention. But, Madison and Sydney viewed the behavior as unwanted aggression that warranted them to become aggressive to save themselves and their reputation. Nia reported that she was taught to fight from her parents stating,

My momma and daddy told us I better not come home crying like a punk! I better beat the S*it out of them before I come back home cause if I don't they gone whip my ass when I get back...they bet not hear about me getting beat up...don't let nobody punk you!

The different participants dealt with fighting in much the same way despite the cultural frames of reference. It was apparent from the interviews that these girls of color were not trained in their environments to be meek and passive at all. These girls have been nurtured in environments where their identities were most often wrapped up in self-preservation at all cost. Bullying, fighting and aggression are not seen as dangerous but it is seen through their eyes as necessary. Though Dellasega and Nixon (2003) and Adamshick (2006) have provided studies that are rich and enlightening concerning how girls experience girl-to-girl aggression, this study and its participants provides a different glimpse into the perspectives that were linked to intra-racial, inter-racial and systemic frameworks that appeared to encourage the deviant behaviors that the girls reported as they would deal with other girls. When searching for themes during the analysis of this data taken from the dialogue the girls would share with me, this study only scratched the surface of the topics that were revealed in their comments. However, these themes

appeared to resemble the cultural trauma found in Crenshaw's (2015) research. The Crenshaw report stated,

Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected seeks to increase awareness of the gendered consequences of disciplinary and push-out policies for girls of color, and, in particular, Black girls...The report developed out of a critical dialogue about the various ways that women and girls of color are channeled onto pathways that lead to underachievement and criminalization. (p. 5)

The Crenshaw study in particular became instrumental in helping me sort out what the participants were trying to explain in their own language and on their own developmental level of understanding. Researchers and scholars cannot afford to conduct further research regarding girls of color without giving voice to the girls themselves and the possible systemic historical trauma they may be tied with. In this study I presented the voices of nine girls of color who had been labeled aggressor/bullies and although they may be looked at through the eyes of biased adults who see them as "problem girls" who are victimizing other girls. In short, for these participants they saw the world they lived in as combative, and in order to survive in that world aggression was a natural part of their identity.

Generally, all of the participants in this study shared similar experiences relationally as in other studies reviewed (Adamshick, 2006; Crick et.al, 2001; Dellasega and Nixon, 2003), showing all too often girls are subtly and oftentimes overtly encouraged to compete with each other and dislike each other through the messages they see on television, in magazines, and media via technology. The findings in this study clearly reveal there is a need for more positive interaction between girls of color and less negative interactions where the aggressor/bully is rewarded for their behaviors. Support programs that specifically address the attitudes of

indifference and coldness toward other girls in the educational environment could be instrumental in changing the existing perceptions the girls have regarding the consequences that currently don't really matter to them.

Implications

This research studies targeted effort to listen to girls of color specifically confirmed that there is a need to combat the negative power of art, music, literature, media and technology and utilize those medians to emphasize positive reinforcement. My findings suggested that both comprehensive (i.e., schoolwide) and targeted (i.e., specific to girls of color who needed additional support and skill building) interventions are essential to modify the girls' behaviors. It is especially critical that educators, administrators, and stakeholders be able to provide the support girls of color need to navigate and negotiate the relationships they will encounter in their lives presently and in the future; therefore, I am suggesting authenticity is an important component moving forward in order to address the first two themes: 1) indifference and consequences and 2) relational victimization and misunderstandings.

Indifference and Consequences

Overall art, music, literature and technology are universal and each can play a great role in the lives of young people nowadays. While searching for effects and justification for some of the experiences the participants spoke about. Many of the lyrics in the music they listen to and all of the media sources the girls have access to appear to be instrumental in the development of their viewpoints regarding girl-to-girl and girl-to-female relationships. The indifference and coldness with which the girls appeared to discuss their bullying experiences can be discovered in much of the popular cultural perceptions found in the avenues of media such as reality television and magazines whether they use printed or digital formats. Furthermore, as a researcher I

underestimated the power of online technology and its instant access to avenues of art, literature, music, and media forms when speaking with the girls because all of the girls participated constantly in chatting with their friends through Facebook, Instagram, Vine/Twitter, Snapchat and texting. Some of the girls' experiences would imitate the various interactions and negative relationships displayed on popular reality television shows such as *Love and Hip Hop*, *The Bad Girls Club*, and *Basketball Wives* and those that were similar to that format would reflect the constant bickering and toxic relationships displayed amid women. For example, Rae Lynn was a huge fan of the VH1 television show *Love and Hip Hop* where revenge took precedence over friendship most often and there were fights going on weekly as the episodes develop. Rae Lynn reported in her account of aggression that most often her challenges started with her wanting and desiring to dominate. The assumption she shared was that the baddest and meanest women in the program got the most attention and always came out on top in the reality world; therefore, she felt "it pays to be the bully because they are making a lot of coins" (Rae Lynn). Rae Lynn's statement and those subtle statements made by all of the other girls emphasized the powerful influences negative images have on the adolescent mind.

Relational Victimization and Misunderstandings

Existing research is abundant that covers the stories of the victims of aggression/bullying more often than studies covering the aggressor/perpetrator of relational aggression or bullying. Dellasega and Nixon (2003) revealed in their findings girls show sensitivity to the harm that occurs in relationally aggressive nasty actions because most adolescent girls feel hurt when they are aggressed in a relational way. Therefore when girls begin to use cruel behaviors in vindictive ways to get back at other girls this behavior creates a cycle that continues and begins to appear acceptable. What was distinctive about the participants in this study was the girls of color all

understood that others were injured by their tactics but felt that the relationally aggressive and bullying behaviors were normal in terms of how girls and females regularly deal with each other. This was most apparent when Neveah, Madison, and Lisa appeared to echo each other when speaking about “that’s just how it is”; the response was “females be havin nasty attitudes that I need to check!” giving the impression as girls progress through adolescence, relational aggression and bullying is just a normal part of life and associated with perceived power. Overall their responses were based in how destructive female relationships have been and can be in their lives and in order to be perceived as powerful you must respond in any way that keeps you on top and popular. Dellasega and Nixon (2003) warned of this behavior in their findings of relational aggression (RA) alerts. In order to maintain popularity in any transition such as a new school change or changes in grade level aggressive behaviors are useful for its ability to maintain one’s dominance and place in the peer group.

The girls of color in this study responded to most forms of physical aggression and bullying behaviors as if it was no big deal and acceptable to help them to survive in this world. What may have been unique about the girls’ of color responses in this study is that they did describe some of their own shortcomings in terms of feeling that their responses were nonproductive and dangerous. In addition, as the reflective part of my field notes would reveal I would record my impressions after speaking with the girls and found that after speaking with all of the girls, I felt as though the participants felt remorseful of the pain they caused other girls, and family members who were the casualties of their aggression and bullying. After talking about the experiences the girls in this study realized they might have misread other girls’ cues and misunderstood the meanings behind some of the aggressive situations they experienced.

Despite putting on a brave and uncaring face about the experiences they shared with me, it became obvious that girls of color were no more deceptive than any other adolescent girl who desired to fit in; however, as my field notes reflect many times the misunderstandings appeared to surface because of a possible racialized expectancy that these girls would be automatically aggressive in the eyes of their teachers, and the authorities.

Educators, Administrators, and Stakeholders

Educators, administrators and stakeholders who are tasked with supervising and teaching these girls must be sensitive to their developmental issues and not assume they are able to fully evaluate complex relationships appropriately. In order to combat the indifference, unresponsiveness, and apathy educators, administrators, and stakeholders must view these girls and their pain through the eyes of investment. Generally the findings in this study revealed race does matter in the equation as well and can add an insightful element to the conversation regarding the phenomena. Those who wish to make steps toward helping girls of color should be mindful that girls in general are receiving more negative social messages than ever before because of the media and technology advancement. Educators who invest the time in creating an atmosphere of non-judgmental support and sharing could give these girls a network she can rely on when difficult situations arise with other girls. Investing in the healthy social and emotional well-being of these girls means educators, administrators, and stakeholders need to first recognize she comes to the classroom with a variety of historical, institutional, and social factors that heighten her risk of under achievement and detachment from school (Crenshaw, 2015). Although this sounds complex it can be as simple as remembering the acronym I.N.V.E.S.T. M.E.N.T when interacting with girls of color (Flynn, 2016). First, mature adults must start by identifying the humanity in her through talking and sharing time with her (i.e., favorite things to

do, television shows, music, websites). Secondly, when she begins to talk about her likes, dislikes, and issues of importance, the insecurities and indifference soon fade and her areas of need become apparent (i.e., lots of idle time, lack of positive influences). Thirdly, when her needs become apparent during the conversations mature adults can assess what is valuable or not within context that she has shared. Overall after she recognizes concerned adults have identified her needs and valued her opinion then one can offer support and teach her better skill-building behaviors possibly through therapy, mentoring, engagement, or nutrition utilizing the means of technology in many cases (Flynn, 2016).

Ultimately because van Manen (1990) encourages researchers who choose to utilize a hermeneutic approach to data analysis to search out sources in music, literature and art, I believe as scholar Winn (2010b) we must urge other “scholars, activists, and youth advocates to combine efforts in coalition building to meet the needs of girls” through the use of their own writings and possible performances those writings could produce in the form of drama and plays (p. 313). Winn (2010b) offered that artistic expression can be applied to target the behaviors of relational aggression and bullying which could ultimately lead the girls to consider multiple perspectives, encouraging her ability to create dialogue and build better relationships.

In order to address themes three and four, environment and sociocultural and foundational and systemic barriers that promote the phenomena I am suggesting we take a look at things the law enforcement community and community stakeholders do to address and change some of the outcomes of the participants.

Environment and Sociocultural Contexts

The findings in this study indicated that the girls’ environment played a big role in whether or not the aggressive/bullying behaviors were tolerated. Environments such as the

neighborhoods where the girls live as well as the school district where the girls attended school were mentioned while discussing their experiences. What was apparent in my field notes in the case of environment and cultural areas was the loyalty all of the girls spoke about when it came to their peers, especially the neighborhood peers. Often the aggression would appear to be encouraged by the physical settings and whether or not they would have “their girls or family” with them. Madison would constantly reference “That's my for real ride-or-die-b*tch right there” when talking about her friends that clearly seemed at times to instigate confrontation when they knew Madison was around. This same loyalty would be referenced with Nia as well when she would reference her extended family and homeys that she felt would look out for her despite her being the aggressor in the situation most of the time. Either relationally or physically the girls gave the impression that the negative behaviors that were perpetrated against other girls and even the authorities in some cases were normal and accepted in their world. In the accounts of participants Nia, Madison, and Neveah the first response was to be defensive when the questions implied they should have limited their aggressive tendencies because those around them could have had influence on them.

The participants in this study came from opposite sides of town but had similar education environmental experiences. The findings showed that all of the girls attended schools that had school conduct policies that were zero tolerance in nature where in the words of Sydney “The teachers don't do nothing about it [bullying] so I started to take care of myself if that mean I gotta fight and get thrown out...oh well...it is what it is.” Sydney's statement left me with the impression she felt alone and picked on in the school environment and in her statements she claimed to have been as much of a victim of relational aggression/bullying herself before she became retaliatory and aggressive. Overall this was the same sentiment that was shared in the

other girls' stories because the aggression and bullying in their environment was in their words "just the way it is."

Foundational and Systemic Barriers That Promote Aggression

Overall out of the three previous themes derived from the analysis of the collected data in this study, the participants appeared to speak about issues that fall into the foundational and systemic area the most. The girls shared their hopeless feelings regarding purposeful manipulation and damage they experienced from the adults in the educational environment and the juvenile justice environment. When the participants shared their individual experiences this theme was the hardest to figure out and identify. The older girls found words to explain what they felt about discipline guidelines; however, the younger girls appeared to not be able to put it into words what they felt and the entire group of participants spoke about their experiences with anger and rage. For example, the older girls Neveah, Madison, and Lisa were able to pinpoint patterns of perceived harsh discipline by their teachers for the same offense as other students of another race. However, the girls could not understand the whys for the maltreatment saying that the teacher or service worker just did not like them or had it in for them personally. The participants could not understand nor explain why their aggressive/bullying behavior violated the school conduct code guidelines. Furthermore, after the experiences of aggression/bullying were shared in their personal interviews Neveah, Madison, Lisa, Sydney, and Rae Lynn revealed they were isolated and punished by school officials and immediately expelled and prosecuted for fighting in school without explanation. The girls were offered services through the OCJB and their parents were punitively fined. The younger girls, Nia, Jada, Jordyn, and Candy, combined were only able to articulate through anger and rage how they felt regarding expulsion from the

school where they felt an overemphasis on discipline and the authorities did not listen to their explanation of the events that day.

Overall the participants in this study mimicked the findings of Crenshaw (2015) that explain the systemic over-policing of girls of color does little to curb harassing behaviors in schools regarding their peer relationships. Plus as a former high school teacher who has taken part in task teams that were given the responsibility of creating discipline/student conduct guidelines it was important to me to hear the girls with an open mind and heart regarding their experiences and treatment while in the school environment. Consequently when it was revealed during the interviews of all of the participants that they had been expelled and not allowed to return to their assigned schools I reflected on why many of the conduct codes were based on punitive results rather than restorative results. Looking at this one change in guidelines “restorative versus punitive” could have possibly changed the outcomes of some of these participants.

Lastly, the findings in this study supported the Crenshaw (2015) report on the suspension and expulsion rates for Black girls in particular who far outpace the rates for other girls, and in some places, they outpace the rates of most boys. Specifically, girls of color are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system and are subject to harsh, punitive law enforcement policies, such as arrest and incarceration for simple verbal disputes that have escalated into violence (Zahn et.al, 2008). As a result of the findings in this study the girls’ stories confirm foundational and systemic barriers are evident and were reflected in the participants’ narratives which merit a closer examination if researchers and scholars wish to understand the relational aggression/bullying phenomenon.

Law Enforcement and Community Stakeholders

Law enforcement (i.e., SROs, Parole Officers, City Police Departments) and community stakeholders (i.e., Churches, Social and Civic organizations) who are tasked with enforcement of policy, neighborhood safety, and engagement activities as girls of color navigate in American society must be aware of the historical, systemic, and institutional biases that exist as well as the developmental issues the girls are facing. Law enforcement officers have a complex job to begin with, without having to add another level to that complexity. However, it is crucial that these phenomena be viewed as a community wide effort if we wish to address it before society takes on the responsibility of incarcerating those who have slipped through the cracks during adolescence. What was obvious from the findings in this study were the feelings the participants shared regarding overly punitive discipline in their environments. The findings in this study revealed the girls felt as though they were viewed from a deficit perspective by educators, law enforcement, and community stakeholders. Therefore, this will be important to keep in mind when law enforcement officers and community stakeholders interact with girls of color.

The findings suggested all the participants desired from those adults who were tasked to protect them was to be heard completely before law enforcement jumped to a conclusion about whatever relationally aggressive/ bullying incident took place. There is encouraging research that promotes restorative concepts that can be used in populations where people of color are in the majority (i.e., urban city schools, alternative schools). Shin et al. (2010) suggested in their study regarding addressing the complexities of existing foundational and systemic barriers such as the impact of unjust social and political conditions are confronted by the students themselves by using Transformative Groups. According to Shin et al. (2010), a key component of transformative group is that the issues related to systemic, institutionalized racism and

discrimination are placed in the foreground then the primary goal of the group work from a transformative perspective is to stimulate higher levels of critical consciousness among the members. The findings in this study support the use of a group based atmosphere such as the STTP workshop to inform participants of the odds they face based on the facts.

What was encouraging by the findings in the this study was OCJB had identified there is a problem with disproportionate numbers of girls being referred to the Juvenile bureau and were taking steps in the right direction to create a protocol that is designed to address and provide groups that can open the dialogue to include possible mandatory transformative groups participation in the future. The research finding in this study can serve to inform law enforcement and community stakeholders regarding ways to approach and engage girls of color with a consciousness that there may be deeper unique challenges involved because they are members from society's marginalized groups.

Limitations

Johnson and Christensen (2000) revealed that research limitations are the deficiencies that occur when the researcher does not directly control those situations that may arise. The first limitation of the research related to the reach of the study. This study focused on a purposive sample of girls of color who represented only the ethnic/racial categories of Black/African American, Latina/Hispanic American, Native American, and other, which included two or more racial identities combined. Therefore when identifying the limitations and the weaknesses of this study I had to consider the participants in this study who represented a very small sample of girls who were selected because they had been participating in the OCJB programs. This sample of girls was specifically selected because they were girls of color who were 14-17 years old and exhibited aggressive/bullying behaviors that then resulted in their participation or potential

participation at OCJB. Thus when looking at the results from this perspective, the phenomenon of relational aggression/bullying experience as portrayed may be specific only to girls that are found in their circumstances; yet, the girls in this study did not think of themselves as different or disregarded than any other girls their age. Overall, this decision to limit sampling categories resulted in sporadic numbers to choose from with unbalanced representation which is related to sampling deficiencies. This deficiency has the potential to mix outcomes within and across each sample group. However, while the nature of purposive sampling allowed for a rich reporting of the phenomenon in the study, the participant demographics were limited to girls of color who were majority Black/African American (4), Native American (1), Latina/Hispanic American (2), and other (2) ranging in ages 14-17 years. This breakdown limited the transferability of findings.

The second limitation of the study was the use of individual experiences that were self-reported to understand the relationally aggressive dealings. In the study sample of nine the wide-ranging ages of the participants from 14-17 years of age exposed the girls' narratives to be immature or mature and symbolized there were variations in their developmental stages. Asking the girls to recall personal accounts of aggression caused most of them discomfort and uneasiness. However, every feeling and emotion was acknowledged in the personal open-ended interviews, and when uncomfortable instances would arise, the interview was discontinued when needed.

Additionally, the self-reported responses were also impressionable by the impact of social media and recognition such as, television reality shows like *The Bad Girls Club*, *Love and Hip Hop*, and *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* that tend to glorify overt aggression. The television shows are important to note because of their popularity among the sample populations demographic.

A third limitation of the study was the amount of time I was able to require the participants to commit in the study. While I was able to gain the data needed from the basic information sought out in the planned protocol/foundational questions it may have been helpful to request two interview sessions and to observe the girls in their separate educational setting to supplement the data. Another limitation was the Email, Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook contact because the girls tended to ignore my request because they were not required to answer my request in a timely manner; therefore, they would answer my request if they wanted to or only if contact was made with the parent/guardian. This time restraint effected the limitation of establishing research credibility with member checking limited to three participants. Nevertheless, within the sample of three, a high-level of reliability of the interview data was established.

Overall the study results were a valuable depiction of the life-world as experienced by the participants. Throughout the study I encouraged the participants to elaborate and clarify their experiences so that the narratives would depict clearly their stories in their language. The evolving themes were verified with the girls in the debriefing interview to check for validity. Furthermore all of the girls' relevant responses were combined in the findings analysis and explanation of the data.

Recommendations for Future Research

In consideration of this study's findings, the nine girls who participated spoke often regarding the need to be heard by someone, preferably the adults who were tasked with teaching, guiding, and protecting them in their environments despite the negative labels most of the girls had been assigned because of past behaviors. The interview conversations revealed the girls' desired compassion and understanding and they wanted the tools needed to handle conflict

better. However, not one girl was excited about signing up for another program with the intent to fix them as if they were broken and were required to attend in order to be fixed. They simply wanted to have an avenue to talk to someone who genuinely cared about the issues they face regularly in their neighborhoods, schools, and churches. As a result of the girls' voices included in this study it is obvious the path forward is to listen to this population of girls and incorporate their voices and experiences into the current dialogue. It is important that researchers and scholars go the step further to ensure research practices regarding relational aggression and bullying surpass the existing limits of a common framework that focuses mostly on middle class Caucasian girls or almost exclusively on boys. A gender-focused framework that includes inter-racial and intra-racial factors could reveal aspects that affect the growing population of aggressor/bully girls of color and provide multiple recommendations and paths for future research. As revealed by the girls in this study they often felt as if they were at war with the school teachers, administrators, and authorities. The girls appeared to feel the school conduct codes and guidelines were often enforced subjectively with bias depending on the classroom and school administration. Taking the girls' comments into consideration may be beneficial for researchers and scholars to at least include their voices in the conversation regarding relational aggression and bullying encounters especially with those girls with similar backgrounds. The issues that were challenging for the participants in this study who quickly became enraged during their aggression encounters might have been de-escalated if the girls felt as if they were part of the process to resolve the instances beforehand.

Overall what we know currently is that there is a marked increase in aggressive/bullying behaviors in the targeted population of girls of color which current data has reflected (Crenshaw, 2015). Therefore it would be helpful for action researchers in the school environment in

particular to include their perspectives when deciding on school conduct policies and guidelines. Furthermore, the findings here suggested that guidelines, policies and programs that are inclusive of the girls' neighborhoods and that center on creating a strong female community network of attachment are needed. For example, because the arts, literature, and drama can be a powerful tool in the lives of girls as seen when they discussed favorite shows and music, it is important that educators, administrators, and community stakeholders find a way to provide an avenue and space for girls of color where creativity is expressed so that the participants can warn other girls that are younger of getting caught up in the system of OCJB and its requirements. Using the philosophy of each one can teach one is feasible in a creative open atmosphere. Creating groups that are specifically tasked with working together on reforming one discipline guideline that they believe is biased and discriminatory in some way. Educators, administrators, and stakeholders have an open opportunity to provide girls of colors with avenues where they have the opportunity to mentor and be mentored themselves.

An inclusion neighborhood program such as this can possibly help girls of color avoid internalizing negative norms and stereotypes associated with the aggressor/bully labels they may carry. In addition, it is practical that the girls of color would benefit from positive gender and culturally responsive violence intervention and prevention settings. It is probable this type of setting can appeal to this neglected population and draw on the girls' narratives to inform researchers regarding the development of valuable strategies that can be used by the girls in order to redirect their negative behaviors and help them better navigate their lived experience.

Summary

The stories of the participants in this study provided an insightful perspective of the life-world experiences of nine adolescent girls of color who had been labeled aggressor/bullies in the

Midwest. Through their comments and responses to the questions in this study they identified areas of concern that are significant barriers to proper relational behaviors in their schools and communities. The findings here have revealed when it comes to relationship building the participants have experienced more negative results than positive when dealing in girl-to-girl or girl-to-female relationships.

Primarily, the important take-away from the findings revealed here should be there is a needed emphasis among researchers and scholars to seek out ways and include the voices of girls who are marginalized normally to address the structural and cultural inequities they spoke about. The findings indicated the importance of developing policies and guidelines that focus on the realities that adolescent girls of color face. The participants spoke candidly about using aggression as a means of survival, securing respect, and as a way to exhibit street toughness in their environments. In addition, the girls spoke about experiences that were complicated by domination and oppression involving racism. Therefore, in response it is vital that scholars and researchers begin to offer services, policies, and guidelines that reflect the girls' realities and address their needs accordingly.

Next, the results here indicated that the participants appeared to face significant stressors and anxieties related to their race, poverty, hostility with school authorities and the police, and aggression/rage from other girls. For example one of the girls spoke often about just staying at home from school because she was tired of the "female drama" on top of having "to be treated like a criminal" when entering the school front door daily (Madison). Thus, it would be instrumental if the programs offered started to focus on fostering girls' individual strengths and build upon their self-esteem in a relational capacity. The findings suggested it would be advantageous for educators and mentors to provide these girls with a nurturing and supportive

atmosphere where hope about their futures, positive feedback from trusting adult relationships and between adolescent girls is the focus. Utilizing a gender related, culturally specific strategy to program development should address a variety of girls, across a group of characteristics that have not been studied extensively.

Lastly, the girls who participated in this study represented a vulnerable population with various unique problems and needs relative to their daily life challenges and their surroundings. And it was obvious from many of the statements the girls shared during this study this is a very complex and difficult subject to study. However, there is need for dedicated researchers to seek out and encourage educators and stakeholders to use a balanced approach when working with these girls. Overall this study and other recent studies (Adamshick, 2006; Crick et.al, 2001; Dellasega and Nixon, 2003; Jones, 2010) support the use of strategies that integrate protective factors and trust, while urging healthy relational skills, and encouraging freedom in their identity development. The data here corroborates the current existing data found suggesting that in the world where girls of color live (urban communities), these girls felt as though they must use aggression and/or violence to build social capital, protect their reputations, and to survive (Crenshaw, 2012, 2015; Jones, 2004, 2010). The findings in this study show that it is crucial that the voices of girls of color be included in the discourses regarding relational aggression and bullying because the context by which they approach life is clearly displayed through anger and rage. The behaviors the girls in this study spoke about were clearly aggressive and sometimes violent. However, that the participants' stories demonstrated aggression and bullying is often the cost they pay for growing up in neighborhoods and in a society where they recognize the perceived injustices regarding gender, race, and poverty. Maybe then researchers can start to view the aggressor/bully girls of color as "girls first" that have chosen aggressor/bullying

behaviors as a language of hope to help them deal properly with the feelings and disparities they experience (Copeland-Linder et al., 2007). Understandably respecting and integrating the girls' voices into successful programs will not be a simplistic undertaking but it will take empathetic determined scholars to continue researching this marginalized community of girls if we want to address the increase in this phenomenon.

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APPENDIX A: Consent Letter



CONSENT FORM

Title of study: Investigating Relational Aggression and Bullying for Girls' of Color in Oklahoma: A Phenomenological Study

Principal investigator's name: Gayle L Flynn

Liberty University

Academic Department: The School of Education

You are invited to join in a research study regarding relational aggression and bullying. In this study, I am interested in understanding how aggressive teenage girls of color manage arguments involving other girls of color, their female friends, and peers. You were selected as a possible participant because this study focuses on the experiences of adolescent girls of color around relational aggressiveness and conflict in Oklahoma. The research specifies that relational conflict and bullying are typical of adolescent students in middle school and high school. You were selected because you are a girl of color, Black /African American, Latina/Hispanic American, Native American, or other, which includes two or more racial identities combined. You are 14 to 17 years old, and you may be involved in an Oklahoma County Juvenile Bureau program. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Gayle L Flynn is conducting this study in conjunction with the School of Education at Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia.

Background Information:

The purpose of the study is to focus on the aggression tendencies those adolescent girls of color experience. I am seeking to gain insight regarding relationally aggressive issues that take place in their settings; I will listen to what emerges as the participants use voice and language to describe their lived experiences.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete open-ended writing prompts that will be administered online via SurveyMonkey.com during the study. The writing-prompts will take at least 20 minutes to complete.
2. Participate in one interview that is audio taped that will last no longer than 30 minutes. The interview will be conducted during the program hours or to be scheduled at your convenience.
3. Participate in observations with other girls' of color that are audio or video taped that will last no longer than 1 hour. The observations will be conducted during the program hours at the program official's discretion.

4. Participate in email correspondence that will be used to communicate with you and to update you about the progress of the research or to ask further questions to clarify some of your answers when needed.
5. You may be asked to provide additional feedback later concerning some of the items discussed during the interview and/or observation to insure your thoughts and ideas are accurately interpreted.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has minimal risks that are no more than the participant might encounter in everyday life. In addition, every caution will be taken to ensure that you feel safe, comfortable, and have the freedom to withdraw from the study if you feel the need to. You may experience discomfort, anxiety, self-doubt, regretful reactions, moral stimulation, guilt, and increased awareness. Thus, every consideration will be made to stop at any point of frustration and discomfort continuing only with your expressed knowledge and permission.

You may find that reflecting on personal experience is an inspiring exercise that gives you a chance to think about questions you never considered before.

Compensation:

You will receive no payment or monetary compensation for your help or participation. In some cases community service hours will be used for your volunteer service.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained by changing your name on all research data and keeping consent forms separate from data to make sure that your name and identity will not become known or linked with any information you have provided. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. A coded document linking pseudonyms and participant names may be necessary but will also be kept in a locked file cabinet in Ms. Flynn's home office. Research records will be password protected and stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

In transcripts and all formal papers, pseudonyms will be used to maintain your confidentiality. Other identifying information, including the name of the program where the study is being conducted and the names of any officials mentioned, will also be changed in the transcripts.

There are limits to confidentiality for participation in this study. If there is any risk of harm to self, children, and/or others, the investigator is mandated to report this information to the appropriate authorities. Furthermore, it is important to note that in observations, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. However, all girls will be asked not to share outside of the session, but this does not guarantee confidentiality.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Juvenile Bureau programs. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. For interviews, you have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer.

Nonparticipation or withdrawal will not affect the services you receive from the court services program.

If you decide to withdraw from the study, you will be given the opportunity to review the existing audio/video recordings and request that your information be erased.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Ms. Gayle L Flynn. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or email gflynn@liberty.edu. You may also contact my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Tamika Hibbert, at tshibbert@liberty.edu or by phone [REDACTED] for any additional information regarding this study.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

I give my consent to be audio or video recorded during this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of parent or guardian: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

IRB Code Numbers: 1640.091213

IRB Expiration Date: 091214

APPENDIX B: Spanish Consent Letter



FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO

Título del estudio: investiga agresión relacional y la intimidación para niñas de Color en Oklahoma: un estudio fenomenológico

Principal nombre del investigador: Gayle L Flynn

Liberti Universito

Académica: La escuela de educación

Usted está invitado a participar en un estudio de investigación con respecto a r relacional agresión y acoso. En este estudio, estoy interesado en comprender cómo las adolescentes agresivas de color manejar argumentos que implican a otras chicas de color, sus amigas y sus compañeros. Seleccionaron como un posible participante porque este estudio se centra en las experiencias de las niñas adolescentes de color alrededor de agresividad relacional y conflicto en Oklahoma. La investigación específica que conflicto relacional y la intimidación son típicos de estudiantes adolescentes en la escuela intermedia y secundaria. Seleccionaron porque eres una chica de color, afroamericano, hispano americano, nativo americano u otros, que incluye dos o más identidades raciales combinan. 14 a 17 años, y usted puede estar involucrado en un programa de mesa juvenil del Condado de Oklahoma. Le pido que usted lea este formulario y preguntas que tenga antes de acceder a participar en el estudio.

Gayle L Flynn está llevando a cabo este estudio en conjunto con la escuela de educación en la Universidad Liberti, Lynchburg, Virginia.

Información de antecedentes:

El propósito del estudio es centrarse en las tendencias de agresión que sufren las niñas adolescentes de color. Estoy tratando de comprender temas relacionalmente agresivos que llevará a cabo en sus entornos; Escucharé lo que surge como los participantes utilizan la voz y el lenguaje para describir sus experiencias vividas.

Procedimientos:

Si usted acepta participar en este estudio, le ruego que haga lo siguiente:

1. Completa abierta escribiendo mensajes que serán administrados en línea vía SurveyMonkey.com durante el estudio. Las indicaciones de la escritura llevarán por lo menos 20 minutos para completar.
2. Participar en una entrevista que es audio grabado que durará no más de 30 minutos. La entrevista se realizará durante las horas de programa o programar a su conveniencia.
3. Participar en observaciones con otras niñas del color que sean de audio o vídeo grabado que durará no más de 1 hora. Las observaciones se realizarán durante las horas del programa a discreción de los funcionarios del programa.

4. Participar en correspondencia electrónica que se utilizará para comunicarnos con usted y para informarles sobre el progreso de la investigación o para hacer más preguntas para aclarar algunas de sus respuestas cuando sea necesario.
5. Se le pedirá proporcionar información adicional más adelante con respecto a algunos de los temas discutidos durante la entrevista o la observación para asegurar que tus pensamientos y se interpretan con precisión ideas.

Riesgos y beneficios de estar en el estudio:

El estudio tiene riesgos mínimos que son que no más que el participante pueden encontrar en la vida cotidiana. Además, se tomarán cada precaución para asegurarse de que se sienta seguro, cómodo y la libertad de retirarse del estudio si sientes la necesidad de. Te puede experimentar incomodidad, ansiedad, inseguridad, reacciones arrepentidas, estímulo moral, culpa y mayor conciencia. Por lo tanto, se realizará cada consideración para detenerse en cualquier punto de frustración y malestar continuar sólo con su expreso conocimiento y permiso.

Usted puede encontrar que reflexionar sobre la experiencia personal es un ejercicio estimulante que te da la oportunidad de pensar acerca de las preguntas que nunca considerado antes.

Compensación:

Usted no recibirá ningún pago o compensación monetaria por su ayuda o participación. En algunos casos horas de servicio comunitario se utilizará para su servicio voluntario.

Confidencialidad:

Los registros de este estudio se mantendrán privados. Confidencialidad de sus registros de investigación se mantendrá estrictamente por cambiar su nombre en todos los datos de investigación y guardar formularios de consentimiento separados de datos para asegurarse de que su nombre y su identidad no se convierten en conocido o relacionados con cualquier información que usted ha proporcionado. En cualquier tipo de informe podría publicar, no incluirá ninguna información que hará posible identificarlo. Un documento codificado una seudónimos y nombres de participantes puede que sea necesario, pero también se mantendrá en un archivador bloqueado en la oficina de la Sra. Flynn. Expedientes de investigación será contraseña protegida y almacenados de manera segura y sólo el investigador tendrá acceso a los archivos.

En las transcripciones y todos los documentos formales, seudónimos se utilizará para mantener su confidencialidad. Otra información de identificación, incluyendo el nombre del programa donde se está llevando a cabo el estudio y los nombres de los funcionarios mencionados, también se modificará en las transcripciones.

Existen límites a la confidencialidad para la participación en este estudio. Si existe algún riesgo de daño a uno mismo, los niños y otros, el investigador tiene el mandato de comunicar dicha información a las autoridades competentes. Además, es importante señalar que en las observaciones, no se garantiza confidencialidad. Sin embargo, todas las chicas se les pedirá no para compartir fuera de la sesión, pero esto no garantiza confidencialidad.

Carácter voluntario del estudio:

Participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Su decisión si desea o no participar no afectará sus relaciones actuales o futuras con programas de Liberti Universito o mesa juvenil. Si usted decide participar, eres libre de no responder a cualquier pregunta o retirar en cualquier momento sin afectar a las relaciones. Usted puede negarse a participar o retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento sin penalización. Para

entrevistas, usted tiene el derecho a pasar por alto o no responder a cualquier pregunta que usted prefiere no responder. No participación o retirada no afectará los servicios que usted recibe del programa de servicios de corte. Si usted decide retirarse del estudio, se le dará la oportunidad de revisar el existente las grabaciones de audio/video y solicitar que su información sea borrada.

Contactos y preguntas:

El investigador de realización de este estudio es la Sra. Gayle L Flynn. Usted puede pedir cualquier duda que tienes ahora. Si tienes preguntas más tarde, **que le animamos** a contactar con ella al [REDACTED] o por correo electrónico gflynn@liberty.edu. También puede comunicarse con mi disertación Presidenta del Comité, el Dr. Tamika Hibbert, en tshibbert@liberty.edu o por teléfono al [REDACTED] para cualquier información adicional con respecto a este estudio.

Si usted tiene preguntas o preocupaciones con respecto a este estudio y quisiera hablar con alguien que no sea el investigador, **le animamos** a contactar con la Junta de revisión institucional, 1971 University of Lynchburg, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502, o un correo electrónico a irb@liberty.edu.

Se le dará una copia de esta información para sus registros.

Declaración de consentimiento:

He leído y comprendido la información anterior. Me han hecho preguntas y han recibido respuestas. Doy mi consentimiento para participar en el estudio.

doy mi consentimiento para ser audio o vídeo grabado durante este estudio.

Signatura: _____ Date: _____

Firma del padre o tutor: ____ Fecha: ____

Firma del investigador: ____ Fecha: ____

IRB códigos: 1640.091213

La fecha de caducidad IRB: 091214

APPENDIX C: Liberty University IRB Approval Letter**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 12, 2013

Gayle L. Flynn
IRB Approval 1640.091213: Investigating Relational Aggression and Bullying for
Girls of Color in Oklahoma: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Gayle,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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UNIVERSITY.

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX D: IRB Change in Protocol and Extension Approval**Flynn, Gayle**

From: IRB, IRB <IRB@liberty.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, July 9, 2014 9:06 AM
To: Flynn, Gayle
Cc: Hibbert, Tamika S (School of Education); Garzon, Fernando (Center for Counseling and Family Studies); IRB, IRB
Subject: IRB Change in Protocol Approval: IRB Approval 1640.091213: Investigating Relational Aggression and Bullying for Girls of Color in Oklahoma: A Phenomenological Study
Attachments: Flynn_1640CIPSpanishConsentConsultantReview.doc

Good Morning Gayle,

This email is to inform you that your request to implement the following changes to your approved study has been approved:

1. Recruit participants referred to you by the Oklahoma County Juvenile Bureau utilizing department form CS-11,
2. Contact parents to set up a meeting to obtain and receive parental consent and participant assent,
3. Request Facebook and email information for online contact,
4. Utilize an online survey on SurveyMonkey to collect the data previously planned for the in-person writing prompt so that participants can answer the questions at a time and place convenient to them, and
5. Complete your observations during the School to Prison Pipeline (STPP) workshop that you conduct.

Thank you for submitting a copy of form CS-11, your SurveyMonkey information email, revised consent form, Spanish consent form, and workshop information. If additional changes are needed, please submit a change in protocol form and await IRB approval prior to implementation.

As part of normal IRB procedure, your Spanish consent form was reviewed by a Spanish language consultant, and revisions were made to the document (attached). Please utilize the revised document for all future parental consent procedures requiring the translated version.

Please contact the IRB if you have any questions. We wish you well as you conduct your research.

Thank you,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Institutional Review Board Coordinator
The Graduate School

(434) 592-5530

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APPENDIX E: Program and Site Consent Request

Oklahoma County Juvenile Bureau, Court Services
Christe Sweat, Chief of Court Services
JJCSWEAT@oklahomacounty.org
5905 North Classen Court
Oklahoma City, OK 73118

Dear Mrs. Christe Sweat:

As a doctoral candidate of Liberty University's School of Education, I am requesting your formal approval for a research study to be conducted by me in conjunction with my degree from Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia. The topic of my research is "Investigating Relational Aggression and Bullying for Girls' of Color in Oklahoma: A Phenomenological Study".

The goal of the study is to better understand from the viewpoint of teenage girls' of color how they go about confronting and dealing with arguments involving other girls' of color, their female friends, and peers. Peer relationships are critical to young girls and these often-changing relationships can be a major struggle during this stage in development. The results found during this research study will expand our knowledge of how girls' of color cope with relational forms of aggression and bullying that may be used to develop more supports in our schools and communities. This study will be looking to see what role the Survival Skills for Young Women (SSFYW) program has on the girls of color who are involved or referred.

While on site, it will be necessary to do the following only with parental and program consent:

1. Recruit and select at least fifteen to twenty girls of color for potential participation in the study.
2. The study will happen over a period of eight to fifteen scheduled weeks on site.
3. Conduct interviews with them and observe their behaviors while attending program classes.
4. Contact them through email to update and clarify their comments.

If you are willing to have your program participate in this study, please provide me with written authorization on formal bureau letterhead. I will provide copies of your letter to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board and all participants to assure them that you are aware and approve of the study. You may also contact my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Tamika Hibbert, at tshibbert@liberty.edu or by phone [REDACTED] for any additional information regarding my study.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,
Gayle L Flynn

APPENDIX F: Program and Site Approval Letter



Honorable Richard W. Kirby
Presiding Judge
Juvenile Division

James L. Saffle
Director

OKLAHOMA COUNTY JUVENILE BUREAU
"Providing Opportunities for Success"

Gayle Flynn

Re: Approval of Research Study—"Investigating Relational Aggression and Bullying for Girls' of Color in Oklahoma"

Dear Ms. Flynn:

We have reviewed your research proposal for your doctoral candidacy with Liberty University's School of Education and we have approved for your research to be conducted with the Oklahoma County Juvenile Bureau Court Services Department. Once you have finished your research report, we do request a copy be provided to us for our records.

You may contact Ms. Christe Sweat, Chief of Court Services, to coordinate the implementation of your research. You may reach Ms. Sweat at

If you have any questions you may reach me at

Sincerely,

Director

CC: Christe Sweat, Chief of Court Services
File

APPENDIX H: Flyer for Inviting Research Participants

**GIRLS OF COLOR NEEDED FOR RESEARCH
STUDY ON BULLYING AND AGGRESSION:
A picture is worth a thousand words or is it?**

Angry BULLY Anguish

Desperation Afraid?

Parents and guardians, I am looking for girls of color 14 to 17 to participate in a research study! As part of this study, you will be asked to complete protocol-writing prompts on aggression and bullying memories. You will be asked to participate in one interview and observation. As a participant in this study you would be asked about your experiences and memories from your own life and answer a few questions about them. The protocol-writing prompt will take approximately 20 minutes for you to complete. The interview session will last at least 30 minutes. The observation will last 1 hour. In appreciation of your time, you will receive individually wrapped snacks and a juice box. If you are interested, please inquire by contacting Ms. Gayle Flynn, Ed. S at [REDACTED] or send me an email at gflynn@liberty.edu.

Thank you!

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Research Review Board, Liberty University, and the Oklahoma County Juvenile Bureau, Court Services

APPENDIX I: Observational Protocol

Agreeable versus Antagonistic Behavior Observation Protocol (AABOP©)

Gayle Flynn, Ed.S.

Date of Observation _____ # of minutes observed _____

SSFYW Session Number _____

Course or Session Title _____

Instructor Name _____

Directions: Using the observation protocol below, the observer may observe up to two girls for 20 minutes each. Please use the following scale as a guide when you rate and observe the behaviors on the checklist below. Please rate each item according to the conduct displayed in the session observed.

1. Participants ID Number _____ Ethnicity (circle): AA-African American; HA-Latino/Hispanic American; NA-Native American; OMR-Other or Mixed Race

Antagonistic behaviors exhibited	Agreeable behaviors exhibited
<input type="radio"/> Speaks loudly and with greater emphasis	<input type="radio"/> Conversational tone and appropriate
<input type="radio"/> Gestures seem threatening (i.e. Finger pointing, rolling eyes, stomping feet)	<input type="radio"/> Nonthreatening relaxed body (i.e. Smiling, posture erect, head up)
<input type="radio"/> Ignoring and aloof as instructor teaches.	<input type="radio"/> Engaged in conversation and responds to instructor
<input type="radio"/> Little eye contact made or prolonged eye contact used to intimidate.	<input type="radio"/> Eye contact made willing to encourage, assist, and help.
<input type="radio"/> Rude comments made	<input type="radio"/> Polite comments made
<input type="radio"/> Verbally combative and argumentative	<input type="radio"/> Verbally peaceable and easy-going
<input type="radio"/> Extreme reactions (i.e. fist made, slashing motion with hand)	<input type="radio"/> Compassionate responses (i.e. Tears, holding hands and agreement head

	nods)
Comments:	Comments:

2. Participants ID Number _____ Ethnicity (circle): AA-African American; HA-

Latino/Hispanic American; NA-Native American; OMR-Other or Mixed Race

Antagonistic behaviors exhibited	Agreeable behaviors exhibited
<input type="radio"/> Speaks loudly and with greater emphasis	<input type="radio"/> Conversational tone and appropriate
<input type="radio"/> Gestures seem threatening (i.e. Finger pointing, rolling eyes, stomping feet)	<input type="radio"/> Nonthreatening relaxed body (i.e. Smiling, posture erect, head up)
<input type="radio"/> Ignoring and aloof as instructor teaches.	<input type="radio"/> Engaged in conversation and responds to instructor
<input type="radio"/> Little eye contact made or prolonged to intimidate.	<input type="radio"/> Eye contact made willing to encourage, assist, and help.
<input type="radio"/> Rude comments made	<input type="radio"/> Polite comments made
<input type="radio"/> Verbally combative and argumentative	<input type="radio"/> Verbally peaceable
<input type="radio"/> Extreme reactions (i.e. fist made, slashing motion with hand)	<input type="radio"/> Compassionate responses (i.e. Tears, holding hands and agreement head nods)
Comments:	Comments:

APPENDIX J: School to Prison Pipeline (STPP) Workshop

School to Prison Pipeline (STPP) Workshop: Revised for Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Created by the New York Civil Liberties Union Retrieved February 20, 2013 from
http://www.nyclu.org/files/publications/nyclu_school_prison_toolkit.pdf

Materials Needed:

Markers
Tape
Construction Paper
Index cards
Pens
Computer and Portable Projector

Agenda:

1. Icebreaker: Social Barometer
2. Short Film Screening: Schoolhouse to Jailhouse YouTube <http://youtu.be/TahVU8WPds>
3. STPP Map OR STPP Race (Note: Map is best for groups of 5 or less, STPP Race for groups of more than 5)
4. Role Play and Improvisation
5. Closing

Icebreaker: Social Barometer:

The facilitator hangs signs on opposite sides of the room that read “Strongly Agree” and “Strongly Disagree.” When the facilitator reads a statement, participants move to the side of the room with the appropriate sign. If they are neutral, participants will stand in the middle of the room. If they agree but not strongly, they will stand between the middle of the room and the “Strongly Agree” sign. If they disagree but not strongly, they will stand between the middle of the room and the “Strongly Disagree” sign. After the facilitator reads each statement and the participants have stopped moving, the facilitator will call on one person from the “Agree” side of the room, one from the “Disagree” side, and one from the middle of the room to share their opinions. During the discussion, participants may move from their original position if their opinion changes.

Suggested statements include:

1. Education is the key to success in life.
2. I enjoy school.
3. I feel that I am/was treated unfairly in school.
4. Today’s students are disrespectful and out of control and need to be dealt with harshly.
5. I have had a negative encounter with a school resource officer (SRO).
6. Oklahoma City should spend more money on schools than on prisons.
7. Metal detectors keep students safe.
8. The school system is racist/classist/sexist/heterosexist/xenophobic.
9. The criminal justice system is racist/classist/sexist/heterosexist/xenophobic.
10. Police personnel should be on school grounds only in emergencies.
11. No Oklahoma City schools should have metal detectors.

12. Low income students and students of color need harsher discipline in order to succeed.
13. Students should be suspended from school and arrested for violent behavior.
14. Once a student is suspended, she will never succeed in school.
15. School age students who are pushed out of school are more likely to get involved in crime.

Screening: Schoolhouse to Jailhouse:

Facilitator plays the Make the Road New York Youth Camera Action Film, Schoolhouse to Jailhouse. After the film, facilitator asks for feedback from the participants: What did you see?

STPP Floor Map:

1. Make the Map

The facilitator explains that the group will be making a life size map of the School to Prison Pipeline using construction paper and tape.

The facilitator places a “School” and “Prison” sign on opposite ends of several sheets of newsprint taped together. Facilitator then asks what a first step along the School to Prison Pipeline might be. The group works together to brainstorm and arrange on the newsprint the various steps along the pipeline. **These could include: suspension, suspension site, and alternative school, summons, dropping out, truancy, arrest, family court, criminal court, juvenile detention, prison, and deportation.**

2. Group discussion and brainstorming

Facilitator leads short discussion about the mapping, asking participants: What do you see?

The facilitator singles out the Suspension stop and begins a group brainstorm on what could have led to the suspension, e.g. fight with another student, theft, in the hall without a pass, weapon, talking back, post on Facebook page, refusal to go through scanners, fight with an SRO. The group then brainstorms underlying reasons for the suspension, e.g. harassment, race, LGBTQ, IEP, low test scores, boredom. Finally, the group creates **Get Out Of Jail Free cards that each describe something that could have kept the suspension from happening in the first place, e.g. mentoring, community involvement, sports, music, Gay Straight Alliance, tutoring, conflict resolution.**

School to Prison Race:

The facilitator explains that the group will line up on one side of the room. This side of the room represents school, while the opposite side represents prison. The facilitator will read a statement paired with a direction to move forward or backwards. If the statement is true for a student, he or she will follow the direction to move forward or backward. If the statement is not true for the student, he or she will remain in the same place. **After each statement, the facilitator reads a statistic about the School to Prison Pipeline.**

1. If you live in Oklahoma City and are Female, take one step forward.
 - For females, 13 percent of Black/African American students had an out of school suspension in 2011-2012 compared with 3 percent of white students.

2. If you are Latino/Hispanic, take one step forward.
 - In 2011-12, 10 percent of students suspended in Oklahoma were Latino/Hispanic.
3. If you are Black/African American take three steps forward.
 - In 2011-12, 24 percent of students suspended in Oklahoma were Black/African American.
4. If you identify as a student with special needs, take two steps forward.
 - Students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension (13%) than students without disabilities (6%). In contrast, English learners do not receive out-of-school suspensions at disproportionately high rates (7% suspension rate, compared to 10% of student enrollment).
5. If you have ever been suspended from school, take three steps forward.
 - Students who have been suspended are three times more likely to drop out of school by 10th grade than students who have not been. Dropping out of school triples the likelihood that a person will be incarcerated later in life. **Disproportionate suspensions of girls of color: While boys receive more than two out of three suspensions, black girls are suspended at higher rates (12%) than girls of any other race or ethnicity and most boys; American Indian and Native-Alaskan girls (7%) are suspended at higher rates than white boys (6%) or girls (2%).**
6. If you attend a school with permanent metal detectors, take three steps forward.
 - Police and SROs get involved in twice as many non-criminal incidents in schools with metal detectors than in schools without them. Schools with permanent metal detectors also receive less funding per student, are more overcrowded, and issue more suspensions than other schools.
7. If you are a youth of color, take one step forward.
 - Arrests and referrals to law enforcement, by race and disability status: While Black students represent 16% of student enrollment; they represent 27% of students referred to law enforcement and 31% of students subjected to a school-related arrest. In comparison, white students represent 51% of enrollment, 41% of students referred to law enforcement, and 39% of those arrested. Students with disabilities (served by IDEA) represent a quarter of students arrested and referred to law enforcement, even though they are only 12% of the overall student population.
8. If you have been arrested OR convicted of a misdemeanor such as trespassing or possession of a small amount of marijuana, take two steps forward.
 - Arrest and conviction records – even for misdemeanors – can affect your job and schooling options. Students become ineligible for federal student loans to attend college after two convictions for possession of a controlled substance.
9. If you live in the United States, take one step forward.
 - The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the entire world. Current research shows that in Oklahoma alone, the incarceration rate of women is a record 8.6 % of the total

inmate population, which is one of the highest in the country. Of that 8.6%, more than half are women of color at 5.1% (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2011).

Role Play and Improvisation:

The facilitator divides the participants into three groups. Each group is assigned a scenario. First, they discuss the scenario and what they think would happen. Second, they act out two versions of the scenario, one that leads to a positive outcome and one that leads to a negative outcome. After practicing their scenarios, each group performs both versions for the rest of the participants.

Scenario 1

On the morning of a big Math test, you set off the metal detector. The School Resource Officer asks you to step up to the table and begins scanning you with the wand and going through your purse/book bag. The SRO immediately finds your cell phone.

Scenario 2

You are sitting in class before everyone enters the room and you take out your comb and begin combing your hair. Before the bell rings the teacher approaches you and tells you to stop and asks you to give the comb to him/her.

Scenario 3

Your school's guidance counselor asks you to come to his/her office. He/she tells you that you are way behind in credits and may not graduate on time. He/she adds that you can leave high school and get your GED, and then offers you a paper to sign.

Closing

Participants go around in the circle and share one thing about schools they would like to see changed and/or one thing they can personally do to change schools.

APPENDIX K: Debriefing Statement

Debriefing Statement

Title of the Research Study: Investigating Relational Aggression and Bullying for Girls' of Color in Oklahoma: A Phenomenological Study

Conducted by: Gayle Flynn for a study conducted by me in conjunction with my degree from Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia.

Thank you so much for participating in this research study. Your participation was very valuable to me. I know that you could have been doing many other things with your time and I very much appreciate the time you devoted to participating in this study. Every caution was taken to ensure that everyone felt safe, and comfortable. There are important considerations that were kept in mind when I dealt with you during conversational interviews and observations. If you have experienced any discomfort, anxiety, self-doubt, regretful reactions, moral stimulation, guilt, or increased awareness there are vast resources that are available to deal with your emotions through the Oklahoma County Juvenile Justice Bureau network of providers. I would like to explain that some of these emotions might be completely normal. Please feel free to contact me Gayle Flynn at [REDACTED] or email gflynn@liberty.edu with any questions or concerns you may have or if you would like more information about the topic of relational aggression and bullying in girls you may be interested in the following resources:

1. The Ophelia Project.org. (2011). *Girls Relational Aggression Curriculum*. Retrieved from <http://www.opheliaproject.org/girls.html>
2. Rivera-Maestre, R. (2010). *Narratives of relational aggression and violence among urban adolescent girls*. (Ph.D. dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. AAT 3407515)
3. Wells, S. (2011). *Listening to adolescent girls in order to understand their response to relational aggression*. (Ed.D. dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. AAT 3475842).

In this study I was interested in understanding how aggressive teenage girls' of color go about confronting and dealing with arguments involving other girls' of color, their female friends, and peers. Peer relationships are critical to young girls and these often-changing relationships can be a major struggle during this stage in development. The results found during this research study will expand our knowledge of how girls of color cope with relational forms of aggression and bullying and how that knowledge may be used to develop supports in our schools and communities.

Thank you again for your participation!

Gayle Flynn
Chief Investigator

APPENDIX L: Sample of Essential and Related Themes

Code-Book

Thoughts/Focus	Frequency	Definition/Etymology	Statement/Example
Indifference: Coldness Immature Popularity	9 Coldness I don't care, 9 That's just the way it is. 3 Oh well 7 Must be on top	Apathetic; Lack of interest or concern about another girls feelings. No consequences. Neither good or bad	"as long as it ain't me" "I don't really hang with females they messy...but I can take care of me!" "Females always be hatin it's just the way it is", "Females can fight too an ain't nobody gone disrespect me and mines..." "Some of them b*tches was just be askin' for an ass whooping".
Consequences: Afraid of reputation Fight or get beat-up Embarrassed	6 Don't matter to me. 4 So it's no big deal to me. 2 Better not come home crying about nothing. 4 Protect your self	Sense of importance; A relationship between cause and effect	"What they gone do put me out of school... Oh Well...it is what it is!" "They [teachers] don't care bout us"
Victimization: Struggled Disappointed	9 They were talking about me. 7 Didn't nobody see them start it.	To be victimized; Ill-treatment and persecution suffered; unfairness of discipline	Teachers be "Taking sides" "I just get tired of seeing fake ass teachers who just want to get paid that's all, if they see something wrong with you, they won't bother asking if you're OK, or if you need something... they don't care about me and what I think."
Misunderstandings: Outsider	9 Prejudging me you don't know me like	A want of understanding;	"They [teachers] always saying that

Prejudice	that. 9 It makes me mad they don't believe me. 5 They don't like Black girls	confusion and misinterpretations of behavior	I'm mean. They don't even know me to be saying s*it like that bout me. That's why I can't stand to be around these fake people." "Why should I respect they [teachers] rules when they don't even respect them, they are the ones who is always breaking um"
Environment: Family Reputation Being ignored Receiving no help	9 The way it is in the "hood" 7 You don't want to mess with me. 6 Teacher don't help Me. 8 They don't care	The aggregate of the conditions in which a person or thing lives; atmosphere and surroundings	"It is normal to see fights between girls with box cutters, knives and bricks in her "hood"" "Of course it is difficult for people like you [the interviewer] who live in safe and stable neighborhoods to look at them like they are animals. But I can't help where my family lives I'm a child." "Where I was living with my momma people get killed in my old neighborhood if you don't fight! My granny told me to survive you better be tougher than anybody else."
Sociocultural: Blacks Poor Common to see races separate	8 My people 9 "ride or die" 7 don't take no mess. 6 I take what I want 9 they don't want us here	Both cultural and social factors to follow others; a love and bond with those who believe like you; cultivation of the mind	"When I'm gonna fight I'm gonna bring my girls and a crowd with me... Just in case they try to jump in somebody is there that got my back too. And it don't mean we a gang but I'm gonna

			<p>have backup for 'sure'</p> <p>"Hum ... like we ain't just friends we family"</p> <p>"We take care of our own... If you were raised in my hood... You aint got to worry about nobody hurtin' you or talking about you! We got you!"</p>
<p>Discipline: Suspended Arrested Delinquency</p>	<p>9 We get referrals 9 Put out of school. 5 Arrested 6 Don't like to go to school.</p>	<p>Treatment toward one to discipline, physical punishment; teaching; suffering; martyrdom</p>	<p>"all I gotta do is open my mouth sometimes and I get a [discipline] referral ... but if a White girl do the same thing or wear the same thing they don't get none [referral]"</p>
<p>Authorities: Scanners SRO Police</p>	<p>6 Hate scanners at the door 9 We get treated like we in prison when we come to school. 3 Police ignore things we tell them.</p>	<p>Treatment that corrects or punishes; order necessary for instruction.</p>	<p>"They [SROs] make you feel like you are at prison already. I mean cause I don't want nobody going through my purse, pockets and stuff."</p> <p>"I hate them scanners in the morning at the front door... I just go home if the line is long."</p> <p>"It's like they [adults in charge] be looking for us to fight and we just want to have someplace to go meet people and have fun."</p>
<p>Misinterpretations: Loud voice Expressions Emotions</p>	<p>6 Talking loud 7 I use my hands to explain stuff don't mean I'm gonna hit somebody! 9 My face is</p>	<p>Mix-ups in understanding the meaning of something; Lack of understanding or comprehension when viewing human</p>	<p>"Teachers be tripping when you just be explaining something an you move your hands and stuff... they be trippin"</p>

	expressive people just don't get it!	behavior; reading the wrong cues	"They don't need to be getting all in my face disrespecting me when everybody is around"
Jealousy: Intra-racial Inter-racial Male attention Good for self-esteem	6 They don't like my looks. 3 I ain't dark enough to be around the Black girls. 9 Feels good to be popular 9 Boys attention	Envious of a girl who appears to look better; feeling like one will get better treatment	"Like, females say slick stuff tryin to get at me to fight them back. Yella b*tch and callin' me a Ho' and everything... an I get bullied cause of my good hair it's long hair an I'm light-skinned, female haters and just say she think she fine. But I don't care cause I do look good an I aint shame of that!"

APPENDIX M: Sample Page Reflective Journal #1

Friday 3/28/14 12 AM
 Meeting was at 3:45

Speaking with G/ today she appeared to be not interested even when talking today. Going through the notes. She just wanted to get it over with. Not sure if she trusts me. Seemed to be doing this because Monyma said so. Was concerned about her trying to describe why she thinks she has the right to say whatever she wants to say to the adults in her school. To me she could use better self esteem.

A Big girl very close to my size and intimidating if you allow her to get to you. I remember feeling excited about telling something to my friends that I had heard Gossip or whatever. But being labelled as the aggressive Black woman. Still to this day! Hum...

Maybe there is something to her comments. Maybe she is being singled out because she is a large build Black girl. Hum... I'm not sure but she seems to be asking for help from frustrated people!

APPENDIX N: Sample Page Reflective Journal #2

10:15 pm 5/22/2014 meeting was 5:10 pm

Meeting with J told was (I believe) the most positive. This girl is talented and just needs some direction and a listening ear. Female mentor could benefit from. She impressed me with her ability to adjust to some bad circumstances. She appeared to be more bark than bite. I find it hard to believe that she gets in so much trouble. But she may be trying really hard to impress me. Hmm Her foster mom is pretty patient with her and she seems to like being in this home while talking she tried to self-regulate. I could tell by her pauses and how closely she watched my reaction to what she said. I felt like she was wanting to please me... not sure why? Clearly J could benefit from some type of scheduled contact where she feels like she can contribute. That's important to keep in mind. Need to email her to see what she thinks?

APPENDIX O: Chain of Evidence

Individual Chain of Evidence: Participant #1 Neveah

1. OCJB Form CS-11 Receive Date: 2-4- 2014

2. 1st Phone contact date: 2-16-2014 6:00pm

Notes: Spoke with kinship/guardian and I was notified Neveah was still in the OCJB Bury House expected release date was to be early March because she has not been conforming to the rules. Guardian frustrated about the attitude of Neveah asked me if I could go and speak with her in lockup because she thinks the study would be a good idea for Neveah. I consented to talk with her parole officer to get approval for the visit.

3. Scheduled introduction to study meeting: Location OCJB Bury House 2-21-2014

Notes: Neveah was allowed to speak to me regarding the study. Introduction was made spoke briefly about her history she allowed me to see her court date and asked if I would attend. Neveah was concerned that she would not be released before her birthdate in May. Parole officer was in the room during the entire meeting because Neveah has a reputation of misconduct when she does not get her way.

4. Signed consent to participate: Neveah Friday 2-21-2014 2:25pm

Notes: Called guardian to notify that Neveah consented scheduled meeting for their signature.

5. Meeting with guardian and confirmed demographic information and collected consent signature from guardian obtained Friday 2-28-2014 6:15 pm

6. Sent email to parole officer containing link for survey monkey protocol writing prompts 3-31-2014

Notes: Received information per email Neveah will be released intake parole officer is changing to her release officer. That officer will encourage Neveah to return the survey and contact me today.

7. Received Survey Monkey reply from Neveah Friday 3-31-2014 9:48 pm.

8. Scheduled personal interview Friday 4-4-2014 6:56 pm

Notes: Location guardian's home Neveah extremely happy she is out of detention lockup. Tensions in the home while we talk because there were unexpected children there that were the guardian's biological children in the home. I suggested we move the interview to Wendy's and Neveah agreed to finish up the interview there. Thankfully the restaurant was empty I provided Neveah with a meal and she finished the interview at 7:56pm.

9. Reading and transcribing interview data Friday 4-4-2014 9pm

10. Reading data and comparing transcribed data to the digital recording. Saturday 4-5-2014

11. Contacted Neveah by email and Facebook Sunday 4-6-2014

Notes: Neveah has not replied to my messages hoping to finalize her transcripts before my next interview. Concerned? Left message with guardian Tuesday 4-8-2014

12. Received phone call from Neveah 4-9-2014.

Notes: Neveah frustrated about guardians saying she is going to put her out as soon as she turns 18 on her birthday 5/26/2014. Offered advice on coping with the guardians demands and scheduled a meeting to go over her transcripts.

13. Debriefing and transcript verification Friday 4-11-2014

Notes: Concerned about Neveah and the selection of her old crew as she is turning 18 in a few days. Facebook postings mention old beefs with other females that have not gone away.

14. Added themes from her transcript to Code-Book.

15. Re-read Neveah's transcripts modified codebook entries 10-23-2014 after speaking with and comparing the language from new participant Jada.

APPENDIX P: SurveyMonkey.com

Investigating Relational Aggression and Bullying for Girls of Color in Oklahoma: A Phenomenological Study. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/TGL7MNF>

Protocol Writing Prompt Questions

The following questions are designed to stir up memories of your experiences or your involvement in aggressive relationships with other girls your age. Please think critically about information that is read and answer as honestly as possible. Your opinions may be expressed through poetry, rap or song. Thank you for your help!

***1. In your own words what is relational aggression and what does it look like to you?**

***2. In your own words what is bullying and what does it look like to you?**

***3. Do you commit relational and physical aggressive acts on others? If so why?**

***4. Where do you see aggression occur most often?**

***5. How often does relational aggression turn into physical violence?**

***6. Have you ever been a victim of relational or physical aggression? If so, how did it make you feel?**

Submit

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