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Queen Bees: An Examination of the Mean Girl Phenomenon

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Queen Bees: An Examination of the
Mean Girl Phenomenon

By

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Abstract

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As highlighted in the media, it is clear that the mean girl phenomenon is becoming a dangerous and growing trend in schools around the country. While girls are less likely than boys to engage in physical fights, they fight within friendship networks to damage relationships and reputations. Within these friendships, the “queen bee” is the girl holding supreme power and influence over the rest, using a combination of charisma and manipulation to keep absolute control. This study examined who these queen bees are and why they negatively dominate schools by asking females in grades six through college senior to discuss hypothetical vignettes involving queen bees and their victims. Participants also completed measures of their observations and own experiences of relational aggression. I hypothesized that girls would choose to trade places with the most popular girl if given the chance, and that girls would rather identify as the queen bee than the victim. In addition, I hypothesized this mean girl phenomenon would be reported as a relevant and problematic trend at all ages. Findings show that girls would rather identify as the victim than the queen bee, as the queen bee is consistently negatively characterized, and that relational aggression is a significant issue across all ages. Our results further the understanding of this phenomenon and help us create solutions for ending relational aggression among girls in schools for the future.

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Queen Bees: An Examination of the Mean Girl Phenomenon

In early research involving aggression, females were rarely included. Instead, it was believed that only males expressed aggression (Gomes, 2007). However, the “mean girl phenomenon” is slowly taking over our culture; it is illustrated in movies such as *Mean Girls*, television shows such as *Gossip Girl*, and is plaguing schools around the nation. For example, the tragic story of Phoebe Prince is one of a victim powerless against a clique of mean girls. In 2010, Phoebe moved from Ireland to western Massachusetts and struggled to fit in, especially after a short fling with a senior football player. As a result, a Boston Globe (2010) article tells how:

she became the target of the Mean Girls... They followed Phoebe around, calling her a slut... The name-calling, the stalking, the intimidation was relentless...Phoebe was walking home from school when one of the Mean Girls drove by in a car. An insult and an energy drink came flying out the car window in Phoebe’s direction. Phoebe kept walking, past the abuse, past the can, past the white picket fence, into her house. Then she walked into a closet and hanged herself. Her 12-year-old sister found her. You would think this would give the bullies who hounded Phoebe some pause. Instead, they went on Facebook and mocked her in death... The Mean Girls are pretty, and popular, and play sports. So far, they appear to be untouchable, too. (Cullen, 2010)

This is only one example of how far relational aggression has gone in our culture. However, little research has examined what drives this phenomenon and who these mean girls are. Yet due to tragic deaths and other horror stories of adolescent victimization, it is time to

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focus directly on this phenomenon. Rachel Simmons (2002) opens her book Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls with a powerful message:

Silence is deeply woven into the fabric of the female experience. It is only in the last thirty years that we have begun to speak the distinctive truths of women's lives, openly addressing rape, incest, domestic violence, and women's health...Now it is time to end another silence: There is a hidden culture of girls' aggression in which bullying is epidemic, distinctive, and destructive. (Simmons, 3)

These glares, rumors, and direct backstabbing cannot be defined simply as bullying and swept into the language of bullying and violence that is discussed in schools. "In fact, the word bullying couldn't be more wrong in describing what some girls do to hurt one another. The day-to-day aggression that persists among girls, a dark underside of their social universe, remains to be charted and explored. We have no real language for it" (Simmons, 69). Therefore, it is clear that our research on the mean girl phenomenon is imperative. To achieve our goal of ending relational aggression and empowering young women, we need to understand exactly who these mean girls are in order to move forward and end their reign in high schools throughout America.

Importance of Friendships

Research by Carol Gilligan has demonstrated that relationships play a central role in the social development of girls (Simmons, 2002). She concluded that girls define danger in their lives as isolation, or "the fear that by standing out they will be abandoned," while boys differently define danger as "fear of entrapment or smothering" (Simmons, 30). Therefore, the female world is one based on attachment instead of separation and replacement. "The centrality

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of relationship in girls' lives all but guarantees a different landscape of aggression and bullying, with its own distinctive features worthy of separate study" (Simmons, 30).

Intimacy is also central to female friendships. "Intimacy and anger are often inextricable. The intensity of girls' relationships belongs at the center of any analysis of girls' aggression. For long before they love boys, girls love each other, and with great passion" (Simmons, 2002, 30). For this reason, the "relationship itself is often the weapon with which girls' battles are fought" (Simmons, 31). When a conflict occurs between two girls who are unable to voice their anger, the relationship itself becomes the problem that is used as a weapon in conflict.

Similarly, one of the greatest factors Simmons noted was the fear of solitude:

Despite the cruel things that happened—the torrents of vulgar e-mail and unsigned notes, the whispered rumors, the slanderous scribbles on desks and walls and lockers, the sneering and name-calling—what crushed girls was being alone. It was as though the absence of bodies nearby with whom to whisper and share triggered in girls a sorrow and fear so profound as to nearly extinguish them. (Simmons, 2002, 32)

Girls state that their biggest fear is being seen alone, and therefore girls choose to remain part of abusive or unhealthy friendships rather than be alone.

Finally, jealousy is another central aspect of female peer relationships. "Jealousy is unbridled desire. Jealousy transforms friends into mere objects, as girls obsess over whatever part of them—body, hair, boyfriend, skin—they want for themselves" (Simmons, 2002, 119). Therefore, it is clear how powerful friendships are between adolescent girls. Not only are they learning the rules of intimacy, but they are also faced with the fear of solitude and feelings of jealousy towards other girls. As a result, it is easy to see why these relationships can become so

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dangerous and destructive for young girls who are willing to give anything to find intimacy among peers in order to avoid solitude.

Relational Aggression

Researchers have identified two types of aggression: overt aggression and covert aggression. Overt aggression is physical aggression that can be easily observed, such as hitting and pushing, while covert aggression includes acts that are not easily observable, such as gossiping and social isolation (Gomes, 2007). A small group of psychologists at the University of Minnesota identified three subcategories of covert aggression, including relational, indirect, and social aggression (Simmons, 2002). Relational aggression is defined by “acts that harm others through damage (or the threat of damage) to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion” (Simmons, 21). Examples of relational aggression include acts such as excluding someone for revenge or sabotaging a relationship between peers. Indirect aggression is “covert behavior in which the perpetrator makes it seem as though there has been no intent to hurt at all” (Simmons, 21). Spreading rumors about friends or peers is a prime example of indirect aggression. Finally, social aggression “is intended to damage self-esteem or social status within a group” (Simmons, 21). Research concludes that men exhibit more incidences of overt physical aggression, while females express aggression indirectly and emotionally (Gomes).

Through the use of body language, relational aggression can be just as damaging as physical aggression. “Nonverbal gesturing,” or body language, is defined as the basis of relational aggression (Simmons, 2002). This covert form of aggression is so powerful because “body language is at once infuriatingly empty of detail and bluntly clear. It cuts deep precisely

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because a girl will know someone is angry at her, but she doesn't get to find out why and sometimes with whom it's happening. In girls' worlds, the worst aggression is the most opaque, creating a sort of emotional poison ivy which makes it hard to concentrate on anything else" (Simmons, 44).

Before people recognized relational forms of aggression they believed males were much more aggressive than females; "Buss (1961) claimed that women are so seldom aggressive, that female aggression is not worth the trouble to study" (as cited in Bjorkqvist, 1994, 177). However, more recent research has consistently found that girls do experience aggression and that they express this aggression in nontraditional ways. When examining how female aggression differs from male aggression, research concludes "cultural rules against overt aggression led girls to engage in other, nonphysical forms of aggression" (Simmons, 2002, 20-21). Unfortunately, the untrained eye often misses this aggression; "While boys come in with a black eye, girls are usually under the radar, caring their scars inside, hidden even from their parents" (Elizabeth, 2002, 2).

Crick and Grotpeter (1995) studied these gender differences in sampling third-through sixth-grade children using a peer nomination instrument to assess social adjustment, overt aggression, prosocial behavior, and isolation. Findings from this study illustrate the distinct difference between relational and overt aggression, as they found that girls are significantly more relationally aggressive than boys. In addition, results provoked concern that relationally aggressive children are at risk for serious adjustment difficulties, such as rejection, loneliness, depression, and isolation.

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In order to further study these gender differences, Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, and Kaukiainen (1992) studied 8, 11, and 15-year-olds through peer nomination techniques. They found that the use of direct and indirect aggression is a very definite phenomenon during the adolescent period; the use of indirect aggression is “dependent on maturation and on the existence of a social network that facilitates the usage of such means for inflicting pain on one’s enemy” (Bjorkqvist et al.). For the eight-year-olds, aggressive expression did not differ significantly, while indirect aggression increased drastically around the age of eleven among girls; eleven and fifteen year-old girls demonstrated the manipulation of friendship patterns as a primary strategy of aggression. Since girls mature faster verbally than boys, they therefore have the verbal skills necessary for manipulation.

Similarly, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, and Peltonen (1988) found that at ages eleven and twelve girls used more indirect means of aggression while boys used direct means. Girls also demonstrated tighter peer social structures, therefore making it easier for them to exploit relationships and harm their victims through indirect manipulative aggression (Lagerspetz et al.). The authors conclude, “the social life of 11-to 12 year-old girls is more ruthless and aggressive than has been suggested by previous research” (Lagerspetz et al., 412).

Simmons (2002) acknowledges that girls do not fight like boys; they do not use direct physical violence, but instead girls shy away from open conflict and express aggression through covert and indirect means. “Unlike boys, who tend to bully acquaintances or strangers, girls frequently attack within tightly knit networks of friends, making aggression harder to identify and intensifying the damage to the victims” (Simmons, 3).

Everyone knows how mean girls can be to each other:

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They can talk behind each other's backs, tease and torture one another, police each others' clothing and body size, and fight over real or imagined relationships with boys... In doing so they not only hurt other girls and get hurt, but in their search for power and visibility, they also unwittingly participate in and maintain our society's largely negative views of girls' and women's relationships as untrustworthy, deceitful, and manipulative. (Brown, 2003)

What causes these differences in how boys and girls express aggression? Past research suggests that our culture plays a large role in defining our learned gender roles. For example, in our Western culture, males are encouraged to be dominant and express physical aggression (O'Neil, 2008). "Parents positively reward verbal and physical aggression in sons and positively reward interpersonal and social skills in daughters" (Wood, 2007, 164-165 as cited in O'Neil, 9). Therefore, children learn to express their aggression differently at a young age: "there is a strong social imperative upon girls/women to hide their intent to hurt others by initiating peaceful outcomes and delivering their aggression in culturally approved, but more covert ways" (O'Neil, 9). Similarly, young girls play in ways that involve cooperation and talk, which "provides a developmental basis for their style of aggressive expression" (O'Neil, 9).

In addition, a review of the literature on female victimization shows being 'popular' and accepted in a peer group involved different factors for boys and girls; "For boys, the number one requirement is athletic ability. There is a driving need in boys to model a macho-masculinity to prove themselves acceptable to their peers. For girls, it is first looks, then clothes and then socioeconomic status" (Catanzaro, 2011, 86). Therefore, past research (Swearer, 1999, as cited in Catanzaro) has found that girls have many motivations for aggression: "competition over ideals of beauty and female perfection, misplaced anger about mistreatment in school, sexual

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harassment, jealousies over boys, and a desire for power that is designed to result in respect and popularity” (86).

Valerie Hey studied the notes adolescent girls pass to each other in school. She found that over 90 percent of the notes were concerned with the girls’ relationships with each other, while only a few were about relationships with boys (Brown, 2003). “Girls are whispering, passing notes, spreading rumors, and gossiping about ‘who we like and who we don’t really like,’ because these are proven, subterranean methods of communication, and because in their secrecy and invisibility is the power to contain and control other girls” (Brown, 107).

While friendships between girls can be incredibly rewarding and satisfying, they are also plagued with fear. “The possibility of loyalty and coalition building between girls is constantly threatened by the competitiveness, fraudulence, and disconnection necessary for girls to be taken seriously, to be respected, or to be the chosen token girl who gets the guy or reaches the elite social position in her school” (Brown, 2003, 172). As a result, we must wonder if girls always have a small amount of doubt about the validity and motivation behind their friendships.

Research has begun to examine how adolescent girls cope with relational aggression. Remillard and Lamb (2005) surveyed high school and middle school girls and asked questions such as, “We want you to think of a time in the past year or two when a very close female friend hurt you by either excluding you, or gossiping, or saying something mean behind your back. Please describe the incident below in detail and say how you handled it and what happened after” (Remillard and Lamb, 226). Results showed that 40% of the girls “remained friends and became even closer friends with the aggressor of the incident they described” (Remillard and Lamb, 226). These findings suggest that girls may have developed effective coping mechanisms to deal

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with relational aggression. However, results also showed that the closer a girl felt to her friend at the time of the aggression, the more emotionally hurt she felt by the incident; this suggests that relational aggression is an extremely effective method of hurting a close friend.

In addition, results showed that the more angry a girl was at the time of the aggressive act, the less likely it was that she still considered that girl her friend (Remillard and Lamb, 2005). Girls that experienced more hurt used coping strategies such as wishful thinking, blamed themselves, engaged in tension reduction, and kept to themselves. This relationship between passive and avoidant coping strategies and the level of hurt suggests that much more work needs to be done with girls to promote more effective strategies that would allow girls to discuss indirect aggressive behavior openly, therefore ending gossip and creating stronger friendships.

Further, “the girls’ ratings of whether or not they still considered the aggressor a friend were a full point lower than their ratings of what they believed were the other girls’ perceptions of the friendship. This would indicate that they believed that the other girl thought the friendship was in better shape than did the girl who was aggressed upon” (Remillard and Lamb, 2005, 227). Therefore, due to these coping strategies, the aggressor could have no idea that what she said or did truly hurt the friendship, further continuing the cycle of relational aggression.

Similarly, Grotper and Crick (1996) studied the characteristics of friendships plagued with relational aggression. Self-report measures regarding the quality of their friendships were given to twelve year-olds, and results showed that “friendships of relationally aggressive children were characterized by relatively high levels of intimacy, exclusivity/jealousy, and relational aggression within the friendship context” (Grotper and Crick, 2328). In addition, results illustrated that relationally aggressive children reported that they did not self-disclose to

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their friends, but their friends often self-disclosed to them, supporting the belief that relationally aggressive children seek to obtain private information from their friends to then use against them.

To further this research, Storch, Brassard & Masia-Warner (2003) examined the relationships between peer victimization, including overt and relational victimization, loneliness, social anxiety, and prosocial behavior from peers. Adolescents in the 9th and 10th grades were administered the Social Experience Questionnaire, SAS-A, SPAI-C, MASC, and Asher Loneliness Scale. These results were the first to show that adolescent boys and girls who are overtly and relationally victimized by their peers experience higher levels of social anxiety and loneliness; “overt and relational victimization are positively associated with significant distress including fear of negative evaluation, physiological symptoms, and social avoidance” (Storch et al., 13). While this study found that adolescent boys report higher levels of overt victimization than girls, these results also dispute past research, as they found no gender differences for relational victimization. Similarly, relational aggression in preschool boys was associated with greater peer acceptance (Crick et al., 1997, as cited in Young, Boye, and Nelson, 2006). As a result, this research suggests, “consequences of relational aggression may vary according to social contexts and the general reputation of the child or adolescent” (Young et al., 304).

Relational aggression has been found to have many negative effects. Owens, Slee, and Shute (2000) conducted both focus groups and pair and individual interviews with 15-year old girls. In order to begin discussion, a vignette was read aloud to the girls that dictated a typical situation of a girl who came back to school after being absent for a day, only to find her friends ignoring her and spreading rumors about her (Owens et al., 2000). The girls who identified as victims of similar relational aggression expressed psychological pain, including depression,

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anxiety, a loss of self-esteem, and fear for future relationships. This pain then turns into a desire to escape; girls expressed their wishes of leaving their schools or thoughts of suicide. In addition, the girls reported that “fear that the harassment from peers may not end and witnesses or bystanders do not intervene for fear or what may happen to them” (Owens et al., 2000, 359). Girls expressed a sense of fear and paranoia in the role of these witnesses, as they are scared the same thing will happen to them. These results make it very clear how distressing and painful relational aggression is, and therefore the need for future research on prevention is essential.

It is clear that awareness of relational aggression must be raised in order to end this meanness; “Relational aggression needs to be understood as it has lifelong consequences for all involved” (James et al., 2010, 441). Girls may remain in these unhealthy relationships because they believe these negative behaviors are a normal part of friendship, or because they are too afraid of losing the friendship. In order to educate girls, a two-part intervention program, ‘A Friend in Deed,’ was designed to teach lessons focused on friendship, including how you should treat and be treated by a good friend, and the effects of malicious gossip (James et al.). Girls ages 16-17 in Ireland were involved in discussions about relational aggression, types of popularity, and the importance of honest communication. At the follow-up, results showed that almost half of the girls felt that the lessons had made a difference in their class atmosphere. In addition, the girls exhibited greater awareness of how their behavior, including exclusion, gossip, and inappropriate remarks, affected others. The girls participating in the study appeared to enjoy discussing these issues and showed good recall of the content of the lessons, suggesting that they were interested in discussing these prominent issues. Therefore, this study shows that raising awareness of relational aggression allows girls to reflect on their own behavior and serves as an excellent preventative measure.

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In conclusion, research on relational aggression is important because “educators have an important role in identifying relationally aggressive behaviors and implementing interventions for victimized students” (Young, Boye and Nelson, 2006, 303). It is necessary that these research findings are acknowledged in schools, as it is important for school administrators to acknowledge if “victimized adolescents are avoiding or missing out on learning or social opportunities as a result of peer maltreatment and associated social avoidance” (Storch et al., 2003, 13).

Cliques

Due to this importance of peer relationships and friendships, girls often form “cliques” or tight, exclusive friendship networks. Social identity theory suggests that people continuously categorize their social worlds, defining themselves as members of ingroups, while those who are dissimilar are defined as members of outgroups (Willer and Cupach, 2011). In accordance with this theory, cliques are “interaction-based, relatively intimate groups of individuals who spend considerable and often exclusive amounts of time together and who share similar interests and behaviors” (Willer and Cupach, 306). Throughout history, adolescents have categorized each other into “peer cliques and crowds that vary in their degree of social centrality and popularity” (Willer and Cupach, 306). In accordance to social identity theory, a desire for a positive social identity drives the obsession for popularity and being well liked. However, the inclusion and exclusion of cliques can be incredibly damaging as well; “Cliques are circles of power wherein leaders attain and wield influence over their followers by cyclically building them up and cutting them down, first drawing them into the elite inner circle and allowing them to bask in the glow of popularity and acceptance, and then reducing them to positions of dependence and subjugation by turning the group against them” (Adler and Adler, 1995, 145).

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In her book, Queen Bees & Wannabes, Wiseman examines this issue of popularity and cliques among adolescent girls. While the standard definition of a clique is an exclusive group of girls who are very close friends, Wiseman alters this definition and refers to a clique as a “platoon of soldiers who have banded together to navigate the perils and insecurities of adolescence...Group cohesion is based on unquestioned loyalty to the leaders and an us-versus-the-world mentality” (19). These cliques are thought to be the most dangerous and damaging in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. As she begins her discussion of cliques, Wiseman makes a point to note that cliques are completely natural; girls are in need of a group of close girlfriends, and generally these relationships are healthy. However, she adds “something in the way girls group together also sows the seeds for the cruel competition for popularity and social status” (Wiseman, 2002, 20).

For example, one powerful quotation was taken directly from a 15-year-old girl as she discussed the “rules” of her friendship clique. Wiseman relays:

The Rules of The Clique: A Snapshot

My group has rules and punishments about everything. There are seven of us and there can only be seven. I mean, we have kicked people out for breaking the rules and only then can we add someone.

We have rules about what we wear. You can only wear your hair up (like in a ponytail) once a week. You can't wear a tank top two days in a row. You can only wear jeans on Friday and that's also the only time you can wear sneakers. If you break any of these rules, you can't sit with us at lunch. Monday is the most important day because you want to look your best—it sets the tone for the rest of the week. So wearing something like sweats on a Monday is like going to church and screaming “I hate Jesus!” when you walk

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in the door. Friday is downtime. When we hang out that night, we wear sweats, watch movies, and talk about what bothered us during the week.

If you want to invite someone to lunch [from outside the group], you have to formally invite them and the group has to vote on it. We do this because it's like buying a shirt without your friends telling you whether you look good in it or not. You may like someone, but you could be wrong. If three or more people in the group really like her, we offer the girl an extended invitation—for a whole week. That's a trial period—it's like getting a dog at the pound and trying her out before you get her a license and call her "Fluffy." -Gabrielle, 15 (p. 37)

Jessica, a junior at a suburban Maryland high school, also shares her clique's "rules":

No 1: clothes. You cannot wear jeans any day but Friday, and you cannot wear a ponytail or sneakers more than once a week. Monday is fancy day— like black pants or maybe you bust out with a skirt. You want to remind people how cute you are in case they forgot over the weekend. O.K., 2: parties. Of course, we sit down together and discuss which ones we're going to go to, because there's no point in getting all dressed up for a party that's going to be lame. No getting smacked at a party, because how would it look for the rest of us if you're drunk and acting like a total fool? And if you do hook up with somebody at the party, please try to limit it to one. (Talbot, 2002, 28)

Therefore, it is clear that the scenes portrayed in the popular 2004 film *Mean Girls* were not an exaggeration, but instead were adapted directly from Wiseman's book about real situations involving real girls. Although few like to acknowledge the truth, young girls actually have these strict rules and regulations in their friendship circles about what they are and are not allowed to

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wear, how to act, and how to treat their peers. Further, “in clique expulsions, punishments range from pretending the girl never existed to embarking on campaigns of scorching cruelty” (Simmons, 2002, 87).

Why are these cliques so powerful, and what are they looking to protect? “Not surprisingly, in a culture that obsessively promotes heterosexual romance and values male independence, assertiveness, and protection, the disintegration of girls’ groups and the tensions and fighting between close friends are most often associated with finding and keeping boyfriends” (Brown, 2003,140). Research has suggested that boys are a large factor in the mean girl phenomenon; girls are constantly competing with each other to attract the attention of the desired male, and they are willing to go to extreme lengths to keep this attention away from other girls and only for themselves. As a high school freshman stated, “Your friends know you and how to hurt you. They know what your real weaknesses are. They know exactly what to do to destroy someone’s self-worth. They try to destroy you from the inside” (Simmons, 2002, 43).

Past research has concluded that leaders of popular cliques use aggression toward “socially threatening subordinate clique members to secure their own dominant position within the clique (Adler & Adler, 1998; Merten, 1997, as cited in Closson, 2009). Closson (2009) studied the relationship between social status, or perceived popularity, and early adolescents’ experiences within their cliques. Early adolescent girls in grades 6-8 completed a series of questionnaires including both self-report and peer-report measures. Participants nominated an unlimited number of participating classmates as most popular and least popular. Results identified the possible negative drawbacks membership in perceived popular cliques may have, as well as benefits. Compared to girls of “lower-status cliques,” girls in the perceived popular cliques use more instrumental relational aggression. Researchers concluded that by using

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relational aggression toward other popular clique members, members were able to effectively maintain or increase their own social status within the clique by decreasing the social position of others.

Despite these drawbacks, girls in the perceived popular cliques also scored the highest on peer likability and peer social impact; “Despite their use of aggression, perceived popular early adolescents are still held in high esteem by many of their peers” (Closson, 2009, 429). Similarly, membership in the perceived unpopular cliques is associated with the fewest positive aspects. Researchers have suggested that these girls may not have strong positive feelings for each other because these relationships might be forced due to exclusion from the larger peer group. Closson’s (2009) study also found that social dominance was present in cliques at all levels of perceived popularity; “the higher one’s dominance rank within the clique, the more aggressive toward clique members one is likely to be regardless of the perceived popularity of the individual’s clique” (430). On the contrary, results showed the girls in the average cliques were reasonably liked by their peers, well-liked by their friends, and engaged in both low levels of aggressive behavior and high levels of prosocial acts within their cliques. These findings support the theory of Adler and Adler (1998) that “children in middle friendship circles may have the highest-quality friendships and engage in less aggression within their cliques because they are satisfied with their midlevel status and are less concerned with ascending the hierarchy” (Closson, 430). Therefore, despite the admiration perceived popular cliques receive from their peers, friendships within popular cliques may be of poorer quality than friendships of lower status.

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The Cycle of Popularity

Girls' peer relationships at early adolescence are framed not in established hierarchies of power and privilege, but in cycles of popularity and isolation that shift and change in sometimes unpredictable ways. While popularity may be thought of in vertical terms by girls and boys alike, for girls it is experienced more as the center of a web of relationships; the closer you are to the center, the safer and the more powerful you become. One wants to be inside, included, chosen, in on the secrets. (Brown, 2003, 108)

Popularity is a difficult topic to tackle. As Simmons writes,

Researchers have nailed down some broad ideas about what makes girls popular, but they remind me of my mom out to dinner without her reading glasses: She knows what restaurant we're at, but she can't read the menu...For girls, they concluded, success was having money, good looks, and 'social development,' which they defined as the 'early attainment of adult social characteristics.' Which most mothers could have told them without the trouble of a formal study. (Simmons, 2002, 156)

Before early adolescence, boys and girls are equally concerned with achievement in school (Eder, 1985). However, during the transition to early adolescence "girls' desire to achieve decreases, and their desire to be well liked increases. During this same period, girls also become more concerned with others' opinions of them and show a marked increase in self-consciousness" (Eder, 154). Similarly, friendships change drastically when girls enter middle school. Past research has concluded that the "number of cliques increased steadily between fourth and eighth grade" (Eder, 155).

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As Wiseman held discussions with adolescent girls about popularity and cliques, she found that girls are incredibly shy about openly discussing the truth; “The power of cliques silences them because those in positions of power won’t take responsibility for their actions, and those not in positions of power fear the consequences of speaking out in public” (Wiseman, 2002, 23). Further, Wiseman noted a clear distinction in the responses of the so-called popular girls and those girls who were unpopular. Popular girls, Wiseman writes, are reluctant to admit that they hurt and put down other girls, know little about the less popular girls who are outside of their clique, and fail to recognize their privilege. On the contrary, those girls on the outside of the popular clique know a great deal about the popular girls and what is going on within their clique. Similarly, “popular girls do not necessarily dislike less popular girls. Rather, they may be concerned about their friends’ reactions to their associations with less popular girls” (Eder, 1985, 155).

In her book, Wiseman defined a very specific cycle of popularity that contains several definite roles. Wiseman writes:

We need to give girls credit for the sophistication of their social structure. Our best politicians and diplomats couldn’t do better than a teen girl does in understanding the social intrigue and political landscape that lead to power. Cliques are sophisticated, complex, multilayered, and every girl has a role within them. (p. 24)

In this social hierarchy, Wiseman first identifies the role of the Queen Bee by asking her readers to picture a combination of the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland* and Barbie. “Through a combination of charisma, force, money, looks, will, and manipulation, this girl reigns supreme over the other girls and weakens their friendship with others, thereby

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strengthening her own power and influence (Wiseman, 2002, 25). For the Queen Bee, she seems “omnipotent” to her peers and controls her popularity through fear and control; she is constantly the center of attention, and feels absolute control and power over her own environment (Wiseman). However, these Queen Bees rarely are willing to recognize their own cruelty. Instead, they justify their behavior because of something that was done to them first. Despite all the attention and control, Wiseman cautions that these Queen Bees are in fact losing their own sense of self: “She’s so busy maintaining her image that she loses herself in the process” (Wiseman, 27).

Next in the hierarchy of clique-world is the Sidekick. This girl can be seen as the second in command and is closest to the Queen Bee, willing to do anything to defend her (Wiseman, 2002). Wiseman writes:

They commonly bully and silence other girls to forward their own agenda... The difference between the two is if you separate the Sidekick from the Queen Bee, the Sidekick can alter her behavior for the better, while the Queen Bee would be more likely to find another Sidekick and begin again. (p. 28)

The Banker is almost as powerful as the Queen Bee, as she creates drama and chaos. She banks “information about girls in her social sphere and dispensing it at strategic intervals for her own benefit” (Wiseman, 2002, 29). From this position the girl gains power and security, as she is rarely excluded from groups because she seems so friendly; however, as soon as girls catch on that she cannot be trusted, she begins to lose her power.

Next, the Floater has friends in many different circles. This girl never associates with only one clique, but moves successfully among many (Wiseman, 2002). From Wiseman’s

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perspective, this is the best position to hold in a clique: “She’s more likely to have higher self-esteem because she doesn’t base her self-worth on how well she’s accepted by one group... Girls want to be the Floater because she has confidence, people genuinely like her, and she’s nice to everyone” (Wiseman, 30). In addition, this is the girl that is most likely to stand up to the Queen Bee.

On the contrary, the Torn Bystander is “constantly conflicted between doing the right thing and her allegiance to the clique” (Wiseman, 2002, 31). As a result, this girl is often trapped in the middle of a conflict between multiple girls. By associating herself with the “popular girls,” this girl has access to a higher social status, popularity, and boys. However, she must sacrifice a lot to maintain this position, including not trying new things or hiding her academic accomplishments. This girl is not good at saying no and lives her life trying to accommodate everyone.

The role of Pleaser/Wannabe/Messenger is one that almost all girls find themselves in. This girl:

will do anything to be in the good graces of the Queen Bee and the Sidekick. She’ll enthusiastically back them up no matter what. She’ll mimic their clothes, style, and anything else she thinks will increase her position in the group. She’s a careful observer, especially of the girls in power. She’s motivated above all else to please the person who’s standing above her on the social totem pole. (Wiseman, 2002, 33)

Often, this girl is instructed to spread gossip in order to please the Queen Bee, yet she is easily forgotten if it seems she’s “trying to hard to fit in.” Unfortunately, the Pleaser/Wannabe/Messenger often feels insecure about all her friendships.

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Finally, Wiseman defines the Target, or the last role in the social hierarchy. This girl is assumed to be the “loser,” and is targeted as the victim (Wiseman, 2002).

Often the social hierarchy of the clique is maintained precisely by having someone clearly at the bottom of the groups’ totem pole. Girls outside the clique tend to become Targets because they’ve challenged the clique or because their style of dress, behavior, and such are outside the norms acceptable to the clique. (Wiseman, 34-35)

This girl is totally vulnerable and feels helpless in the wake of her peers’ cruelty, and often feels “ashamed of being rejected by the other girls because of who she is” (Wiseman, 2002, 35).

However, Simmons is sure to note the consequences of popularity as well. She writes:

But here is the truth about girls and popularity: It is a cutthroat contest into which girls pour boundless energy and anxiety. It is an addiction, a siren call, a prize for which some would pay any price. Popularity changes girls, causes a great many of them to lie and cheat and steal. They lie to be accepted, cheat their friends by using them, steal people’s secrets to resell at a higher social price. (Simmons, 2002, 156)

Mayeux, Sandstrom, & Cillessen (2003) studied the relationships between social preference, perceived popularity, and risk behaviors such as smoking, alcohol use, and sexual activity. High school girls were assessed in both grade 10 and grade 12. Results showed that for both boys and girls, perceived popularity in grade 10 was predictive of increased alcohol use and sexual activity in grade 12 (Mayeux et al.). Results also showed that advances in perceived popularity “may be associated with subsequent losses in social preference over time, lending support for the ‘cycle of popularity’ observed by Eder” (Mayeux et al., 49).

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These results are unsettling, as they support the idea that holding high status among one's peers is correlated with a sharp increase in risky behaviors over time. These results are also concerning because these "popular" adolescents engaging in risky behaviors serve as the "role models" for their peers; "lower-status teens and those who experience depression or social anxiety may be particularly prone to emulate the risk behaviors of perceived popular teens in hopes of improving their own social standing" (Mayeux et al., 2003, 67).

Who is this Queen Bee?

To most adults, the typical school bully is the beefy kid who knocks the books out of the hands of the bespectacled ninth-grader in the hallway, or the hulking football player who tosses the swim team member into the shower stall. But in the world of adolescent girls, the school bully wears glitter fingernail polish. She has the latest jewelry, jeans and shoes. She has her hair professionally done. She has tickets to sold-out rock concerts, a membership at a tanning salon and all the premium cable channels. The girl-bully is skinny, pretty and seemingly perfect. And she can make other girls' lives so horrible that, decades later, they'll break down in tears just talking about it - - if they can talk about it at all. (Elizabeth, 2002)

The Queen Bee generally illustrates the "ideal girl," reflected from the image of the "it girl" consistently represented in the media. The ideal girl is defined by the qualities of "very thin, pretty, blond, fake, stupid, popular, boyfriends, smiling, happy, helpless, superficial conflicts, dependent, manipulative, sex=power, and romantically attached to someone with status" (Simmons, 2002, 125). However, on the contrary the anti-girl is seen as "brainy, athletic, opinionated, pushy, imperfections, independent, strong, serious, artsy egocentric, bookish, or

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ugly” (Simmons, 125). Therefore, it is clear that the images presented by the media have powerful consequences for adolescent girls, as they use these images to define what should be constituted as “popular vs. unpopular.” Simmons writes,

Look again at the lists. The ideal girl is stupid, yet manipulative. She is dependent and helpless, yet she uses sex and romantic attachments to get power. She is popular yet superficial. She is fit, but not athletic or strong. She is happy, but not excessively cheerful. She is fake. (p. 126)

Simmons states that what is most dangerous about this girl is her “intensely charismatic, even seductive aura” (Simmons, 2002, 62). In addition, she explained that these girls have “gravitational pulls” on their peers (Simmons, 62). This queen bee also:

gets maximum access to the booty of womanhood. The cool girls are the first to discover makeup and boys. They get the parents born without genes for party supervision, bedtime setting, and credit card control. They look and act like they just stepped off the pages of a Delia’s catalog. They do just about everything and anything to simulate womanhood. (Simmons, 156)

Similarly, past research has concluded that:

The girl who thinks she’s all that is the girl who expresses or projects an aura of assertiveness or self-confidence. She may assert her sexuality, her independence, her body, or her speech. She has appetite and desire. The girl who thinks she’s all that is generally the one who resists the self-sacrifice and restraint that define “good girls.” Her speech and body, even her clothes, suggest others are not foremost on her mind. (Simmons, 2002, 115)

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When asked to describe this queen bee, one high schooler responded, “They’re fake. They’re overconfident. They’re loud. They’re always dressed perfectly. They make themselves look like they have a perfect life” (Elizabeth, 2002, 3).

Similarly, in a study conducted at Brigham Young University, queen bees received an extensive number of both “like” and “dislike” nominations from their social peers (Fischio, 2006). These girls were defined as “good resource controllers, socially skilled, popular, conscientious, socially integrated, and yet among the most aggressive, dominant and arrogant children in the peer group. It is this bi-strategic mix of positive and negative behavior that allows them to maintain their standing in the social hierarchy” (Fischio, 28).

When examining the “Queen Bees” exclusively, Wiseman found several harsh reactions. In her interviews, girls responded, “She’s the meanest to everyone,” “People live in fear of her,” and “She has all the power and she’ll crush you” (Wiseman, 2002, 24). Similarly, other girls responded to Wiseman:

Yes, we’re exclusive, but it’s just popularity. I’m the queen but I’m not mean. People exclude themselves. Nobody else had the power to do that. I’m perfect and I’m not in denial. -Anonymous Queen Bee, 12

She thinks she’s better than everyone else. She’s in control, intimidating, smart, caring, and has the power to make others feel good or bad. She’ll make stuff up about people and everyone will believe her. -Anne, 15

From these statements, past research has started to examine how others view these queen bees. Conclusions have been reached that she has all the desired physical characteristics and is seemingly perfect, yet she is dangerously manipulative. However, it is clear much more research

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needs to be conducted about these queen bees in order to help effectively end their powerful reign. Other girls seem intimidated by this queen bee, yet they also seem to worship her; how does this mean girl seem to have the most friends when other girls are truly envious of her and hate her?

Mean Girls in the Media

A study conducted by Behm-Moraqitz and Mastro (2008) analyzed the top 20 grossing U.S. teen movies released between 1995 and 2005.

As hypothesized, results indicate that female characters are significantly more likely to engage in and be rewarded for socially aggressive behaviors than are male characters in teen movies. This thematic portrayal of female teenagers indicates that teen films have a tendency to rely on the stereotype of teen girls as ‘mean girls.’ This suggests that teen movies portray socially aggressive acts as rewarding, particularly for female. (Behm-Moraqitz and Mastro, 136)

Further, results of the 2008 study also conclude that the “longstanding picture of the ‘cloyingly sweet and kind’ girl presented in the media has been replaced by a new dominant image, that of the ‘mean girl’” (Behm-Moraqitz and Mastro, 141). This finding is completely destructive to our adolescent population. It is impossible to think that these images and messages in our media are not affecting our young women; adolescent girls are seeing the girls and behaviors they fear in their school hallways depicted on the big screen in front of them.

From the perspective of social cognitive theory, it would be expected that exposure to such messages among the appropriate audience could potentially result in the development of unfavorable beliefs about female friendships and negative attitudes

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toward women in general. Moreover, viewing the rewards associated with the socially aggressive behaviors depicted in these movies may send the message that actions of this nature are an effective means to gaining status and other positive rewards. (Behm-Moraqitz and Mastro, 136)

These results are disturbing for our adolescents; since the media is one of the primary means of learning values and norms, girls are mirroring what they seen on the screen in their own school hallways.

Consequences

This mean girl phenomenon is successfully ingraining itself deeply into every aspect of our culture: “The line between good girls and bad, nice and mean, popular and unpopular is not a line girls created, but one they’ve absorbed from the wider culture in which they live and one they’re expected to maintain and anticipate wherever they go” (Brown, 2003, 95).

If one thing is clear from Simmons’ book, it is how disastrous relational aggression can be. Many of the girls whom Simmons interviewed transferred to other schools, used drugs, developed eating disorders and ulcers, or became depressed or suicidal and underwent lifelong psychological counseling as a result of their experiences with their female peers (Elizabeth, 2002). Simmons explains that, as a result of our limited understanding of relational aggression among girls, it makes it incredibly difficult for girls to understand their peer relationships in healthy ways. “Friends are often forced to second-guess themselves and each other. Over time, many grow to mistrust what others say they are feeling” (Simmons, 2002, 37). Eventually, girls ultimately blame themselves for the victimization they experience.

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In addition, girls learn early in their lives through peer socialization that vocalizing conflict with other girls may only result in others ganging up on her, causing her to become a loner (Simmons, 2002).

She learns to channel feelings of hurt and anger to avoid their human instigator, internalizing feelings or sharing them with others. She learns to store away unresolved conflicts with the precision of a bookkeeper, building a stockpile that increasingly crowds her emotional landscape and social choices. She learns to connect with conflict through the discord of others, participating in groups acts of aggression where individual ones have been forbidden. (Simmons, 69)

Girls lose their ability to trust and form healthy relationships with their peers, as they have experienced what it feels like to be backstabbed and hurt by a friend; “The cruel part of gossip in the form of spreading rumors is that it often originates with someone you thought you knew and trusted” (Brown, 2003, 159).

As a result of the cycles of popularity and relational aggression, these girls are learning to form unhealthy relationships. “When meanness and friendship become inextricable, girls lose the ability to distinguish between them. They may come to understand meanness as a component of friendship, learning to explain it away and even justify it. When abuse permeates friendship, some girls lose their ability to defend themselves against it” (Simmons, 2002, 56). Girls truly do not learn how to form strong, healthy friendships:

These girls described feeling unfamiliar with the most basic rules of friendship, things taken for granted by any socially adjusted person. They no longer feel certain of what makes people angry or upset, not to mention how to tell when someone is feeling that

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way. Their emotional radar is incapacitated. This can turn a girl into a cautious ghost of her former self, stifled and silenced by fear. (Simmons, 101)

These negative consequences do not apply only to the loners and those at the lower end of the popularity spectrum, but plague the popular girls as well; “Competition and insecurity are rampant. When popular girls talk about their social lives, many of them talk about losing themselves. Their feelings closely mirror the symptoms psychologists associate with girls’ loss of self-esteem” (Simmons, 2002, 173).

Finally, the spread of this mean girl phenomenon is starting to hurt our younger generations. Brigham Young University conducted a study that showed “relational aggression may be associated with social prominence as early as four and five years of age” (Fischio, 2006). It has become clear that preschoolers are much more sophisticated in their social behavior; “We are all aware of girls who secure their social hierarchy through relationship manipulation during adolescence; but it is striking that these aggressive strategies are already apparent and related to increased social centrality in preschool” (Fischio, 28).

In addition to learning unhealthy ways of dealing with communication and conflict, girls do not learn how to positively deal with their anger and frustrations. “Because these girls lack the tools to deal with everyday feelings of anger, hurt, betrayal, and jealousy, their feelings stew and fester before boiling to the surface and unleashing torrents of rage” (Simmons, 2002, 88). Instead, there are many negative symptoms associated with social aggression and victimization. Victims expressed depression, loneliness, anxiety, and diminished social and global self-esteem (Willer and Cupach, 2011). Further, when discussing physical health, victims are more likely to experience headaches, abdominal pain, stomachaches, backaches, dizziness, sleeplessness, and

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bedwetting. Past research has also found a correlation between victimization and low school performance. In research with ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade girls specifically, “relational victimization has been related to fear of negative evaluation, social avoidance of general and new situations, and loneliness” (Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004 as cited in Willer and Cupach, 2011, 304). Therefore, it is clear there are numerous negative consequences of relational aggression. Besides the most visible physical changes in one’s characteristics, the mean girl phenomenon is truly destroying how girls form and interact within their friendships. When closely examining friendships among adolescent girls today, the fundamentals of trust and loyalty that were once the building blocks of adolescent friendship are lost.

For the Future

Simmons expresses her debt to Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan for their work and research with adolescent girls. These two researchers acknowledge the importance of allowing a girl to find her “own voice,” refuting typical interview protocol but instead allowing a conversation to go wherever the girl herself takes it.

Staying with the girls’ voices, rather than emphasizing one’s own, ‘can help girls to develop, to hold on to, or to recover knowledge about themselves, their feelings, and their desires... Taking girls seriously encourages them to take their own thoughts, feelings, and experience seriously, to maintain this knowledge, and even to uncover knowledge that has become lost to them. (Simmons, 2002, 6)

In addition, Simmons states that America’s public schools lack consistent strategies to deal with relational aggression. “In the absence of a shared language to identify and discuss the behavior, student harassment policies are generally vague and favor acts of physical or direct

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violence” (Simmons, 2002, 35). Therefore, this research hopes to gain additional knowledge about these queen bees and the prevalence of relational aggression in schools in order to be able to establish this language for future discussion on prevention.

Simmons states it clearly when she says:

I believe our task now is to give every girl, every parent, and every teacher a shared, public language to address girls’ conflicts and relationships. A world that acknowledges the hidden culture of girls’ aggression would empower girls not only to negotiate conflict, but to define relationships in new and healthier ways. Girls would learn that relationship is an option and not a mandate. They would understand relationship as a chosen partnership in which care and conflict are comfortably exchanged. (Simmons, 2002, 261)

This quotation accurately summarizes the aim of this research: to further our understanding and knowledge of the mean girl phenomenon in order to heighten awareness and develop strategies for prevention. We cannot expect the behavior of our girls to change until we begin open and honest discussions about what they are experiencing.

After reviewing the limited research available on the mean girl phenomenon, we concluded significantly more research needs to be conducted focusing on the queen bees and how girls view these queen bees. While these popular girls are condescending and controlling, they are also the most admired and have the most friends (Wiseman, 2002, 25). Young girls are constantly asking the questions, “Why are these girls being mean to me? Why am I being excluded? I don’t want to be part of this popular group anymore. I don’t like what they’re doing” (Talbot, 26).

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Consequently, this study is looking to understand who these queen bees are and why they negatively dominate schools, using realistic hypothetical vignettes to ask questions such as, what words describe her behavior, what desirable characteristics does she have, if given the opportunity, would you want to trade places with her? I hypothesize that girls will report that they would rather be the queen bee than the follower/victim, and that they would switch places with the most popular girl if they could. While there is no focus on developmental trends, I do predict this mean girl phenomenon will be reported as a relevant and problematic trend at all ages (6th grade- college senior). As a result, I believe these results will further our understanding of this phenomenon and help us create solutions for ending relational aggression among girls in schools for the future.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 126 females in grades six through college senior. The study was conducted with three age groups in three different settings (see Table 1). First, 35 female students at St. Mark's School in Southborough, MA voluntarily participated in the study. Participants were all in grades 9-12, received parental consent to participate, and were compensated for their time with a pizza dinner. In addition, 12 young females grades 6-9 at Girls Inc. in Schenectady, NY participated in the study after receiving parental consent. These girls were compensated with candy and juice drinks, and engaged in a casual 15-minute discussion after completing the survey about relational aggression and their experiences in school. Due to uncompleted surveys, only eight of these participants were used in the analysis of the data. Finally, 83 female students from Union College participated in the study to receive either credit

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for their Introduction to Psychology or Research Methods class or monetary compensation.

Although ethnicity was not noted in the survey, participants were predominately Caucasian and Asian American in the high school and college groups and African American in the middle school group.

Table 1			
<i>Participants by Grade and Location</i>			
Grade	Girls Inc.	St. Mark's	Union College
6 th grade	3		
7 th grade	2		
8 th grade	1		
9 th grade	2	7	
10 th grade		15	
11 th grade		6	
12 th grade		7	
Freshmen			23
Sophomores			15
Juniors			17
Seniors			28
Total	12	36	83

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Materials & Procedure

This study included three questionnaires: one designed specifically for this study to examine relational aggression and two forms of the Indirect Aggression Scale. All surveys are found in Appendix A.

Responses to Relational Aggression Survey

Participants were presented with four hypothetical vignettes that were created by myself describing hypothetical situations in which a “queen bee” exhibits acts of relational aggression against a “victim” with the purpose of assessing how each participant viewed the characters and which character she would rather be. All participants were given the same questionnaire asking the same questions, although the wording of the hypothetical vignettes differed for the college participants in order to make the scenarios age appropriate.

- Vignette 1: “Pleaser”- a victim of relational aggression still tries to please the most popular girl and hang out with her in school
- Vignette 2: “Social-Climber”- a girl meets new friends, the “most popular girls,” and ditches her old, “less-cool” friends in order to gain popularity
- Vignette 3: “Back-stabber”- the “most popular girl” is described as always talking about her best friend behind her back, who seems to ignore this behavior
- Vignette 4: “Boy-Crazy”- a beautiful girl constantly gets all the attention from boys yet spreads rumors about her close friend

Participants were asked to describe both the mean girl’s and the victim’s personality. In addition, they were asked to rate how much they would want to be both the mean girl and the victim on a 1-4 Likert-scale, with 1 indicating *definitely not* and 4 indicating *definitely yes*, and

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to describe why or why not. The participants from Union College were asked to indicate whether they had seen a situation similar to the given vignette at Union.

Participants were asked their grade and what popularity group they most identified with (*the most popular kids in the grade, one of the popular groups but not the MOST popular, not very popular, or other.*) In addition, participants were asked to reflect on their friendships and to think of and describe girls in their grade who were “queen bees” or “popular girls.” Finally, girls were asked whether they would trade places with the most popular girl in the school if they were given the chance and to explain their reasoning. Participants were given three quotations from Rosalind Wiseman’s book Queen Bees and Wannabes (see Appendix A) and asked if they thought these quotations were true and if they applied to the participant’s own life.

Indirect Aggression Scale

All participants completed the Indirect Aggression Scale, including both the Aggressor Version (IAS-A) and the Target Version (IAS-T). Both scales were created by Forrest, Eatough & Shevlin (2005); the IAS-A measures the amount of indirect aggression individuals have witnessed in the past 12 months, while the IAS-T measures the extent to which the participants have been the victims of indirect aggression in the past 12 month. In both scales, participants were given specific behaviors such as “Talked about them behind their back” (IAS-A) or “Intentionally ignored by other person/people” (IAS-T) and asked to response on the frequency of the behavior on a scale from *never* to *all the time*.

All surveys were completed in a group setting. Participants were then debriefed and given the opportunity to ask any remaining questions.

Results

Experiences of Relational Aggression

Table 2 illustrates the most common responses for relationally aggressive behaviors girls reported observing “all the time” on the IAS scale.

Table 2	
<i>Relational Aggression Mostly Commonly Witnessed</i>	
IAS-A Measure	Percentage who witness it “all the time”
Talked about them behind their back	58%
Used sarcasm to insult them	31%
Been “bitchy” toward them	31%
Stopped talking to them	29%

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to test the relationship between age group and Indirect Aggression Scale Aggressor Version total scores and results were found to be significant, $F(2, 120) = 3.23, p = .043$. Further post hoc comparisons using the Tukey test indicated that the mean score for the middle school girls ($M = 123.40$) was significantly higher than the mean score for college girls ($M=91.60$), $p = .034$. Girls in high school reported similar levels of witnessed relational aggression to those girls in college ($M =94.63$).

Table 3 illustrates the most common responses for relationally aggressive behaviors girls reported being victims of *all the time* in the past year, with “talked about me behind my back” being the most commonly found.

Table 3	
<i>Most Frequent Experienced Types of Relational Aggression</i>	
IAS-T Measure	Percentage who experience it “all the time”
Talked about me behind my back	17%
Been “bitchy” towards me	16%
Used sarcasm to insult me	11%
Belittled me	10%
Gave me “dirty” looks	10%
Made me feel inferior to them by their behavior/words	10%

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to test the relationship between grade and Indirect Aggression Target Version total scores and results were found to be significant, $F(2, 121) = 3.98, p = .021$. Further post hoc analysis showed that the amount of victimization was significantly higher in high school ($M=71.97$) than in college ($M=57.68$), $p = .028$. Middle school girls also reported high levels of victimization ($M=76.00$).

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted between popularity group and the reported amount of victimization of relational aggression, and no significant relationship was found. However, closer examination of the estimated marginal means provided interesting results, as the most popular girls reported the most victimization (see Table 4). A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to test the relationship between popularity group and the reported amount of relational aggression observed, and no significant relationship was found.

Table 4	
<i>Popularity Group and Relational Aggression Observed</i>	
Popularity Group	IAS-T Mean
Most popular	70.00
Popular but not MOST popular	56.21
Not popular	68.30
Other	64.87

Almost all girls (97%) denied seeing their own lives in the quote, *I really don't like my friends- It's just like they're people I work with and our job is being popular*. However, 63% responded that they know a girl who may have said this. Therefore, these results suggest some girls forgo genuine friendships for the sake of popularity.

Similarly, 49% of participants responded *yes* to quote three (See Appendix A) acknowledging that they have been in a situation where a close friend ditched them in order to be better friends with a more popular girl, even though that girl talked behind her back. A chi square analysis examining the relationship between popularity group and responses to this quotation reported no significant relationship ($p = .92$).

Vignette Results: Victims

Results of the hypothetical vignettes show that across all situations, girls do not want to identify with the victim (see Table 5).

Table 5				
<i>Percentage of Participants Identifying with the Victim</i>				
Vignette	Definitely not	Mostly not	Mostly yes	Definitely yes
“Pleaser”	46%	36%	14%	5%
“Social-Climber”	25%	37%	35%	2%
“Back-Stabber”	50%	34%	13%	4%
“Boy Crazy”	46%	39%	14%	2%

In the first vignette, “Pleaser,” responses regarding the victim’s behavior could be grouped into two different categories: *genuine and nice* (39 responses) or *passive/wannabe/wants attention* (86 responses). These results suggest that some participants saw the victim as a genuinely nice girl who was trying to make friends, while the majority of participants saw the victim as a “wannabe” who desperately tried to please the queen bee in order to gain popularity and attention. Therefore, responses to the victim were predominately negative (see Table 5).

Results of the second vignette, “Social-Climber,” also show that participants did not want to identify with the victim (see Table 5). However, since there were two victims who were ditched by a friend trying to gain popularity in this situation, responses were not as strongly negative. Participants said although they did not have enough information to make strong statements about the victims, these girls still had true friendship with each other.

In the third vignette, “Back-Stabber,” participants responded most strongly that they definitely did not want to be the victim (see Table 5). Only 16 of the responses were solely nice,

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characterizing her as *sweet*, *mature*, and *friendly*. Other participants responded that she was “smart to hang on to [the queen bee’s] friendship for popularity,” suggesting that victimization can be endured if it gives one access to popularity. However, other participants stated that “Rachel [victim] is worse than Molly [queen bee]” for not sticking up for herself. Therefore, while qualitative responses are mixed toward the victim, it is clear that once again girls definitely do not want to experience this victimization.

In the fourth vignette, “Boy Crazy,” participants again do not want to identify with the victim (see Table 5). Girls responded that they would not like to be the victim because she is in “Stephanie’s [queen bee] shadow” or they “lose the spotlight to her.” In addition, 19 girls responses included worries about boys; either that they would not be able to gain male attention due to the queen bee or that they did not want a friend who deserts them for boys. Thirty-two participants responded that having rumors spread about you is painful and they would not want to be in this situation. Therefore, these results show that girls definitely do not want to identify with the victim or unpopular girl in any of these four situations due to their defined negative characteristics of these girls.

Vignette Results: Queen Bees

Results of the hypothetical vignettes show that across all four situations, participants did not want to identify with the queen bee if given the chance. However, responses differed depending on specific factors present in each situation (see Table 6).

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Table 6				
<i>Percent of Participants Identifying with Queen Bee</i>				
Vignette	Definitely not	Mostly not	Mostly yes	Definitely yes
“Pleaser”	69%	25%	6%	0%
“Social-Climber”	41%	46%	12%	2%
“Back-Stabber”	52%	38%	10%	1%
“Boy Crazy”	30%	41%	27%	2%

Results of the first vignette “Pleaser” show that girls definitely do not want to identify with the queen bee (see Table 6). Analyses of the responses to the queen bee’s behavior are all negative; all of the 126 participants negatively characterized the queen bee (see Table 7). Examples of responses include “mean, bully, rude,” “inconsiderate, sassy, bitchy,” and “mean, manipulative and condescending.”

Table 7	
<i>Descriptions of Queen Bee in “Pleaser” Vignette</i>	
Response Category	Number of Responses
Mean	68
Rude	59
Bitch/bitchy	46
Obnoxious	18
Inconsiderate	15
Fake	14

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In the second vignette “Social-Climber” involving the queen bee Christine, participants again did not want to identify with this popular girl (see Table 6). However, responses were not as strong as those with the queen bee in the “Pleaser” vignette, suggesting that being seen as a “social-climber” is not as bad as strictly making fun of less popular classmates. Again, all 126 participants had at least something negative to say about this queen bee (see Table 8). Responses included comments such as “inconsiderate, shallow, unkind, very concerned with being popular,” “stuck up, mean, not very caring, needy, wants to be cool and not a lot of confidence,” and “snobby, popular, dumb, has turned into a follower, doesn’t see how mean she is.” Some participants acknowledged that she “may have good intentions to meet new people,” but added, “those are the wrong reasons to ditch her old friends and (the queen bee) is still a social climber.”

Table 8 <i>Descriptions of Queen Bee in “Social-Climber” Vignette</i>	
Response Category	Number of Responses
Social climber	26
Gaining status	4
Pathetic	4
Bitch	3

Participants again responded very harshly to the third vignette “Back-Stabber,” strongly stating that they would *definitely not* want to be the queen bee if given the chance (see Table 6). Again, all 126 participants negatively characterized the queen bee, with the most popular responses being that she was “two-faced” and “mean” (see Table 9). Example responses include, “[Queen bee] has everything one could want, but it is still not enough- she is a drama queen and

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a back stabber,” “mean and insecure- wants to keep Rachel [victim] close incase she loses her reputation and so she has someone weaker to manipulate,” and “typical mean girl, she is privileged for being the prettiest and best dressed which often means the most popular.”

Therefore, although the queen bee was described as the girl who is *the prettiest, best dressed, and has the most friends* (see Appendix A), participants still responded that they would definitely not like to be her as a result of how she treats her friends.

Table 9	
<i>Descriptions of Queen Bee in “Back-Stabber” Vignette</i>	
Response Category	Number of Responses
Two-faced	34
Mean	22
Fake	21
Insecure	12
Back-stabber	12
Bitch	8

Results of the fourth vignette “Boy Crazy” are considerably different than those of the other three vignettes. First, the percentage of responses for those who *definitely do not* want to be the queen bee is much lower than those of the previous vignettes (see Table 6). Ten of the 126 responses to the queen bee’s behavior were completely nice comments. Examples of these nice responses include that the queen bee is “popular, charming,” “sweet and attractive,” and “gorgeous and friendly.” One participant even responded that the queen bee is “a good person

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surrounded by jealous people.” The most popular negative characterizations of the queen bee named her an “attention seeker” or an “attention whore” (see Table 10).

Table 10 <i>Descriptions of Queen Bee in “Boy Crazy” Vignette</i>	
Response Category	Number of Responses
Attention seeker/attention whore	21
Self-centered/Selfish	15
Insecure	12
Slut/hoe	10
Fake	8
Desperate	5

A chi square analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between grade and the participant’s desire to want to be this queen bee. Results were found to be significant, $\chi^2(6) = 17.72, p = .007$. Crosstabulation results show that participants definitely want to be her the most in college while no participants definitely want to be her in middle school or high school (see Table 11).

Table 11 <i>Percentage Participants Identifying with Stephanie by Grade Group</i>				
Grade Group	Definitely not	Mostly not	Mostly yes	Definitely yes
6 th -8 th	100%	0%	0%	0%
9 th -12 th	31%	36%	33%	0%

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Freshman-Senior	24%	46%	27%	4%
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Identify with Queen Bee or Victim?

In order to assess whether participants wanted to identify with the queen bee or the victim/follower overall, *definitely not* – *definitely yes* responses were coded on a 1-4 scale, (*1=definitely not, 4=definitely yes*) and total means were analyzed for all participants. Results showed that girls would rather identify as the victim in the first three vignettes, but would rather identify as the queen bee in the last vignette (see Table 12). These results are replicated when examining the percentage of participants that prefer to identify with the queen bee or the victim; participants prefer identifying with the victim except for the fourth “Boy Crazy” vignette in which they would rather identify with the queen bee (see Table 12).

Table 12				
<i>Participant Responses to Identifying with the Queen Bee versus Victim</i>				
Vignette	Mean want to be Queen Bee	Mean want to be Victim	Percentage preferring Queen Bee	Percentage preferring Victim
“Pleaser”	1.37	1.77	14%	40%
“Social-Climber”	1.74	2.15	16%	42%
“Back-Stabber”	1.59	1.71	22%	28%
“Boy Crazy”	2.02	1.71	41%	21%

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Relational Aggression at Union College

Participants at Union College were asked if they had ever witnessed each of the four hypothetical situations between girls at Union. Results in Table 13 show how problematic relational aggression is in college today.

Table 13		
<i>Are the Four Vignettes Realistic Situations at Union?</i>		
Vignette	Yes	No
“Pleaser”	75%	25%
“Social-Climber”	92%	8%
“Back-Stabber”	88%	12%
“Boy Crazy”	80%	21%

Real Queen Bee/Popularity Results

When all participants were asked whether they knew any queen bees themselves, 88% responded that they knew at least one of these girls (see Table 14). Twenty of the 113 girls who characterized the queen bee they knew best had only nice things to say about this girl, such as the response from an 11th grader: “gorgeous, athletic, smart, has a lot of friends, has the perfect boyfriend, funny,” and the response from a college sophomore: “pretty, dressed well, friends with all the athletic guys.” In addition, 34 of the negative responses had to do with attractiveness and 22 of the negative responses had to do with boys. Example responses include:

- “A hoe, desperate, goody-two shoes to teachers” -8th grader

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- “She’s nice but whenever she turns her back to you I automatically think, oh she’s going to go talk to her friends about me” -10th grader
- “She gets a lot of attention from guys and uses her body to manipulate them- She’s very pretty but uses it to take advantage of guys- Manipulative of her friends and takes advantage of everyone” -Freshman
- “Flaunts wealth, loves attention of boys, thinks partying is the most important part of life” -Sophomore
- “Strategically nice but no one wants to be on her bad side- She manipulates guys and girls to be exactly what she needs, always the center of drama and talks shit behind everyone’s back” -Senior
- “Slutty, nice to your face, parties hard” –Senior

Table 14	
<i>Do you Known any Queen Bees?</i>	
Response	Percentages
No	12%
Yes, one	12%
Yes, more than one	76%

Results show 81% of participants believe Wiseman’s quote, “No one likes the most popular girl, so why does she have the most friends,” is true. A chi square analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between grade and the responses to this quotation, and results were found to be significant, $\chi^2(2) = 6.97, p = .031$. 50% of middle school students thought this quote was true, while 90% of high school and 80% of college students responded

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true. These results suggest that being the queen bee has the worst connotations in high school and in college.

When participants were asked why they think people want to be friends with the most popular girl even if they don't like her, responses were classified into three main categories: *popularity and attention, fear, and boys* (see Table 15). Results show that the overwhelming majority responded that people want to be friends with this queen bee in order to gain popularity and attention. Examples responses include:

- “Everyone hangs out with her because the guys love her- when it comes down to it, she is mean to her friends so they don't really like her” -10th grader
- “Better to be on her good side than her bad side” -9th grader
- “She mostly hangs out with guys and gets a lot of invites to parties and such” - Freshman
- “They want the perks- the invites to parties, status, guys attention etc. They don't care about real friendship” -Freshman
- “They are scared of her want to be popular” -8th grader

Table 15	
<i>Why be Friends with the Most Popular Girl?</i>	
Response Category	Number of Responses
Popularity and Attention	59
Fear	18
Boys	5

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When all participants were asked if they would trade places with the most popular girl in school if given the chance, only 16% said *yes*. A chi square analysis was conducted on popularity group and wanting to trade places, and results were found to be significant, $\chi^2(3) = 10.86, p = .013$. The girls who are already in the most popular group are the most likely to want to trade places with the queen bee (42%), while 20% of girls from both the not popular groups and the “other” groups wanted to trade places. Girls who identified in a popular group but not the most popular group were the least likely to want to trade places with the queen bee (6%).

A chi square analysis was conducted on grade level and wanting to trade places with the most popular girl, and results were found to be significant, $\chi^2(2) = 8.00, p = .018$. Girls want to trade places with the queen bee the most in high school (31%), where only 17% of girls in middle school and 10% of girls in college would choose to trade places. Therefore these results suggest that while the queen bee may have negative connotations, girls would trade places with her if given the chance more in high school than middle school or college.

When asked why or why not they would choose to trade places with the queen bee, responses fit into five general categories (see Table 16).

Table 16	
<i>Why Trade Places with the Queen Bee</i>	
Response Category	Number of Responses
I like myself how I am	35
Too much attention	22
Too much drama	16
Mean	13

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They are popular for the wrong reasons	8
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The primary reason girls gave was because they liked their current lives and would not want to change, where as “too much attention/drama” where the second and third reasons. Example responses include:

- “I wouldn’t because when most girls are popular it is for the wrong reasons: flirtatious, mean, etc.” -10th grader
- “I like attention but not as much as that. I wouldn’t like people to rate my outfit or judge my hair in the morning” -10th grader
- “Don’t have many redeeming qualities, just their bodies” –Freshman
- “They all talk about each other behind each other’s backs and aren’t true friends” –Senior
- “Don’t need extra attention and don’t need people to be talking negatively about me”
-Junior
- “Her friendships with people are fake and she doesn’t have any “real” friends that actually like her- they just like her status” –Senior
- “People love me just the way I am” -7th grader

When examining the 16% of participants who said they would trade places with the queen bee if given the chance, responses fit into five categories (see Table 17). The majority of girls who responded *yes* are interested in gaining attention from their peers, while other participants would like to trade places with the queen bee because they think she is nice or because they believe popularity is a good thing.

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Table 17	
<i>Reasons to Trade Places with the Queen Bee</i>	
Response Category	Number of Responses
Attention	7
Popularity is a good thing	4
Popular girl is nice	4
Boys	3
Curiosity	2

Example responses include:

- “I would because it is awkward being in the popular group and being less popular than the rest” -9th grader
- “It would be interesting to see what ‘popular’ is like but only temporarily” -Senior
- “For a day- I like who I am but it would be nice to be treated like she is where everyone wants to sit with you, be your friend etc.” -12th grader
- “I want to experience what it’s like to belong to the popular group, but sometimes I see the problems and drama that take place and I’m glad to have the friends I do” -11th grader
- “I want to trade places because they are the ones who are known by everyone and get attention from boys. But in the long run I wouldn’t because they are not into academics and I’d choose academics over popularity” -11th grader
- “For one day- her boyfriend is cute” –Senior

Discussion

In this study, I hypothesized that girls would report they would rather identify with the queen bee than the victim. However, analysis of the vignettes proved my hypothesis wrong in the first three scenarios, as participants identified with the victim instead of the queen bee. Therefore, this shows that when placed in these situations of “Pleaser,” “Social-Climber,” or “Back-stabber,” girls would rather identify with the victim than the mean girl.

Individual analysis of these vignettes sheds light on why girls would rather identify with the victim than the queen bee. In “Pleaser,” the queen bee is clearly defined as the most popular girl, but no specific characteristics such as “beautiful,” “well dressed,” etc. are given. As a result, participants may have defined her outright meanness and cruelty towards the victim as outweighing her stated popularity, and would rather be perceived as a “nice girl” or as “trying to please Stacy” than as a truly mean, malicious girl. In “Social-Climber,” the queen bee ditches the victims as she tries to gain popularity by making new friends. In this vignette there are two victims, and participants clearly responded that while it hurts to lose a friend for being “un-cool,” the victims “still have each other.” Therefore, these results suggest that while participants still view these girls as “less popular,” they are not as quick to negatively characterize them because they are not individually loners but still have a solid friendship. Finally, in “Back-stabber” the queen bee is clearly defined as the *prettiest, best dressed, and has the most friends*. However, participants responded that they would rather identify with the victim because many saw the queen bee’s backstabbing behavior as immature and a sign of her own insecurity. Therefore, this suggests that girls do not want to be the “popular girl” if it involves relational aggression towards one’s own best friend.

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However, results also showed that participants would rather identify with the queen bee than the victim in the fourth vignette, “Boy-Crazy.” Therefore, given that this is the only vignette that introduces boys into the situation, it is clear that the boy-factor is a major aspect in perceived and idealized popularity for girls, and that girls want to identify with the queen bee if that means getting all the attention of the boys. Specifically, the boy-factor is most important in determining and maintaining popularity in college and high school. Boys were continually mentioned in participants’ responses as reasons why girls want to be friends with the queen bee, and why they would want to trade places with the queen bee if they could. Girls responded that the queen bee is “friends with all the athletic guys,” “has the perfect boyfriend,” and “gets a lot of attention from guys and uses her body to manipulate them.” These results support Brown’s (2003) findings that tension and fighting among girls most often results from finding and keeping boyfriends. Therefore, future research should specifically focus on the relationship between male attention, popularity, and relational aggression in order to further understand these findings.

I also hypothesized that girls would switch places with the most popular girl they knew if given the opportunity, which was not supported by my results. Therefore, while previous studies have discussed how queen bees are portrayed as popular and are continually rewarded for their socially aggressive acts in the media, these messages may not be impacting our young women as severely as previously hypothesized (Behm-Moraqitz and Mastro, 2008). Girls may be beginning to realize how cruel and selfish these queen bees are, and in actuality do not worship these mean girls; instead, girls observe the negative qualities queen bees use to work their way to the top and prefer their current lives. Many girls responded that being the queen bee would be “too much attention” or “too much drama.”

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Therefore, it is clear this research supports previous findings that queen bees have many of the desired physical characteristics, yet are dangerously manipulative and mean. In addition, responses from participants support previous research that queen bees use a “bi-strategic mix of positive and negative behavior that allows them to maintain their standing in the social hierarchy” (Fischio, 2006, 28). For example, girls described the queen bee they knew best: “She’s nice in the hallway or the dorm because not a lot of people are looking, but in big areas she doesn’t acknowledge I’m there,” “Seemingly nice, but is constantly trashing friends behind their backs,” and “Seems nice to everyone but two-faced, bitchy, not a good friend.” Girls are not as envious of the queen bee’s life as the media portrays, but would instead choose their current lives over one filled with fake friendships and drama.

Girls' desire to trade places with the queen bee differed depending on their popularity status; almost half of the most popular girls would trade places with her, while practically no girls in the "second most popular" groups would want to become a queen bee. These results suggest that those girls who are in the most popular group like being popular and want to obtain the dominate queen bee role within their clique, while those who are close to the top of the popularity scale but not in the center of attention are the happiest with their position in the social scene. A 9th grade girl confirms this when she states, “I would [want to trade places with the queen bee] because it is awkward being in the popular group and being less popular than the rest.” In addition, these results dispute past research that suggests all girls want to get to the top, arguing “the closer you are to the center, the safer and the more powerful you become” (Brown, 2003, 108). Instead, results of this study argue that the top of the popularity cycle is one of the most dangerous and cutthroat positions, as girls are battling for the dominant queen bee role. However, our results support Adler and Alder’s (1998) research that children in middle

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friendship circles have the highest-quality friendships because they are satisfied with their status and are not as concerned with the popularity hierarchy. Therefore, future research should ask girls specifically what their ideal location in the popularity cycle would be and why, providing further insight into the complicated web of popularity.

While I did not focus exclusively on developmental trends, I hypothesized that this mean girl phenomenon would be reported as a relevant and problematic trend at all ages. Results overwhelmingly supported this hypothesis. Girls clearly witness high levels of relational aggression across all ages, especially in middle school, and it is clear that girls in the most popular group reported the highest level of victimization. This supports Wiseman's (2002) findings that relational aggression is very common among the Queen Bee's most-popular clique, involving the Sidekick and other followers who are willing to "bully and silence other girls to forward their own agenda" (p. 28). In addition, these results support Closson's (2009) findings that girls in the perceived popular cliques exhibit more relational aggression in order to effectively monitor their own social status within their clique.

Similarly, results of analysis of Union participants proved how problematic relational aggression still is in college. When asked if participants had seen situations similar to the hypothetical vignettes between girls at Union, responses were overwhelmingly *yes*. The issue of "climbing the social ladder" is a key problem among female relationships in college; girls quickly jump at the chance to become friends with girls who they believe will advance their own popularity, and think nothing of leaving old friends behind. In addition, backstabbing behavior and talking about friends behind their backs is another concern for female relationships in college today. In order to alleviate this behavior and protect female friendships from relational aggression, Union should engage women in open, honest discussions about friendship and

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popularity so that girls become aware of the prevalence of this issue and unite together to take a stand against relational aggression.

When working to understand who the typical Queen Bee is, results of this study supported Simmons' (2002) findings that this girl is generally defined as "very thin, pretty, blond, fake, stupid, popular, boyfriends, smiling, happy, helpless, superficial, conflicts, dependent, manipulative, sex=power, and romantically attached to someone with status" (125). Our results reflect past research findings that girls do not like the most popular girl they know, as it is clear that girls have overwhelmingly negative responses to the queen bees that dominate their grades. Participants agreed with results of past studies stating that this queen bee is manipulative, and overall agreed with Simmons' (2002) conclusion that this girl is "fake." Specifically, the "queen bee" is most negatively viewed in high school, while middle school does not yet have the stereotypical, negative connotations associated with the most popular girl.

Despite many significant findings, this study does have limitations. Developmental trends were not an initial focus of the study and therefore the sample size of each grade group was very unequal. Future research should work to evenly sample across all grade levels in order to support findings of differences in relational aggression across grades. In addition, changes to the Responses to Relational Aggression Survey designed for this research should be made for future studies. For example, in questions involving the four hypothetical vignettes participants were never specifically asked which girl, queen bee or victim, they would rather identify with. Participants were asked to rate their level of wanting to identify with each girl separately with the intent that this would improve honesty, as participants would not have to make one conclusive statement choosing to identify with one over the other. However, results showed that participants generally rated both the queen bee and the victim very similarly in each vignette,

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stating that they did not want to identify with either, and they were never forced to make a choice. Therefore, this should be changed so that participants simply have to choose the queen bee or the victim for the future.

In addition, although demographics were not part of this study, high school participants sampled from St. Mark's and college participants sampled from Union College were predominately upper-middle class Caucasian or Asian American students, while middle school participants from Girls Inc. were predominately African American students from low-income families. Therefore, these differences in ethnicity and socioeconomic status must be noted, as it is possible that they had an impact on the data. Given the interesting conversations that took place with the middle school girls, who spoke openly about engaging in physical aggression as well as relational aggression, it would be interesting for future research to study if there is a relationship between ethnicity and levels of relational aggression among young girls.

Overall, the results of this study are very concerning for the future and make it clear that girls themselves are also worried about their friendships. As Simmons (2002) states, it is now our job to “give every girl, every parent, and every teacher a shared, public language to address girls’ conflicts and relationships. A world that acknowledges the hidden culture of girls’ aggression would empower girls not only to negotiate conflict, but to define relationships in new and healthier ways” (261). This research makes large strides in furthering the understanding of the mean girl phenomenon, the cycle of popularity, and the prevalence of relational aggression across middle school, high school and college today, and conversations must take place with our young women in order to stop the negative trends we have illustrated.

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Specific prevention strategies must be implemented in schools across the country to stop this phenomenon. First, girls must be presented with the facts. This research illustrates that the ‘mean girl image’ rewarded in the media is not also rewarded by one’s peers; girls do not have nice things to say about the queen bees they know, nor do they want to trade places with them. I believe if girls are presented with these truths, interactions between females will change; girls will be less likely to try and climb the social ladder once they learn that girls do not actually idolize the girl at the top, and therefore I believe victimization due to relational aggression will decrease.

In addition, the media message must change. The results of Behm-Moraqtiz and Mastro’s (2008) study illustrating that the ‘mean-girl’ has become the new dominant image presented in the media must be immediately removed, as our results show it is a misrepresentation of who girls want to be and what characteristics they idealize. As previously stated, “The line between good girls and bad, nice and mean, popular and unpopular is not a line girls created, but one they’ve absorbed from the wider culture in which they live and one they’re expected to maintain and anticipate wherever they go” (Brown, 2003, 95). By presenting adolescents with the realistic facts that girls would not change their lives on the drop of a dime to switch places with the queen bee if given the opportunity, girls will stop idolizing Regina George, Heidi Montag, and other queen bees the media encourages our young girls to worship.

In conclusion, this research has furthered our understanding and knowledge of the mean girl phenomenon, with the hopes of heightening awareness and developing strategies for prevention in the future. From the voices of real girls, this research has illustrated that being a queen bee and dominating the popularity scene is not as illustrious and romanticized as girls may think; when given the opportunity to speak the truth, girls would rather continue their own lives

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than become a queen bee if given the chance. Therefore, this research begins to develop a language of honesty with which to discuss relational aggression and bullying within female friendships.

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Appendix A

SECTION I: Please consider the following hypothetical situations. Please be honest when answering the questions! We are interested in your real reactions.

- A. (COLLEGE) *Stacy is considered the most popular girl in the junior class. Stacy is always loudly making fun of Katie for her clothes with her friends in front of Katie, yet Katie is always nice to Stacy and tries to hang out with her at parties. Stacy rolls her eyes and pretends to dance with her, but continues to make fun of her and laugh at her with her friends.*
- A. (MS/HS) *Stacy is considered the most popular girl in school. During math class she is constantly making fun of Katie for her clothes and hairstyle, yet Katie is always nice to Stacy and tries to sit with her at lunch. Stacy rolls her eyes and lets her sit at her lunch table, but continues to make fun of her and laugh at her with her friends.*

1. What THREE words describe Stacy's behavior?
2. How would you describe Stacy's personality?
3. How would you describe Katie's personality?
4. Would you want to be Stacy? (Circle One)

- 4 = Definitely yes
- 3 = Mostly yes
- 2 = Mostly not
- 1 = Definitely not

Why or Why not?

5. Would you want to be Katie? (Circle One)
- 4 = Definitely yes
 - 3 = Mostly yes
 - 2 = Mostly not
 - 1 = Definitely not

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Why or Why not?

6. Have you seen a situation similar to this at Union? YES NO

B. (COLLEGE) Christine just joined a sorority and was so excited to meet new people. She was so happy when Michelle and Tory, two popular girls in her pledge class she had never known before she joined, wanted her to come over to pregame. Christine now spends all her time with Michelle and Tory, gossiping with them and getting ready in their room. Sometimes Christine even ignores Liz and Julie, her old best friends from freshmen year, in Reamer because they aren't as popular as her now and she doesn't want to look uncool.

B. (MS/HS) Christine just transitioned to high school and couldn't wait to meet new people. She was so excited when Michelle and Tory, two popular girls from the other school, wanted to hang out with her and sit with her at lunch. Christine now spends all her time with Michelle and Tory, gossiping with them about the latest school drama. Sometimes Christine even ignores Liz and Julie, her old best friends from middle school, in the hallways because they aren't as cool as her now and she doesn't want to look dorky.

1. How would you describe Christine?
2. How would you describe Liz and Julie?
3. Would you want to be Christine? (Circle One)

- 4 = Definitely yes
- 3 = Mostly yes
- 2 = Mostly not
- 1 = Definitely not

Why or Why not?

4. Would you want to be Liz or Julie? (Circle One)

- 4 = Definitely yes
- 3 = Mostly yes
- 2 = Mostly not
- 1 = Definitely not

Why or Why not?

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5. Have you seen a situation similar to this at Union? YES NO

C. (COLLEGE) *Molly is the most popular sophomore girl- she is the prettiest, best dressed, and has the most friends. Yet Molly is always gossiping with her friends about Rachel, who also lives with them and is supposedly a friend of Molly's. Rachel is always nice to Molly and considers her one of her best friends, even though she knows she gossips about her behind her back. Rachel lets it go and pretends she doesn't know what Molly says about her.*

C. (MS/HS) *Molly is the most popular girl at the Riverwood School- she is the prettiest, best dressed, and has the most friends. Yet Molly is always gossiping about Rachel, who is supposedly Molly's best friend. Rachel is always nice to Molly, even though she knows she gossips about her behind her back. Rachel lets it go and pretends she doesn't know what Molly says about her.*

1. How would you describe Molly?

2. How would you describe Rachel?

3. Would you want to be Molly? (Circle One)

4 = Definitely yes

3 = Mostly yes

2 = Mostly not

1 = Definitely not

Why or Why not?

4. Would you want to be Rachel? (Circle One)

4 = Definitely yes

3 = Mostly yes

2 = Mostly not

1 = Definitely not

Why or Why not?

5. Have you seen a situation similar to this at Union? YES NO

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D. (COLLEGE) *Stephanie loves all the attention she gets from boys. She is gorgeous and constantly has a boyfriend, and when she doesn't all the hottest boys try and dance with her at parties. Stephanie can't help that she gets all the attention, and she comes across as so sweet to everyone. Yet Heather often hears from her other friends that Stephanie makes up rumors about who Heather slept with last weekend. Heather thought about confronting Stephanie, but knew that she'd deny it anyways.*

D. (MS/HS) *Stephanie loves all the attention she gets from boys. She constantly has a boyfriend, and when she doesn't all the hottest boys in the school flirt with her at lunch. Stephanie can't help that she gets all the attention, and she plays along by ignoring her friends Jessica and Ashley at school because they aren't as cool as her. She can't jeopardize losing all the attention from the boys by being seen with them.*

1. How would you describe Stephanie?
2. Would you want to be Stephanie? (Circle One)

4 = Definitely yes
3 = Mostly yes
2 = Mostly not
1 = Definitely not

Why or Why not?

3. Would you want to be Heather? (Circle One)

4 = Definitely yes
3 = Mostly yes
2 = Mostly not
1 = Definitely not

Why or Why not?

4. Have you seen a situation similar to this at Union? YES NO

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SECTION II: Please answer the following questions:

1. What grade are you in? freshman sophomore junior senior

2. Can you think of any girls who are in your grade that are “queen bees” or are the “popular girls”?

No Yes, one Yes, more than one

3. Think about the one you know the best: How would you describe her?

4. At Union, how do most people see your group of friends (the people you hang out with most)? (check one)
 - We’re the most popular kids in my grade
 - We’re one of the popular groups, but not the MOST popular
 - We’re not very popular
 - Other (please explain):

5. If you could trade places with the most popular girl in the school, would you want to? Why or why not?

SECTION III: You will be given three questions focusing on popularity. We want to hear your thoughts- How would you respond to this quotation?

1. *“No one likes the most popular girl, so why does she have the most friends?”*
 - a. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

 - b. If you think this is true, why do you think people want to be friends with the most popular girl, even if they don’t like her?

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2. *“I don’t really like my friends. It’s just like they’re people I work with and our job is being popular”*
 - a. Would you say this is true about your own life?
 - b. Do you know girls who you think may have said this?

3. *“Why does my old friend want to be better friends with a girl who talks behind her back and is mean to her than with me, who is a good friend and who wouldn’t do that?”*
 - a. Have you ever felt this way about a friend? Please explain.
 - b. Do you think girls often act like this? If so, why do they do this?

SECTION IV:

Have you seen a girl do the following behaviors to another girl in the last year?(Check One)					
	Never	Occasionally	Sometimes-pretty often	Very often	All the time
Used sarcasm to insult them					
Made fun of them in public					
Called them names					
Intentionally embarrassed them in public					
Been “bitchy” towards them					
Made negative comments about their physical appearance					
Imitated them in front of others					
Criticized them in public					
Accused them of something, making it appear to be said in fun					
Purposefully left them out of activities					
Intentionally ignored another person/people					
Belittled them					
Done something to try and make					

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them look stupid					
Talked about them behind their back					
Played a nasty practical joke on them					
Excluded them from a group					
Omitted them from conversations on purpose					
Used private jokes to exclude them					
Withheld information from them that the rest of the group knows					
Turned other people against them					
Made other people not talk to them					
Spread rumors about them					
Stopped talking to them					
Gained their confidence and then told their secrets					
Used emotional blackmail on them					
Tried to influence them by making them feel guilty					
Used our relationship to try and get them to change a decision					
Put unfair pressure on them					
Used their feelings to coerce them					
Made them feel inferior to me by my behavior/words					
Pretended to be hurt and/or angry with them to make them feel bad about him/her-self					

Have other girls done any of the following things to you in the last year? (Check One)					
	Never	Occasionally	Sometimes-pretty often	Very often	All the time
Excluded by a group					
Made me feel that I don't fit in					
Omitted me from conversations on purpose					
Purposefully left me out of activities					

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	Never	Occasionally	Sometimes- pretty often	Very often	All the time
Intentionally ignored by other person/people					
Made other girls not talk to me					
Withheld information from me that the rest of the group knew					
Used private in-jokes to exclude me					
Turned other people against me					
Snubbed me in public					
Stopped talking to me					
Gave me 'dirty' looks					
Made me feel inferior to them by their behavior/words					
Spread rumors about me					
Gained my confidence and then disclosed my secrets					
Accused me of something while making it appear to be said in fun					
Used our relationship to try and get me to change a decision					
Pretended to be hurt and/or angry with me to make me feel bad					
Used emotional blackmail on me					
Been 'bitchy' towards me					
Talked about me behind my back					
Belittled me					
Put undue pressure on me					
Used my feelings to coerce me					
Took or damaged something that belonged to me					
Intentionally embarrassed me around others					
Made fun of me in public					
Done something to try and make me look stupid					
Called me names					
Imitated me in front of others					
Used sarcasm to insult me					
Played a nasty practical joke on me					
Criticized me in public					
Made negative comments about my physical appearance					

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