

THE CULTURE OF HISPANIC FEMALE BULLIES: AN EXPLORATION OF
RETROSPECTIVE NARRATIVE REPORTS OF THEIR SOCIALLY AGGRESSIVE
BHAVIORS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

A Dissertation

by

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This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative interview study examined retrospective accounts of six Hispanic females between the age of 19 and 23 that attended school in a South Texas school district and who self-identify as having bullied or committed social aggression regarding their the motivation and experiences. Six females participated in the interview study. Scholars in education, criminology, and psychology noted that the mean girl phenomenon of bullying and social aggression has been overwhelmingly perceived as a White upper-class problem (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004, 2008; Gonick, 2004; Ringrose, 2006) because of this, my study sought to understand how Hispanic females who identified as bullies processed the cultural discourse of social aggression and bullying. The main goal throughout the course of the study was to explore the stories and experiences recollected from the participants past social aggressive experiences to understand the process of the mean girl phenomenon of bullying and social aggression (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004, 2008; Gonick, 2006; Ringrose, 2006).

Because the majority of the research found on relational or social aggression pertained to white, middle to upper class females (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003), I purposely chose to explore the narratives of Hispanic females as relational or social aggressors, as South Texas is highly populated with Hispanic females and the university is considered a Hispanic Serving Institute. As reflected by the data shared by the participants, the problem of bullying and social aggression is not specific to class or race. Similar to the research conducted of white middle to upper class, the data suggested that the Hispanic female social aggressors that participated in my study were also trying to find ways to react and express aggressiveness without “breaking out of the expectant mold of passiveness and niceness” to outsiders (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003).

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Michael Mondragon, my sons (Micael and JonGabriel), my parents Diana and Alonzo Delgado Jr. and all my family. I thank you for your love, encouragement, and support. I could not have gotten this far without your sacrifice to make my dream a reality.

Michael, I couldn't have done this without you. I saw how hard you worked to keep the house in order and family intact in my absence and although I did not thank you daily, as I should have, I am grateful and love you for wanting me to succeed more than I did at times. Boys, thank you for waiting for mommy to finish homework and loving me regardless of how long I took. Mom and dad, thank you for watching the boys when I need to write and allowing me to bounce ideas off you. Dalila, thank you for helping me with the boys; it gave me time to finish, like Tio Lino wished.

This has been a long journey, but you have all been with me along the way, so I dedicate and share this honor with you.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Sec. 37.0832 of the Texas Education Code defines "Bullying" as "a single significant act or a pattern of acts by one or more students directed at another student that exploits an imbalance of power and involves engaging in written or verbal expression, expression through electronic means, or physical conduct" (Student Code of Conduct, 2017). According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, bullying behaviors include diverse forms of aggression such as physical aggression, verbal aggression, and relational and social aggression (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Social aggression is a form of nonphysical bullying that it is more subtle such as gossiping, spreading rumors, criticizing other people behind their backs, excluding or ostracizing people from a group, turning people against each other, dismissing the opinions of others, "Stealing" a boyfriend or girlfriend, threatening if the other person does not comply, flirting with a person to make another person jealous (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Despite the prevalence of these forms of aggression, much of the literature on aggression has focused on physical aggression (Underwood, Galen, & Paquette, 2001). During the 1990s research attention focused primarily on issues regarding imbalance of power that emphasized nonphysical power assertion strategies such as indirect aggression (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992), relational aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), and social aggression (Galen & Underwood, 1997). This focus informed legislative actions to address the issue of bullying on school campuses.

Anti-bullying legislation was enacted in March 2011, when the White House convened or participated in... a conference on preventing bullying in schools. In 2013, Texas further addressed this issue with SB 471, which required each school district "to address bullying and harassment, through providing parental notification, programs for students and staff, providing

counseling to bullies and victims and protecting those who report bullying.” In addition to the previously mentioned bill, Texas HB 1386, which passed on June 2, 2019, required the “development of intervention and prevention programs to train school staff to recognize potential suicide victims, to include those students targeted by bullies” (p. 3).

As defined in Chapter 37 of the Texas Education Code (2017), physical aggression and sexual harassment may also be a component of social aggression (Student Code of Conduct, 2017). The Texas Education Code categorizes social aggression under “other forms of bullying” (Student Code of Conduct, 2017), which causes problems for school officials due to the code’s lack of clear definition. Additionally, according to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2017), social aggression has aspects of harassment and verbal aggression and is defined as one of the three main categories of bullying.

Legislation at State Level reflects a recognition that Bullying is complex and can encompass physical, social power assertion strategies. Further, Chronic Bullying is associated with psychological harm and has potentially lethal consequences(perhaps a factor in suicide). Social aggression as a power assertion strategy has not been studied extensively with Hispanic Females.

Statement of Problem

Bullying via social aggression is a problem among females that can result in a psychological pain that exemplifies anxiety, loss of self-esteem or self-confidence, and damages the ability to properly function in relationships (Krahe, 2013; Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000b). Moreover, studies by Olafsen & Viemerö, (2000) and (Koyanagi, Oh, Carvalho, Smith, Haro, Vancampfort, Stubbs, & DeVylder, 2019) also determined that negative psychological outcomes, such as those found in extreme cases exhibiting the desire to flee a situation or person who is socially aggressive, can manifest into a suicide or an attempted suicide.

Relational or social aggression is a covert form of aggression, “aimed at destroying other girls” (Galen & Underwood, 1997). Several researchers (Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988; Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000a; Archer & Coyne, 2005; Krahé, 2013) have shown females to be more relationally aggressive than are males. Relational aggression is particularly effective in hurting females (Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowen, 2001; Shute, Owens, & Slee, 2002), therefore females often present the rationale “to inflict harm on peers, in ways that best thwart or damage the goals that are valued by their respective gender peer groups” (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995, p. 710). Because females relate peer feedback to their self-worth (Fowler, 1981; Remillard, & Lamb, 2005), especially regarding physical appearance, attractiveness, and acceptance, they will attempt to harness and use this undiscovered power to the benefit of one's popularity. Additionally, females are known to employ tactics to maintain their social position by using indirect aggression, which is defined in the social scientific scholarship as a form of social manipulation (Kelly & Pomerantz, 2009).

Owens et al. (2000 a) found that females are impacted differently by relational aggression because they are discouraged from using physical aggression. A follow up qualitative study conducted by Owens, Shute, and Slee (2002) exposed the functions of relationally aggressive behaviors in adolescents “own words.” Their study was conducted with high school girls who were asked to explain the occurrences in a scenario that encompassed relational aggression from her peers. Shute et al. (2002) concluded that the most common reason for aggressive behavior, such as breaking confidences or gossip, was to alleviate boredom because the behavior was thought to be fun and added excitement to their lives. Additionally, the study reported that the participants explained that relational aggression was more commonly used in friendship and group processes. As substantiated by Simmons (2002), girls attack within close friendship networks or cliques. Crothers, Field, and Kolbert (2005) study added that the bullying tactics

associated with indirect aggression included gossiping, social exclusion, stealing friends, not talking to someone, and threatening to withdraw friendship. The leader of the clique, the social aggressor / bully, is framed as using boundary maintenance as a bullying tactic, allowing her to exclude other girls from friendship groups (Bjorkqvist, et al., 1992).

According to Kelly and Pomerantz, (2009) when Rosalind Wiseman published her book, *Queen Bees & Wannabes* in 2002, she exposed social aggression as a hidden aspect of girl culture. This girl culture, once thought to be about “cattiness” and commonplace, was revealed to contain a subculture of “popular girls” who protect and cultivate power by asserting themselves in in cruel ways (Waldron, 2011, p. 1299). Using these tactics to gain attention and perhaps emulation, allows the Queen Bee to disguise her aggression. Because her aggression is hidden, she escapes consequences, while inflicting long term pain on other girls (Kelly & Pomerantz, 2009); thus, provoking feelings of jealousy and revenge from the Queen Bee’s “loyal subjects willing to do her bidding” (Kelly & Pomerantz, 2009 p. 5).

A study by Teicher (2010) examined the neurological impact of verbal abuse on childhood brain development where teens who had been bully victims were subjected to brain scans that allowed him to examine the physical differences in their living brain tissue, specifically in the corpus callosum, in comparison to the neurological structures of teens who had never been victimized by bullying, it shed light on a major issue. Teicher’s research showed results of bullied teens that “had observable abnormalities in a part of the brain, corpus callosum, and had less myelin, a coating that speeds communication between the cells--vital in an organ like the brain where milliseconds matter in visual processing, memory, and more” (p. 5). This caused a slow transference of information to go from one hemisphere of the brain to the other. The myelin acted, as if the brain was trying to protect itself from what it was processing (Teicher, 2010). These findings allow one to understand that bully victims may not have a

normal brain development or relationship development. Currently, the concentration of the majority of literature is to understand the apprehensions of students that have experienced bullying, in any form, should be on their mental health, but this does not address the problem, which is the bully and the reasoning for their actions. The queen bee like other bullies is often actual or potential victims themselves either suffering from coercion of others or struggling to cope with their own insecurities (Cho, 2017).

For example, according to Cho (2017), the overlap between becoming a perpetrator of bullying and the issue of victimization is a significant area to address in understanding the process and consequences of bullying. Her study found that many, if not all perpetrators were once bully victims and are struggling to understand the reasoning behind their victimization during adolescence, while trying to figure out their own value and worth. Separate from their parents and peers, many may struggle with the different influences of their environment and relationships. Sometimes those victims become bullies because their values become congruent with those who bullied them, which causes the overlap. In other words, they once were bullied or are being bullied while they are bullying others. Female adolescent social aggression research and media stereotypes (mean girl movies) has been dominated by studies of white females (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008). Actuarial accounts of female bullying indicate a prevalence within, Hispanic culture. In a recent study by Romero, Wiggs, Valencia, & Bauman (2013), being a Hispanic female bully increased likelihood of suicide ideation and suicide plan compared to not being a bully. Because the interpersonal and intrapsychic experiences of this female Hispanic population has not been explored, in order to address a need to prevent depressive symptoms and suicide among Hispanic girls and to further investigate the effects of bullying, more research is needed to address this bully / victim cycle.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand dynamics of school based social aggression (bullying) through analysis of retrospective accounts of bullying experiences elicited from six Hispanic females between the age of 19 and 23 that attended school in a South Texas school district and who self-identify as having bullied or committed social aggression. The research questions guiding the study are:

1. How do self-identified Hispanic female social aggressors retrospectively describe their secondary school bullying behavior?
2. What thoughts do self-identified Hispanic female social aggressors report they engaged in while bullying in secondary school?
3. What thoughts do self-identified Hispanic female social aggressors retrospectively report engaging in after the bullying occurred?

Aims of the Study

- To explore and describe conceptualization of social aggression from a sample of Hispanic female bullies
- To explore and describe Hispanic female experience of social aggression as aggressors
- To explain why the Hispanic social aggressors resorted to social aggression
- To provide suggestions that could be used in intervention programs for Hispanic female social aggressors

Definition of Terms

Bully - A person who commits "Bullying" as "a single significant act or a pattern of acts by one or more students directed at another student that exploits an imbalance of power and involves engaging in written or verbal expression, expression through electronic means, or physical conduct" (Student Code of Conduct, 2017).

Cultural discourse - a form of cultural communication that focuses on distinctive means of communication that are used in specific contexts, and the meanings of those practices to participants who use them.(Schneider, 1976).

Cyberbullying - Cyberbullying has been defined as occurring "when the Internet, cell phones or other devices are used to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person" (National Crime Prevention Council, 2011, para. 2).

Cybercide - Cybercide describes cyberbullying that directly or indirectly results in a completed suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Discourse- written or spoken communication or debate. (2019)

Harassment - threatening to cause harm or bodily injury to another student, engaging in sexually intimidating conduct, causing physical damage to the property of another student, subjecting another student to physical confinement or restraint, or maliciously taking any action that substantially harms another student's physical or emotional health or safety (Student Code of Conduct, 2017).

Physical or mental damage or injury - Something that causes someone or something to be hurt, broken, made less valuable or successful (Merriam-Webster, 2016).

Queen bee - a woman who dominates or leads a group (as in a social activity) (Merriam-Webster, 2019)

Social Aggression - intentionally harming another person's social relationships verbally or digitally (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Warburton & Anderson, 2015).

Social Aggressor – One who manipulates others to attack the victim, or, by other means, makes use of the social structure in order to harm the target person, without being personally involved in attack (Owens, 1996).

Victimization -The action of singling someone out for cruel or unjust treatment. (Victimization, 2016).

Operational Definitions

How Hispanic females “feel” while bullying will be defined as their stated emotions such as sadness, anger, jealousy, fear, etc. - as reported by participants during interviews with the researcher or written by them in the journal they will keep as part of the research in order to understand the thought process and impact of a student on a peer who is intentionally being harmed at school.

How the Hispanic females “view” the different subtypes of aggression used in or delivered at school or a premises of school will be defined and categorized by any statements showing their understandings, beliefs, attitudes, or ideas about the experience, as reflected in their reports during the interviews or in journal entries kept as part of the research.

The Hispanic females’ “integration into self-image” or school reputation will be defined as their reports - in either interview or journal entries - of their attempts to understand of the experience, to link this experience with previous meaningful experiences, and/or to describe how the experience has changed them in some way.

Methodological Framework

Qualitative research has been chosen for this study to conduct an in-depth examination of “interpretive practice that makes the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008 p. 5). Schwandt (2007) noted, “Interpretivism is a term occasionally used as a synonym for all qualitative inquiry” (p. 160). Through the qualitative lens of interpretivism I have made an attempt to represent the psychological and emotional experiences of the participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008 p. 8) and “examine how people construct meaning from these events that take place in their lives” (Bhattacharya, 2007, pp 2-3). Because social aggression is not limited to one time or

place, nor is it limited to any one age group or other demographic factor, a study of its characteristics is appropriate for an interpretivist framework, which allows the researcher to ask ‘How do people form their understandings?’

Interpretivism was used as a lens to explore retrospective accounts of bullying behavior by perpetrators during their secondary school years. The focus of the retrospective accounts was to explore reflective accounts of the meaning and characteristic motivation/mindset of social interactions (Schwandt, 2007). Therefore, interpretivism was used “to deepen our understanding of what it is to live a human life, to contribute to human self-understanding and decency” (Buchanan, 1998, p. 439).

Interpretivism shapes reality to be subjective, relating to a person's, or researcher's emotions, prejudices, and bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Interpretivism is an existentialist notion that reality is created through interaction within a certain time. Moreover, we are seen as the creators of our own world or reality, not being restricted by any external laws (Buchanan, 1998). Because interpretivism aims to understand people, but not to measure them, through its use, I attempted to understand social aggression / bullying through human action, and characteristics within the action.

Theoretical Framework

Additionally, this study examined the findings through the theoretical lens of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), a theory developed by Bandura (1977). According to Fiske (2014), Social Cognitive Theory states that the process people use to make sense of their perspectives about other people, social situations and themselves takes place through social interaction. Bandura (2002), maintained that the social cognitive theory “adopts an agentic perspective to human development, adaptation and change” (p. 269). Therefore, individuals may be socially aggressive in schools, because they have been pre-exposed to the knowledge and skills of social

aggression in social interactions that enabled them to increase their own power and or social status (Bandura, 2012). This pre- exposure to successful social aggressive behavior may influence others to model the same behavior so that they too can succeed at perhaps solidifying social status, or to ensure that they will not be socially aggressed/ bullied (Bandura 2012). Self-efficacy is based on how people judge whether or not they are able to engage in the activities needed to achieve a particular goal, in a particular context (Greene, 2017).

Subjectivity Statement

Growing up, I had friends and acquaintances that were repeatedly tormented and bullied. I remember standing up for them on many occasions, but in doing so, I became a bully for that moment to deflect the focus from my friend. I remember telling my teacher about my friends being bullied and hearing her say “kids will be kids” (with a nonchalant tone).

I myself was a victim of bullying in middle school. I was targeted by a group of girls who disliked me, because a boy they liked had a crush on me. He would not date them because he wanted a chance to date me, though I had a boyfriend. I, of course, was oblivious to the boy liking me at first and the girls hating me, as neither of them were a part of my social circle. I was “jumped” by four girls and left to defend myself until friends, whom I had previously stood up for “jumped” in for me. Though my incident was isolated, others were not so fortunate.

Similarly, I remember leaving my circle of friends, well more dividing my clique in high school, because my two best friends (that I went to school with since first grade) kept picking on a friend that was part of our clique. It was constant and mean, and I would always say something until I just couldn’t stand it anymore, divided our click, and made more friends. Though we remained friends, I chose when I would be around them and when I would not. Although I was always on guard with them, I maintained a decent friendship.

It's because of my past experience with friends that I understand how someone bullied may feel, but I have never understood the rationale of the bully. Because children have no safe refuge from their bully, and as an educator I feel compelled to keep my students safe, I don't believe putting a band-aid on a problem without addressing the root of the issue will rectify the plight. That's why I'm interested in the reasoning for a female bully to engage in peer aggression. I included a subjectivity statement to bracket my own experience in an endeavor to accurately express the experiences of my participants.

Limitations and Delimitations

I functioned as a researcher. I shared and provided questions prior to the interview sessions that would be helpful to answer my research question. The limitations included the willingness of the participant to fully express themselves. Moreover, participation was voluntary, and while it was recognized that attrition might be problematic, none occurred.

Significance of the Study

The study makes a valuable contribution to educational research by helping to identify factors that impact the target of social aggressors. The retrospective accounts of adult Hispanic women, ages 19-23, regarding their experiences as social aggressors in adolescence offer new insight into the treatment and explanation of social aggression. Moreover, this research can be used to develop and support the intervention required by law for school counselors.

Because social aggression is a continuous cycle of vicious behaviors, without intervention and prevention efforts, behavior and social problems may arise for many girls, regardless of the perception. According to researchers (Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988; Owens, Slee, & Shute, 2000b; Archer & Coyne, 2005; Krahé, 2013), there is a hidden culture of girls' aggression in which bullying is epidemic, distinctive, and destructive. Girls use backbiting, exclusion, rumors, name-calling, and manipulation to inflict psychological pain on

targeted victims. Unlike boys, who tend to bully acquaintances or strangers, girls frequently attack within tightly knit networks of friends, making aggression harder to identify and intensifying the damage to the victims. Behind a façade of female intimacy lies a terrain traveled in secret, marked with anguish, and nourished by silence (Simmons, 2002, p. 3). The results of this study contribute further information regarding the destructive behaviors of female aggression and reveal that change needs to be implemented through counseling.

A study by Teicher (2010) examined the neurological impact of verbal abuse on childhood brain development where teens who had been bully victims were subjected to brain scans that allowed him to examine the physical differences in their living brain tissue, specifically in the corpus callosum, in comparison to the neurological structures of teens who had never been victimized by bullying, it shed light on a major issue. Teicher's research showed results of bullied teens that "had observable abnormalities in a part of the brain, corpus callosum, and had less myelin, a coating that speeds communication between the cells--vital in an organ like the brain where milliseconds matter in visual processing, memory, and more" (p. 5). This caused a slow transference of information to go from one hemisphere of the brain to the other. The myelin acted, as if the brain was trying to protect itself from what it was processing (Teicher, 2010). These findings allow one to understand that bully victims may not have a normal brain development or relationship development. Currently, the concentration of the majority of literature is to understand the apprehensions of students that have experienced bullying, in any form, should be on their mental health, but this does not address the problem, which is the bully and the reasoning for their actions.

Scholars in education, criminology, and psychology note that the mean girl phenomenon of bullying and social aggression is overwhelmingly perceived as a White upper-class problem (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004, 2008; Gonick, 2006; Ringrose, 2006). Therefore, this study

provides an understanding how Hispanic female social aggressors process the cultural discourse of social aggression and bullying. The main goal throughout the course of the study was to tell the stories and experiences recollected from the participants past social aggressive experiences to understand the process of the mean girl phenomenon of bullying and social aggression (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004, 2008; Gonick, 2006; Ringrose, 2006). Because the majority of the research found on relational or social aggression pertained to white, middle to upper class females (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003), I purposely chose to explore the narratives of Hispanic females as relational or social aggressors, as South Texas is highly populated with Hispanic females and the university is considered a Hispanic Serving Institute. As reflected by the data shared by the participants, the problem of bullying and social aggression is not specific to class or race. Similar to the research conducted of white middle to upper class, the data suggests that the Hispanic female social aggressors that participated in my study were also trying to find ways to react and express aggressiveness without “breaking out of the expectant mold of passiveness and niceness” to outsiders (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003).

Chapter Summary

The chapter provided a brief understanding of the problem of social aggression and bullying causes for victims. Further, the chapter emphasized social aggression to be a White problem, though other researchers have shown concern for girls of a different ethnicity. Additionally, the research on girls’ aggression indicates the *mean girl* discourse is reflective of a cultural concern though they are not at the center of the current narrative. I have explained that my focus, in particular, was to explore the reasoning of the aggressor/ bully to behave in social aggression and the ways in which social aggression occurs amongst girls of different ethnicities, particularly in the Hispanic culture. The Texas Senate and House of Representatives have

agreed and mandated counseling be implemented to address the bully/ social aggressor as the root of the problem in hopes of identifying and deterring the behavior.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter II discusses the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study as well as the definition of bullying as defined by the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the Texas Education Code and further explains the conceptualization of the definitions to clinical and scholarly literature. Additionally, this chapter explains the changes in social aggression; cyberbullying and social aggression; where bullying occurs; legislation on bullying in schools; gender and bullying; consequences of social/relational aggression, including social exclusion or rejection; and programs for prevention of social aggression. Finally, the chapter aims to provide a clear understanding of these phenomena in the context of this study.

Theoretical Framework

The study utilized the theoretical framework of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT).

According to Fiske (2014), SCT states that the process people use to make sense of their perspectives about other people, social situations and themselves takes place through social interaction. Likewise, Bandura (2002), maintains that the SCT “adopts an agentic perspective to human development, adaptation and change”(p. 3). For example, individuals may be socially aggressive in schools, because they have been pre-exposed to the knowledge and skills of social aggression in social interactions that enabled them to increase their own power and or social status (Bandura, 2002).

SCT is a psychological theory unified by Bandura (1977), based upon existing research merged with environmental factors. This theory suggests that behavior is a result of environmental factors and personal cognitive factors, such as knowledge and rationale (Bandura, 1977). Because behavior is affected by environmental and cognitive factors, the actions resulting from the behavior is an interacting factor (Bandura & Walters, 1963) since it reinforces

cognitive influences. SCT suggests that perceived self-efficacy has an influence on behavior. Self-efficacy encompasses an individual's belief in his or her ability to achieve a goal (Bandura, 1997) through multiple dimensions (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). This perception is especially true regarding the impact of an individual's ability to self-judge and with stressful or harmful situations. Moreover, Bandura (1977) suggests that self-efficacy is especially affected by one's persistence and ability to overcome obstacles.

It is important to understand that students establish self-efficacy through the ability to regulate their own learning and emotions (Galla & Wood, 2012). Specific to social aggression, researchers have found that adolescents who reported high levels of self-efficacy in social settings were significantly more likely to engage in helping behaviors in social or relational aggression (Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoe, 2008; Bandra, 2012).

Aggression and Bullying

What is aggression?

According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2001) aggression is defined as "harm caused by bullying or manipulative behavior as well as isolated incidents", whereas bullying is the repetition of behaviors that are intended to hurt a target (U.S. Department of Justice, 2001, as cited in the Ophelia Project website, 2001). Moreover, aggression involves the act of agitating or injuring another person. There are two main types of aggression: overt and covert. Each type has subcategories of aggression: physical aggression (overt), verbal aggression (overt and covert), and relational aggression (covert) (Bushman & Anderson, 2001). Bullying, indirect aggression, and social/relational aggression are terms that are frequently used interchangeably both colloquially and within the aggression literature (Archer, 2004), therefore, I will be using the terms synonymously.

Overt	Posting pictures on social media (without being recognized) Social Isolations & Rejection	Social Exclusion and Rejection Taunt or Torment to commit physical aggression
	Posting pictures on social media (taking credit for behavior) Relational aggression Damage to relationships or feelings friendship or group inclusion Social Isolations & Rejection	Actual Verbal Confrontation Verbal Abuse.
Indirect		Direct

Figure 1. Types of aggression

Overt aggression. Gender differences in overt aggression have been cited with males using overt aggression more than females; however, no gender studies in relational/ social aggression have been widely published. Most American research regarding aggressive behavior has been based on males' overt aggression (Artz, Nicholson, & Magnuson, 2008; David & Kistner, 2000). Additionally, studies reported that social / relational aggression is thought to be primarily a female form of aggression (Artz, Nicholson, & Magnuson, 2008; David & Kistner, 2000; Delveaux & Daniels, 2000; McEvoy, Estrem, Rodriguez, & Olson, 2003; Tiet, Wasserman, Loeber, McReynolds, & Miller, 2001; Tomada & Schneider, 1997). Artz et al. (2008) asserted that males are implicated in direct physical forms of aggression more than females, while indirect aggression is the primary form of aggression that females use more than males. David and Kistner's (2000) findings were consistent with other studies that reported males to display more overt and relational aggression than females. Delveaux and Daniels, (2000) results showed that some female children choose relational aggression, as opposed to physical, because they believed that using relational aggressive techniques would not only accomplish their intention but would allow them to do so and stay out of trouble. Boys,

however, were more likely to endorse physically aggressive strategy. Tiet et al. (2001) presented results which supported previous findings that levels of relational aggression in girls are at least equal to, or higher than, levels of relational aggression in boys. Additionally, results from McEvoy et al. (2003) further supported gender differences by asserting that boys more often used physically aggressive behavior and girls more often engaged in relational aggression.

Covert aggression. Studies regarding covert aggression have demonstrated that indirect aggression is associated with increased peer rejection and psychological impairment, such as greater loneliness and depression for both females and males, although girls seem to be more adversely affected than boys (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Hennington et al., 1998; Rys & Bear, 1997). Therefore, gender behavioral responses to stressors often differ. Taylor et al. (2000) hypothesized that women may more likely “tend-and-befriend” as a response to specific stressors, whereas men will not.

Gossip has been studied as an additional form of covert behavior of both women and men. However, McDonald, Wang, Menzer, Rubin, and Booth-LaForce (2011) indicated that there are differences regarding gender and gossip. Current evidence about gender differences in gossip specifies that preconceptions about females being more likely to use gossip in an aggressive fashion are more than just anecdotal and more than just a stereotype (McDonald et al., 2011).

Khosropour and Walsh’s (2001) study concluded that in order to protect the current generation from brutality, especially amongst females, correction of past mistakes, using programs that primarily focused on male physical bullying and treating the victim only, needs to be changed. They stated that preemptive measures in the education system regarding counseling for social / relational aggressors needs to be addressed so that the known behaviors can be

identified and unlearned. Additionally, they concluded that by unmasking the root of the problem in the aggressors, working to change the problem is possible.

What Is Bullying?

The definition of bullying was originally proposed in the 1970s and reiterated in the now classic book “Bullying in School” (1993) by Olweus. His definition states, “A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (p. 265). In 2014, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Department of Education released the first federal uniform definition of bullying for research and surveillance (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014). The definition further includes that bullying may be a single significant act or pattern of acts of unwanted aggressive behavior, observed or perceived power imbalance, and repetition of behaviors. Furthermore, Texas Education Code 37.0832 defines bullying as consists of acts by one or more students that exploits an imbalance of power which includes engaging in written/verbal/electronic expression or physical conduct that causes harm (David’s Law, 2018). Because bullying is the most prominent form of aggression in schools (U.S. Department of Justice, 2002) it is important to classify each type to be able to identify and expose the negative actions. There are two different modes of bullying as defined by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2017): direct and indirect.

Direct bullying. Direct bullying entails the repeated exposure to negative physical and verbal incidents (Olweus, 1994). Physical bullying is a subcategory of direct bullying. The physical bully uses pushing, hitting, or kicking to harm their victim (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Because physical bullying is blatant, it is considered an overt form of aggression that uses physical contact to inflict harm. Additionally, another form of direct bullying uses verbal assaults and can be both overt and covert forms of aggression. Verbal bullies use words to inflict

harm or humiliate their victims (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Verbal bullying includes name calling, insults, teasing, intimidation, homophobic or racist remarks, or verbal abuse (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). A face-to-face banter or other form of communication intended to hurt another person, or a communication perceived as intended to harm someone, whether spoken, written, or drawn is verbal abuse in the form of overt aggression (Benson & Archer, 2002).

According to Smokowski et al. (2005), verbal aggression has the intended goal to degrade and demean the victim, while making the aggressor look dominant and powerful. It can be a covert form of aggression when a person is manipulated or told how to feel, think, or what they need or want. It is a coy and deceptive form of aggression. Another form of covert verbal aggression is to taunt and torment someone to commit physical aggression in order for the verbal aggressor to use self-defense as a way to justify a physical reaction (Smokowski et al., 2005).

Indirect bullying. The second form of bullying is indirect bullying. Indirect bullying/aggression is a covert form of aggression, which is a method of social manipulation behavior used to attack a target, or manipulating the social network in order to exclude the target person from friendship group (Bjorkqvist, 2001; Coyne et al., 2006; Green et al., 1996; Loudin et al., 2003; Kaukiainen et al., 1999). Verbal and social bullying are the two most common types of indirect bullying according to Espelage, Holt, and Henkel (2003). Furthermore, social bullying has a tendency to involve groups of students who support each other in bullying other students (Espelage et al., 2003). For example, the behaviors that can maximize concealment of identity and minimize the chance for retribution, such as rumor spreading or gossiping, is the preferred form of indirect aggression over direct aggression because it is harder to detect or observe than overt behaviors.

The overt form of aggression in indirect bullying is relational aggression. Relational aggression is also interchangeably used as relational victimization and relational bullying

(Dempsey & Storch, 2008; Gomes, 2007; La Greca & Harrison, 2005). Crick (1995) defined relational aggression as “behaviors that harm others through damage (or threat of damage) to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion” (p. 77). It is important to understand that the harm inflicted through relational aggression can be inflicted overtly or covertly. Additionally, relational aggression uses social isolation and rejection to harm their victim (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Relational aggression influences and sustains the different roles and behavior in social groups (Tajfel, 1978, as cited in Tarrant, p. 111, 2002). However, the covert form of aggression comes in the form of social aggression.

Social aggression. One of the descriptions of social aggression is “the manipulation of group acceptance through alienation, ostracism, or character defamation” (Cairns et al., 1989, p. 323). Galen and Underwood (1997) further defined social aggression as being “directed toward damaging another’s self-esteem, social status, or both, and may take such direct forms as verbal rejection, negative facial expression or body movement, or more indirect forms such as slanderous rumors or social exclusion” (p. 589). Thus, social aggression includes both overt and covert forms which can result in relational manipulation, as well as all the behavior characteristics for relational and indirect aggression (Underwood, 2003). It also includes harmful nonverbal behavior, which is defined as the gestural form of indirect aggression (Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000). Nonverbal forms of aggression can include scowling/ hostile looks, the making fun of physical characteristics or clothing, exclusion (moving so that you can’t sit or if you sit everyone getting up to leave), the head taunt, or rolling of the eyes.

The nature of social aggression is to harm someone, damage relationships, lower social status, impact self-esteem, and create social rejection. Females have a tendency to use social aggression because physical aggression is considered taboo (Scheff, 1984). Moreover, it has

been suggested that social aggression may be a way for girls to resolve the feeling of anger and pursue their social goals, while wanting to be perceived as nice (Saarni, 1999).

Direct and indirect aggression are involved in social relationships, yet are distinguishable from physical aggression. Both forms of aggression manipulate relationships and contain a need to control others. While indirect aggression manipulates the social network in order maintain control, some behaviors can encompass both indirect and direct aggression, such as social and relational aggression.

Social exclusion or rejection. A social aggressor's actions are often motivated by feelings or fear of inferiority (Beatty & Alexeyev, 2008). Many researchers (Archer, 2004; Crick et al., 1995; Crothers, 2005) speculate fear of social abandonment is a major factor social aggression. The social aggression behavior can be caused by perceived slights or over envy over physical appearances. The members of the social circle eventually grow tired of the bully's behavior leaving them (the aggressor) at risk for being progressively rejected herself. This in turn, leads to threatening exclusion from the group. Crother et al.'s (2005) research concluded that jealousy, entertainment, social status, and deflection often fall under the higher order theme of social abandonment because it is believed that all of the aforementioned can be affected by being in with the in crowd or ostracized. The above exemplifies coercive control tactics and processes known to potentially cause a physical-like psychological pain (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008).

Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner (1994) and Krishnan (2010) speculate that social aggressors often believe that a good reputation is important to display for self-promotion; therefore, they use fear of social abandonment to raise their social status and to deflect aggression away from themselves in order to maintain and save face (Eagly & Steffen, 1986;

Eron, 1987; Letendre, 2007). They rely more on indirect aggression rather than physical conflict or overt aggression.

Additionally, one of the common tactics used to humiliate their potential rivals or to deflect the need to accept someone into their social circle is gossip. It is typical for the social aggressor to gossip about the promiscuity of other females to avoid establishing friendly relations with the women who are suspected of having a promiscuous sexual behavior, which could disadvantage a woman in her position on the social scale, or to protect their friends or potential significant others from the sexual advances from those females (Campbell, 1982; 1995; Liddle, Shackelford, & Weekes-Shackelford, 2012, p. 13).

Another example that contributes to social exclusion or rejection is boredom (Owens 2000; 2000). The ability to torment others makes time more eventful by creating excitement and brings attention to themselves. Because aggressors do not select their targets indiscriminately and have a tendency to select certain peers for their aggressive acts, they choose targets for their psycho-emotional stress in hopes of creating a subordinate group (Owens, 2000; Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008).

The Changing Face of Social Aggression

Social aggression is commonly linked to the phrase “survival of the fittest” (Spencer, 1864) which relates to Darwin’s theory of natural selection, and insinuates that bullying is a survival tactic (Donegan, 2012) especially when paired with individual competition or social Darwinism. Herbert Spencer, a 19th century philosopher, applied the theory of natural selection to social, political, and economic issues, known as social Darwinism.

Before 1970, bullying was not considered to be a serious issue in the United States. In fact, little attention was given to bullying by researchers. An early study by Olweus (1993) exposed that an underlying problem existed. His seminal results caused others to take notice and

take measures to include bullying in safety plans in the schools. Additionally, his study attributed deaths and mental health issues to violence and bullying, requiring immediate attention. He believed that bullying did not only affect someone physically, but might include psychological trauma that may be continuous such as poor academic performance and low self-esteem (Wilson, 2006). Since suicide is a leading cause of death in some subpopulations, such as adolescent girls (Koyanagi, Oh, Carvalho, Smith, Haro, Vancampfort, Stubbs, DeVlyder, 2019), in a current response to Olweus, Koyanagi et al. (2019) studied adolescents who did not have previous ideations of suicide, but who attempted suicide as a result of bullying. Additionally, in their global findings across over 48 countries, results showed that adolescents who experienced bullying had significant increases in suicide attempts. The discussion of the paper emphasized that “mental health practitioners should consider bullying an important potential risk factor for suicide attempts” (p 917).

In 1995 the Texas Legislature responded to the bullying issue with the Safe Schools Act, which allows for schools to have significant authority to make the school environment safe by defining the bullying behavior and extending bullying discipline in the student code of conduct. The student code of conduct is adopted by school districts to comply with state standards for disciplinary removal of a student from a classroom; transfer of a student to a disciplinary alternative education program; and suspension or expulsion (Student Code of Conduct, 2017).

Additional, conventional attempts to deter violence in schools were exemplified by the installation of metal detectors at school entrances to prevent students from bringing weapons onto school grounds; the enactment of “zero tolerance” policies that guarantee the automatic removal of students (through either suspension, expulsion, or transfer) who perpetrate acts of violence, and the use of police officers and security guards to patrol and monitor student behavior while school is in session (Noguera, 1995). These temporary remedies may in fact

have made some schools safer, but the reasons that have recently been acknowledged by mass school shootings have not entirely addressed the goal to deter the behavior.

Cyberbullying and Social Aggression

Bullying that occurs using technology (including but not limited to phones, email, chat rooms, instant messaging, and online posts) is considered electronic bullying and is viewed as a context or location (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Electronic bullying is also known as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is a non-traditional form of direct (verbal) and indirect bullying that includes the use of any type of technological information and communication technology used to bully another person (Poland, 2010).

Cyberbullying includes verbal aggression and relational aggression and can involve property damage resulting from electronic attacks that lead to the modification, dissemination, damage, or destruction of a privately stored electronic information (Willard, 2007). Willard (2007) stated that cyberbullying is a way to broadcast hurtful content with minimum effort. Li (2007) stated, “the anonymity associated with electronic communication tools make it easier for cyberbullying to happen and more difficult to prevent” p. 1785). Additionally, Ang and Goh (2010) identified that low effective empathy in both genders had higher scores in cyberbullying. Hinduja and Patchin (2015) stated that girls are more likely to be involved in cyberbullying. However, Li further states, “How to effectively prevent and appropriately intervene remains to be answered” (2007, p. 1785).

Most bullying takes place in school, outside on school grounds, and common places for youth to gather in the community (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O’Brennan, 2007). However, with modern technology, no longer is the only type of bullying historically found in a school yard; now society is observing it in conjunction with cyberbullying (Hinduja & Pachin, 2009). Cyberbullying occurs on cell phones and online. Moreover, social aggression takes on many

forms especially through cyberbullying, or bullying through technology such as social networking sites, instant messages, or text messaging, which presents a new challenge for broader bullying prevention considerations (Willard, 2007). Unlike traditional forms, cyberbullying can occur 24/7 to a wide audience and gives those who engage in the behavior a false sense of anonymity (Bradshaw et al., 2007).

State and local lawmakers have initiated mandates for the protection and safety of school-aged children. In addition, although there is no federal law that applies to bullying, if the bullying is based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or religion, then the behavior may be considered prohibited harassment under federal law, and schools must address the behavior according to federal guidelines, state law and the local district code of conduct.

The U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services welcomed students, parents, and teachers in addition to non-profit leaders, advocates, and policymakers to the White House for a Conference on Bullying Prevention in Schools on Thursday, March 10, 2011. The Conference brought together communities from across the nation that had been affected by bullying as well as those who are currently moving toward action to address it. The participants spoke about the effects of bullying and the work of students, parents, and teachers nationwide. Moreover, preventive education and supportive school structures were mandated in anti-bullying legislation to be implemented per state by the federal government in 2011. Texas went further by creating SB 471 to ensure that important elements for reducing bullying in schools is executed in all districts (2013). Yet, according to Kristin D. Eisenbraun, author of *Violence in schools: Prevalence, prediction, and prevention* (2007), few evidence-based programs have proven effective at reducing bullying in the United States and those that have are cost-prohibitive for many schools especially programs that isolate and address social aggression.

Federal Legislation

According to Stopbullying.gov (2014), the United States has not directly addressed bullying through a federal law; however, there may be laws that address some of the characteristics of bullying. There are federal laws that prohibit discriminatory harassment, which is covered under civil rights laws enforced by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). When the two (bullying and harassment) overlap, federally-funded schools have an obligation to resolve the issue (Cho, 2017). Regardless of the label categorizing the issue (e.g., bullying, hazing, teasing, aggression), schools are obligated by the Department of Education and Department of Justice laws to address the conduct (severe, pervasive or persistent), environment (hostile climate at school that interferes with a student's ability to participate or benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by a school), and discrimination or harassment based on a student's race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or religion).

Gender differences in Bullying Behavior

Because females most commonly utilizes indirect or social/ relational aggression, it has been concluded by several researchers (Crick, 1995, Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Letendre, 2007; Vail, 2002) that females can learn unhealthy relational patterns that last into adulthood and often shape what they expect from other women. Thus, the results of socially aggressive girls in middle school aggressively making their way through high school and college then bully their way to the top in a career or volunteer pursuits will continue the process in all endeavors and impart the behavior onto her offspring (Neal, 2007). Eagly & Steffen stated that men have a tendency to aggress physically or produce physical pain more than women who have a tendency to produce psychological or social harm (1986). Letendre, provided further support identifying that the developmental and contextual factors that contribute to learned aggression in girls are

increasingly effecting the development of girls' aggression (2007). Vail stated that "covert aggression goes unabated and that administrators and teachers turn a blind eye because it doesn't disrupt the order of the classroom or the school" (2002, p. 8).

School counselors must create or use existing interventions (Letendre, 2007) in the school in order to comply with Texas SB 471. Currently, most counseling programs focus on bullying. For example, the Model Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program focuses on group counseling and one-on-one counseling sessions regarding physical aggressions. However, this program tends to focus and concentrate on physical aggression. Therefore, social / relational aggression must be addressed (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006) regarding program development and interventions focusing on social/ relational aggression. This is problematic because failing to consider social/ relational aggression limits the scope of the problem that anti-bullying programs can address. In order to comply with Texas SB 471, counseling programs must expand their definition to include social/relational aggression.

Bullying among females has become a prevalent problem. Crick et al. (1995) and Romero (2013) categorized and defined this type of bullying as relational aggression, which is the intention to harm others through purposeful manipulation and damage of relationships including feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion (Crick et al., 1995) and consists of both direct and indirect behaviors (Cairns & Cairns, 2000). Bullying, indirect aggression, and social/relational aggression are terms that are frequently used interchangeably both colloquially and within the aggression literature (Archer, 2004) therefore, I will be using the terms synonymously.

Crick et al. (1995) hypothesized that a female aggressors behavior includes damaging the goals of individuals they see as a threat to their social status. Their study found that female aggressors will damage an individual's reputation and relationships with others, in order to

achieve dominance and power. Several studies (e.g., Crick et al., 1995; Owens, 1996; Vail, 2002) focused on socially aggressive females, rather than males because females are especially effective in hurting other females. According to Vail (2002) “girls are more likely than boys to use with holding friendship as an act of aggression” (p.10).

Consequences of Social/Relational Aggression

The legislation outlined above was a consequence of numerous acts of social/relational aggression. These acts were exposed in the most extreme form of indirect aggression resulting in death on January 14, 2010 when Phoebe Prince, a new arrival at South Hadley High School in Massachusetts, committed suicide because she was mercilessly tormented by a group of classmates, later nicknamed the "Mean Girls" by Massachusetts newspapers (Goldman, 2010). As a result of the social/relational aggression that she experienced, Phoebe Prince committed suicide (Goldman, 2010). According to the Massachusetts newspapers, the nation was stunned with the news that no one intervened to help her. Cases like that of Phoebe Prince have become all too common (Marr & Field, 2011). Children who are bullied experience real suffering that can interfere with their social and emotional development, as well as their school performance (American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry, 2008). Moreover, they “share a view that girls’ self-esteem crisis is a consequence of a girl-hostile culture that denies them expression of their authentic selves” (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005, p. 45).

Studies of Adolescent Students and Social Aggression

Research on neurological and physiological causes and effects of social aggression is limited. Teicher (2009) conducted a study examining the neurological impact of verbal abuse on childhood brain development and found that the children “had observable abnormalities in a part of the brain, the corpus callosum, and had less myelin, a coating that speeds communication between the cells thus affecting the brain where milliseconds matter in visual processing,

memory, and more”(2009, p.7). This caused a slow transference of information processing from one hemisphere of the brain to the other. The myelin acted, as if the brain was trying to protect itself from what it was processing (Anthes, 2010). Thus, the detriment to the human brain needs to be addressed and changed, but in order to make such a change, the problem needs to be identified. The aggressors are the problem and information regarding the reasoning for aggressors are limited.

Programs for Prevention of Social Aggression

In order for social aggression to be prevented, researchers agree that bullying and all of its subcategories, such as social aggression, require clear definition (Atlas & Peplar, 1998; Garrett, 2003). As Texas has endeavored to create a clear definition of bullying, according to Peplar, Craig, Connolly, Yuile, McMaster, & Jiang (2006), a program designed for Texas schools would do well. Moreover, Peplar et al. (2006) suggested that a program for the prevention of social aggression would need to be scaffolded to focus on both the aggressor and victim as individuals.

In 1991, Olweus created one of the most well-known bullying prevention and intervention programs in Norway. The program was created to reduce bully and victim problems, as well as prevent the aggressive behavior from occurring (Olweus, 2005). Other prevention programs currently used across the United States include Expect Respect Project, Bully-Proofing Your School, Respect and Protect, and Take a Stand.

"Expect Respect" focuses on the reduction of bullying by increasing awareness of prevention strategies for the promotion of respectful relationships among students as a means of preventing dating and domestic violence (Preventing bullying, 1998). "Bully-Proofing Your School" comprehensive approach that includes "conflict resolution training for all staff members,

social skills building for victims, positive leadership skills training for bullies, intervention techniques for those who neither bully nor are bullied and the development of parental support” (Preventing bullying, 1998).

The “Respect and Protect” program empowers students to report bullying behaviors and to give faculty and staff the tools to recognize, intervene, and issue consequences for bullying behaviors that they witness or that have been reported by the students (Preventing bullying, 1998). The “Take a Stand” program is for bullying prevention of elementary school students. Starting at the Kindergarten level and progressing through Grade 5, children learn about bullying, its effects, how to stop it and the importance of mutual acceptance and respect through creating a community of interpersonal problem solving and mutual respect” (Preventing bullying, 1998). Although several of these programs include social aggression or relational aggression within a unit, no program specifically addresses social aggression as a program for bullying prevention, nor are the units gender specific.

Chapter Summary

Chapter II has described social cognitive theory which will be used as a Theoretical Framework. The chapter also defines and describes aggression, bullying, social aggression, and cyberbullying. An overview of Federal and State Legislation is provided and is followed by studies on the consequences of bullying, implications for gender differences and current programs for prevention of social aggression.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Recall the purpose of this qualitative study was to understand through retrospective accounts the motivation and experiences of six Hispanic females between the age of 19 and 23 that attended school in a South Texas school district and who self-identify as having bullied or committed social aggression. The research questions guiding the study are:

1. How do self-identified Hispanic female social aggressors retrospectively describe their high school bullying behavior?
2. What thoughts do self-identified Hispanic female social aggressors report they engaged in while bullying in high school?
3. What thoughts do self-identified Hispanic female social aggressors retrospectively report engaging in after the bullying occurred?

Methodological Framework

The qualitative research methodology treats people as research participants and not as objects as in the positivist research approach. This emphasis can be an empowering process for participants in qualitative research, as the participants can be seen as the writers of their own history rather than objects of research (Casey, 1993). As a component of qualitative methodology, Interpretivism allows researchers to understand human actions by seeing the world through the eyes of the participants. Interpretive researchers accept that they will become part of the research in order to make sense of their own social realities (Mutch, 2005) and use qualitative research methodologies to investigate, interpret, and describe social realities (Bassey, 1995; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Interpretivism was used to study Hispanic female social life and bullying and assumed that the meaning of human action (bullying / social aggression) is a characteristic in the action (self-perception) and a key to understand the meaning (Schwandt, 2007). The theoretical scope of interpretivism suggests that we cannot understand the world free

of what is in our minds. Therefore, interpretivism was used “to deepen our understanding of what it is to live a human life, to contribute to human self-understanding and decency” (Buchanan, 1998, p. 439). Because interpretivism aims to understand people, but not to measure them, I adopted it as a theoretical framework to aid my attempt to understand social aggression / bullying through human action, and characteristics within the action.

Methodology

Qualitative research methodologies are often inductive and aim to discover, understand, and expose a context to establish a deeper understanding of the research problem (Ulin, Robinson and Tolley, 2004). A research methodology can determine how a researcher will acquire knowledge and conduct the research processes, according to Rajasekar, Philominathan, and Chinnathambi (2006). Establishing relationships with participants can lead to deeper insight of the context, adding depth to the data (Stake, 1995). To gain a deeper insight, this study utilized an interview study approach, which allowed me to study complex understandings within the participants' experiences. Additionally, I used an arts-informed approach in Chapter 5 to explore the interview results (Knowles and Cole, 2008)

In order to gain an in depth understanding of how participants recalled their involvement in social aggression, I used an interview study as the methodology. Kvale (1996) stated that the purpose of an interview study is gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experience. This can be done through open-ended questions that probe for rich thick detail. The open-ended questions allowed the participants to tell their story. Types of questions included in the interview study included the Grand Tour questions where I asked the participant to describe the first time you either saw or experienced social aggression. Some of these were intentionally broad and others more specific. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of social aggression and bullying, participants were asked to specifically describe what occurred – ‘How would you

describe the events that social aggression had on your school behavior or your school environment' to 'Walk me through your most significant experience when you committed social aggression.' Other techniques used in the interview study included follow-up questions, such as, 'So, when you got sent to the office, what was the end result?'

It is important to note that Sherman and Webb (1998) (Merriam, 2001) stated that one's perceived reality is constructed by one's interaction with one's social world (Merriam, 2001, p. 6) because of the intention of the researcher to focus upon the lived experience of female social aggressors in relation to the way their social worlds (school communities) influenced their respective understandings of their behavior in this research.

Additionally, I used arts-informed research in my conclusion to explore the results of the findings. Because arts-informed research is influenced by, but not based in arts-based research (Given, 2008), I was able to enhance the understanding of the human condition to reach multiple and diverse audiences. According to Barone (2008), "arts-based research is a form of qualitative research in the human studies that employs the premises, procedures, and principles of the arts" (p. 29). Additionally, Knowles and Cole (2008) stated that "arts-informed research is an approach to qualitative research in the social sciences that is situated in sound understandings of qualitative research approaches" (p. 32) in three ways. First, it is "inspired by an art form"; second, it "draws from artistic processes"; and, third, is a "representation of the research (the telling of the research story) that relies heavily on art forms characteristic of the arts' preceding defining qualities" (p. 32). Arts-informed research differs from arts-based in that arts-based creates a fully developed representation, whereas arts-informed uses a previous work to develop its results (Knowles & Cole, 2008). Both arts-based and arts-informed approaches help address the research question 'what is happening' and help interpret the problem of the study through a more in-depth and sophisticated understanding while considering the research questions and

fully acknowledging the richness and complexity of human experiences (Knowles & Cole, 2008). Because arts-informed research is “the creative meshing of scholarly and artistic endeavors” (Knowles & Cole, 2008 p. 33) the approach helps researchers question the occurrences in their research, with a process that allows the researcher to interpret and report the participants’ story (Barone & Eisner, 1997). Knowles & Cole recalled at an Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Elliot Eisner gave a distinguished Presidential Address addressing an expanding array of research methods to acknowledge and account for the range of forms and modes of understanding that comprise human development.

“Images created by literature, poetry, the visual arts, dance, and music,” he states, give us insights that inform us in the special ways that only artistically rendered forms make possible. . . . [Beyond stories and narrative] film, video, the multiple displays made possible through computers, and even poetically crafted narrative are waiting in the wings. . . . We won’t have long to wait until they are called to center stage. (pp. 7, 8)

I used the arts-informed approach to conceptualize knowledge through the use of Alice in Wonderland as a comparison. For example, I used the flowers in Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland to describe not only the personalities of the participants, but to show the hierarchy to which the participants belonged, allowing the reader to understand the participants through and artistic method.

Research Design

The overall design of this study was an interview study with six participants. Upon gaining IRB approval, this study was conducted during the spring and summer of 2019.

Site of Study

The site of the study was a university in the South Texas region. Data collection was conducted at a site mutually agreed upon by each of the participants and researcher to allow the

participant to feel comfortable. A quiet private room was reserved by the researcher in the library to provide a safe and quiet location.

Participant Selection

The study participants were six adult Hispanic females who self-identify as social aggressors / bullies while attending school (grades k-12). Participants were selected through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a method of sampling where the researcher selects “information-rich” cases for an in-depth study. Purposive sampling means that the “participants are selected because of some defining characteristics that make them the holders of the data needed for the study” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007 p.79). As information-rich cases, participants who self-identified as past social aggressors allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of important issues that linked to the purpose of the research (Patton, 2001). The participants were recruited on a voluntary basis by gathering a list of professors teaching first year seminar classes to contact about visiting their classes to recruit participants. I wrote an email to the professors (Appendix C) using the format template provided by IRB. Upon approval of four professors, who allowed me to speak to their classes regarding my research, I made recruitment flyers (Appendix D), which gave interested participants a QR code to access further information, a consent form, and a demographics survey on Qualtrics (Appendix E). Before handing out the flyers, I read a script required by IRB (Appendix F) to each class and asked if they had any questions. Over the course of two days, I recruited participants from students in the first year seminar classes, by making my presentation and handing out flyers, after which I began receiving possible participants’ information through Qualtrics. As Qualtrics filtered the possible participants, I began contacting several adult female students that met the participant criteria for the study.

The criteria for participant selection was:

- Hispanic females

- Between the age of 19 and 23
- Self-identified as social aggressors in secondary school

The participants were from the same or similar context.

Researcher's Role

Explanatory research explores the questions “why things are the way they are” (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, the researcher may use probing questions to arrive at explanations of the phenomenon (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). As the researcher, I met for an individual interview with participants who identified as social aggressors/ bullies. Individual interviews allowed participants to describe a detailed picture or perception about an experience, as well as reflect on their explanations (Greeff, 2011). Over a period of six months, I collected the data (interviews, member checks, participant journals, and research journal/observations), interpreted the information, and identified themes (Creswell, 2009). The participants worked closely with me during data-gathering and member checks.

Data Collection

Data collection began upon approval by the IRB and ended two months following. The data consisted of interviews. The following (Figure 2) is a data inventory which provides an account of the number of documents resulting from the data collection.

Source of data	Number of pages per event	Number of pages total
1 one-hour interview per participant	13 pages per one hour of transcription	$6 \times 13 = 78$ pages
Member check	~ 1.5 page per participant interview	$6 \times 1.5 = 9$ pages
Researcher Journal	10 pages per participant	$6 \times 10 = 60$ pages
		Total pages 147

Figure 2. Data Inventory

Interviews Timeline

The study began upon approval by the IRB. I created a list of possible participants that fit the criteria (Creswell, 2009). After making the initial contact with my first choices, I did a follow-up with my participants to see if they were still interested. When my participants responded that they were interested, I sent them an e-mail with a list of possible dates and time of availability for the interview. I set an informal meeting to discuss my study and explained expectations of the participants as well as have my participants sign a consent form. I contacted the participants and finalized an interview date and time. The third week after IRB approval I met with my participants to conduct our first interview. The second week after the first interview we met and did our first member check and I finalized the data. I met with my participants and conducted my first interview. I recorded each interview per participant using my Galaxy S8 edge phone. Interviews were transcribed and given to the participant for a member check.

Six participants were interviewed for this study. The graphic below indicates the participant demographics that represent the requirements for participant participation as described in Chapter III. Participants who self-identified as both queen bee and non-queen bee social aggressors are represented in the data collected, with two queen bees and five non-queen bee social aggressors. All six participants self-identified as social aggressors. The six participants all described being bullied prior to becoming a social aggressor. The following (Figure 3) is a chart of how the participants self-selected pseudonyms and self-reported characteristics pertaining to this study.

Demographics Self-reported by Participants									
Participants	Attended school in South Texas	Between the age of 19-23	Hispanic Female	Popular	Bully Victim	Changed	Physical Aggressor	Social Aggressor	Queen Bee
Mandy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Lala	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Lexie	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Rose	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Amy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Abby	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

Figure 3. Profile of participants' self-reported demographics

Interview Questions

Interviews are characterized as in-depth unstructured tools, with specific features, which emerge from the life stories of the participants (Jovchelovich & Bauer, 2002). The interviews took place in a private comfortable setting so that the participants would feel at ease. The interviews were one, one hour conversational style with open-ended pre-scripted questions per participant and a member check following the interview. As an initial interview, to gain comfort and trust, two participants requested to be interviewed together and had a joint member check, then each interviewed separately, and I conducted separate member checks. (Creswell, 2009, p. 133).

Researcher Journal Reflections and Observations

I used researcher memos to record my observations during the interviews to assist in the data collection and analysis process. Additionally, personal journaling was used as the reflection process.

Data Management

The data generation methods for this research study included individual interviews followed up by member checks. The interviews used during the data collection were audio taped. The interviews were then dictated on to a word document using a program called *Dragon*. The participants verified the accuracy of the data as well as the data representation. The recordings of the interviews, as well as the transcriptions were stored on my personal password encrypted laptop for security. I used computer-based qualitative analysis software called MAXQDA to store the data, and it helped with the organization of codes during analysis (Creswell, 2009).

Demographic questionnaires served as a vetting process to support the research data. After every interview, the interviews were coded manually and decoded for emerging core meanings.

Data Analysis and Representation

Each interview was coded manually using open coding otherwise known as Initial Coding (Saldana, 2009). Initial coding is a coding method appropriate for the first cycle or “beginning stages of data analysis that fracture or split the data into individually coded segments” (p. 27). The goal of Initial Coding is to remain open and for the researcher to reflect deeply on the contents and nuances of the data (p. 46). As I began open coding, the interviews were cross analyzed by question and participants’ answers. I encoded each interview question by hand and analyzed to determine its appropriate code and label it for categories and resulting themes. Transcripts were uploaded into the computer software, MAXQDA 2018, for further analysis. Each interview was coded again manually then compared to the manually graphic cross coding of question and participants’ answers initially completed during the interview collection.

Initially, open coding results included 37 codes, which were further organized into four initial categories, behavior, thoughts, it’s hard, and relationships. Each of the initial categories

was broken into subcategory segments. The behavior category had 16 subcategories: change, disclaim, smart, stronger, trigger, covert, overt, cyber, hurt, jealous, repete, revenge, sinful nature, nothing, deterrent, and remorse. The thoughts category was made up of three subcategories: after, while, and didn't care. It's hard had four subcategories: girls mean, girls leader, looks, and on top. The last category, Relationships, was made up of three subcategories: male, female, and family. After manually coding, 1029 coded segments were found. The following screenshot (Figure 4) is an example of coded segments shown in MAXQDA.

Code System	Coded Segments
Code System	1029
we follow each other	1
it's hard (conceptualization)	10
girls	9
mean	75
leader	50
looks	4
on top	23
thoughts	10
didn't care	26
after	39
while	46
behavior	43
nothing	10
stronger	11
change	69
repute	32
detrant	16
trigger	43
i'll talk to you to your face	8
smart	11
disclaim	13
revenge	42
respect	16
jealous	24
hurt	79
cyber	50
sinful nature	57
overt	40
covert	30
remorse	36
relationships	39
Male relationships	10
female relationships	31
male	5
female	12
family	9

Figure 4. Examples of coded segments from MAXQDA

In second round coding, values coding was applied to the coded system by evaluating the repetitive patterns and consistency that permitted segregation, grouping, regrouping, and relinking to consolidate meaning of values, attitudes, and beliefs of the participant's perspectives which entailed analyzing the data in order to understand the ways patterns emerged that resulted in ten categories (Saldana, 2009). According to Saldana (2009), "Values Coding is the application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs representing his or her perspectives or world view. Though each construct has a different

meaning, Values Coding, as a term, subsumes all three.” Saldana further states that “a value is the importance we attribute to oneself, another person, thing, or idea. The greater the personal meaning [of something to someone], the greater the personal payoff; the greater the personal payoff, the greater the personal value” He defines an attitude as “the way we think and feel about oneself; another person, thing, or idea” (p. 89). Additionally, according to Shaw and Wright, (1967), “attitudes are part of a relatively enduring system of evaluative, affective reactions based upon and reflecting the evaluative concepts or beliefs, which have been learned” (p. 3). And “a belief is a part of a system that includes our values and attitudes, plus our personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world” (Saldana, 2009, p. 90). According to Wolcott (1999), “beliefs are embedded in the values attached to them”(p. 97). Thus, Values Coding was an appropriate method to use for my second round of coding the participants’ data.

As I coded, I searched for evolving categories from the similarities in the open coded system. I needed to identify and name patterns by comparing them for similarities and differences (de Vos, 2005). The ten categories that evolved as a result of first and second round coding were: I’m over it, trigger happy, follow the leader, relationships, evolving, hard to be a girl, who cares, reputation, do it to me-do it to you, and right vs wrong. The following screenshot (Figure 5) is an example of coded segments shown in MAXQDA.

Variable/ category number	category meaning
1	I'm over it
2	Trigger happy
3	follow the leader
4	relationships
5	evolving
6	hard to be a girl
7	who cares
8	reputation
9	do it to me- do it to you
10	right vs wrong

Figure 5. Examples of categories from MAXQDA

These categories contributed to the following themes which are described in Chapter 4: Who in the World Am I; Safe haven: Passage to the Loveliest Garden You Ever Saw; I don't matter: What Else is it Good For?; and Things change: How Curiously it Twists.

Qualitative data analysis was “based on an interpretative philosophy that is aimed at examining meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data”(Nieuwenhuis,2007 p.99). Therefore, each interview was not only transcribed into a Word document and filed under collected data, but each was also analyzed through codes, categories, and themes, and described through narrative description (Creswell, 2009). I looked at the transcripts to find commonalities, similarities in meanings or expressions, and pull out similar words. These were used to create codes, and the codes led to categories and themes. Identifying themes from transcripts was done by using the participants' interviews to identify similarities as well as connections between transcripts in each analysis.

I imported the interview transcripts into MAXQDA for data analysis. The first step I used for data analysis was to re-read each transcript. Next, I interpreted the data by reading and highlighting pertinent information in the transcripts that was relevant to the study. I then identified information to assign codes. Saldaña (2016) noted, “a code in qualitative inquiry is

most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data” (p. 4). I maintained an interactive codebook to list, describe, organize, and reorganize the codes into categories and themes.

In summary, the first coding cycle used was the open coding (Saldana, 2016) which represented the participants’ spoken words that were grouped according to the interpretation of those words. For each participant’s transcript, I used written notes to identify categories from the grouped codes and then grouped the codes into themes according to connections between the ways in which themes clustered together. The second cycle of coding used values coding to capture the participants’ emotions, to find themes, and to “honor the participant’s voice” (Saldana, 2009 p.74). I created categories from the codes and finally I was able to “theme the data” (Saldana, 2009 p.13) to conceptualize and describe participant’s views by using an arts informed approach. The themes of the categories did not arise before the application of arts informed approach being used to conceptualize the data. After the comparison of my data to Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, I was able to create themes using the verbiage from Carroll’s novels.

Reciprocity and Ethics

In my attempt to insure that ethical issues were addressed, before interviews began, each of the participants was provided a signed consent form. I ensured confidentiality and anonymity of the study by explaining to each of the participants that an agreed upon pseudonym was assigned to each of the participants in the study before beginning the interviews. I provided each participant with information regarding the university counseling center, should any emotions triggered through their recollections need further addressing. I checked for understanding and

once assured the participants understand their rights will be fully protected, I scheduled the first interview.

Academic Trustworthiness and Rigor

To achieve trustworthiness and rigor I used the data source of interviews. I attempted to “write my way into a particular space” when I was unable to get there by just sorting data with the computer program MAXQDA or through reading my manual codes (Denzin, 2008).

Through member checks, I showed original transcripts, as well as codes, categories, themes, and description to my participants from their first and second interviews to ensure that I stayed true to their feelings, thoughts, expertise, and data.

To achieve credibility I consulted regularly with my supervisor to assess research questions and procedures, data generation and analysis. Audio and recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim in order to present accurate data findings.

To achieve confidentiality, all personal and private information and audio recorded data was stored on my password encrypted personal computer for safe keeping, as no one except myself had access to the device. No one except myself and my supervisor had access to the data and all identifiable information about participants was omitted or renamed on the transcription. Additionally, I kept careful records of interviews, journals, and any other data, and included enough detailed information in my research design for other researchers who are interested in following the same procedure (Borg, Gall, & Gall, 1993).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to explore the ways in which seven Hispanic females described their socially aggressive behavior. The study used interviews and the researcher’s memos as data. Interpretivism was used to interpret and create meaning from the accounts of the participants.

The following chapter will discuss codes and themes uncovered when analyzing transcripts from the six individuals' interviews.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Recall, the purpose of this qualitative study was to understand dynamics of school based social aggression (bullying) through analysis of retrospective accounts of bullying experiences elicited from six Hispanic females between the age of 19 and 23 that attended school in a South Texas school district and who self-identify as having bullied or committed social aggression.

The research questions guiding the study are:

1. How do self-identified Hispanic female social aggressors retrospectively describe their secondary school bullying behavior?
2. What thoughts do self-identified Hispanic female social aggressors report they engaged in while bullying in secondary school?
3. What thoughts do self-identified Hispanic female social aggressors retrospectively report engaging in after the bullying occurred?

The findings discussed in this chapter show a representation of the participants' attitudes and experiences as pertains to a self-identified social aggressor. I have captured rich descriptive data through interviews conducted with six Hispanic women, between the ages of 19-23, who self-identified as social aggressors at some point of their scholastic career. These interviews served as the primary source of research data.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Each interview underwent first and second round manual coding for emerging core meanings. The results were then imported into MAXQDA qualitative software for comparison. The resulting codes were gathered into ten categories. After further comparisons, these categories were grouped into four themes described in this chapter: Who In the World Am I?; Safe haven: Passage to The Loveliest Garden You Ever Saw; Things change: How Curiously It Twists; I don't matter: What Else is it Good For?

Who In The World Am I?

The name of this theme, Who In the World Am I?, reflected the attributes and the phases the participants described in their maturation process. The titles of the categories for this theme, Evolving, Hard to be a Girl, Relationships, and Follow the Leader, emerged from the language the participants used and together they combined to form the theme. Who In the World Am I? describes the ways that the participants reported their change over time from being a victim or aggressor to their actions and attitudes currently and their view of themselves as a queen bee. This theme also revealed the ways the participants described the effects of social media on their relationships. The following graphic (Figure 6) is a visual representation for each category, which contributed to this theme.

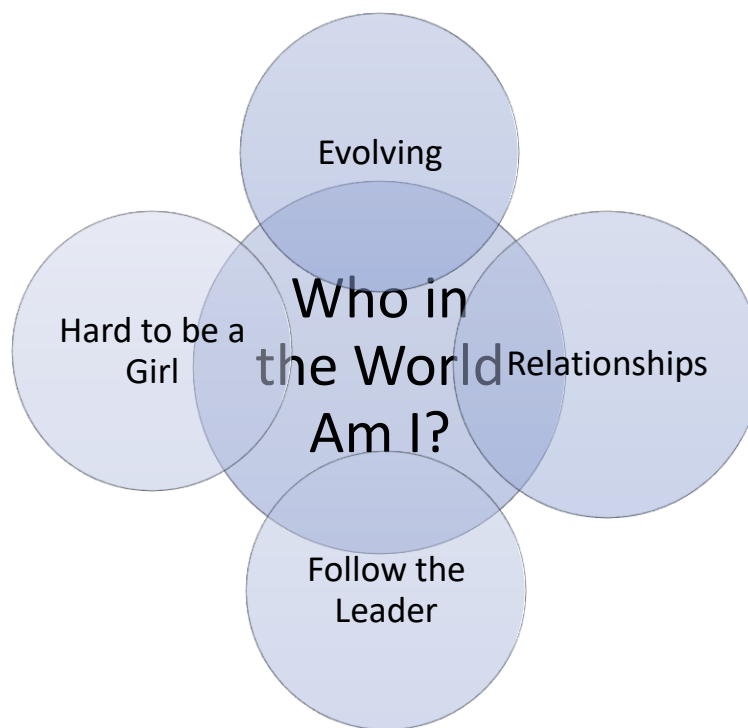


Figure 6. Theme of Who in the World Am I? and the contributing categories

An important attribute of this theme was the category of Evolving and the participants' statements that exemplified the way the participants changed. Amy expressed what most of the

participants said in some way. “You mature as you grow up and you like honestly, you're like all that stuff, you kind of like leave it behind and you're not like so intense now because like everybody's doing their own thing” (Amy, lines 150-152). Lala further stated, “Like me younger versus me now, I have completely changed. From like being on the spectrum of ‘if it's not my way, then I don't want it’ to like, ‘aaa, it's okay, I'll deal with it’” (Lala, lines 110-114). In addition, the evolution process was apparent through Lala when she talked about her experience as a queen bee versus now.

I was captain of the cheer squad in Middle School, and so I was like ugh. I was the queen bee. I was so like, anything I said people would follow and I was kind of like That and I didn't mean to be like that, but I was. Now, I'm not like that. (Lala, lines 190-192) [Participant emphasized the word That]

Abby had a different experience. She evolved to queen bee status within her senior of high school as status shifted from one queen bee to another.

My Senior year it was really really weird because we were all really close friends. We, the two queen bees, kind of split apart and most of them went to her and they aimed at me and then they realized that was kind of wrong. They left her and they went to me. That was kind of switching, but more like they went from one to the other because they realized the character of this one versus me and I guess they liked me more. I don't really know why, I mean I know why, she was a horrible person, but they probably just didn't want to be around her or the drama anymore, so I guess, I don't know why people just started to follow me for a while. (Abby, lines 250-257)

In a second category contributing to this theme, the participants identified experiences in which they found it hard to be a girl. Some of the difficulties were with the way they felt about situations or themselves. Rose expressed that she observed social aggression was common

among females, “I see it almost every day, it's... it's almost becoming something that you just ignore.” (Rose, lines 24-25). Similarly, Lexi and Mandy stated that although they felt that they had evolved in most stages of their life, that it was hard being a girl because they did not evolve when it came to social aggression. Lexi stated, “I'm not a mean person, but with social aggression nothing has changed” (Lexi, line 425), and Mandy added, “I've grown up. I've matured a lot, but as far as social aggression, nothing has changed” (Mandy, line 426). However, like other participants Mandy described having insecurities.

Not to be conceited but do I think I'm pretty, yeah. Do I wish that I wasn't so insecure with myself, yeah... I don't know, I don't have a lot of confidence in myself. I'm very insecure about my body, very insecure compared to being around my friends who think that they are queen bees. You're just like, “okay here I am”... I don't know. (Mandy, lines 60-63)

Another issue expressed by participants was their difficulty with establishing relationships and/or having trust in a relationship. Abby expressed her reasoning for not having relationships with others.

Now I don't trust people. Like friends that would have... since I was bullied by people that were my friends at one point. Now, I'm very very insecure about making new friends and trusting the ones that I currently have now. If that makes sense? I just don't... I don't trust anybody when it comes to personal sharing or personal anything. Anything that I feel that they can use against me, I just don't go there, which is kind of sad, but smarter. (Abby, lines 8-16)

Lexi's response was similar to Abby's outlook regarding relationships She stated she was no longer

As nice as I used to be. I'm more aware of who my friends are and who I associate myself with. Before, I was nice to everybody and I was friends with just about everybody, even if they treated me like crap. (Lexi, lines 8-14)

Rose expressed that “you sometimes have to keep your circle small to keep your real friends close.” (Rose, lines 81-82)

Lexi was the first to express that social media played an important part in establishing relationships because you could virtually engage in meeting someone before you physically met them. “The first time that you meet a person, you're going to go creep on them, on their Instagram, you're going to go creep on their friends” (Lexi, lines 337-339). In addition, she referred to the world she lived in separately from that in which others lived. For example:

Like in today's world, in our dimension, that's how you get to know someone, not by talking to them, you find them, you look their name up, and you could creep on them. You go far back and look at all their pictures. I didn't have any social media for like a year-and-a-half and when I finally got it back, I was lost. Someone got pregnant and I didn't know and someone had a baby and I didn't know. Like there was so many things that happened that I didn't know that happened until I got social media back and I was back in the world... in our world basically. If you do not have social media you won't be communicating with the outside world and when I got it back that's when I finally came back in the world literally. (Lexi, lines 347-355)

Although Rose did not mention a different world as blatantly as Lexi, she did refer to those “outside” when referring to the ways that someone can now get in trouble. Rose explained that the type of people that post everything on social media are causing more problems for themselves because they are leaving a trail of evidence for everyone else, especially the school administration.

The screenshot of a message instead of he said type stuff is more of what's used. Now, there is real evidence of what one says on social media, so nothing causes more issues between... there's always proof for those outside. (Rose, lines 49-52).

The fourth category, Follow the Leader, that contributed to the theme of Who in the World Am I? was reflected in the participants discussion of their image and leadership status as social aggressors. Each participant saw themselves differently within their social circle. Amy, although she saw herself as a social aggressor, did not consider herself a queen bee mainly because she did not want the title. She did not want to be a “mean” kind of a leader.

Because at that time, I kind of didn't want to be the queen bee of the you know, like the leader. Even though like being a leader is like good, but if we're talking about like the leader of a Mean Girls group, I wouldn't want to. (Amy, lines 52-54).

She referred to being popular and socially aggressive with the people within her circle, but she felt she followed the others rather than initiating. She saw herself more as a bystander.

I was just like a part of their group, so I would hear like everything... what they would say about someone and I was like, “oh yeah” and add more to it (sounding and showing embarrassment) maybe or agree, but I wouldn't necessarily, like I wouldn't like be like we should do that. Like I would be like, maybe we shouldn't be like that or do that, but they would still go and do it, you know what I mean, like I was just there like hearing the gossip. (Amy, lines 62-66)

Similarly, Lexi stated that she too was not a queen bee, but that she was very aware that she was socially aggressive.

I have friends who would consider themselves “queen bee” but me personally... no! My looks just don't... Um I wouldn't necessarily think that I'm queen bee but in my group we were all pretty. We were are all “mean girls”. We judged everybody! We were those

mean people in high school judging who I thought was pretty. I know I was better than most of the people there. I do have friends who, that I was personally jealous of because I think they're prettier than me, they have better bodies than I do, better facial structure. I do have insecurities too, but I mean I would fall under the category is being a mean girl in school (Lexi, lines 52-70).

However, Lexi stated that her social aggression didn't start until after her sophomore year in high school, when she was bullied by a group of girls who didn't believe that she was good enough for the boy that she was dating. The fact that she was bullied for most of that year changed her.

When asked if there was anything that she would do differently, she stated,

I would have gone back and been worse and not have been bullied at all. It was just so irritating being bullied... so irritating! (Lexi, lines 325-326).

Like Amy and Lexi, Mandy agreed that she is a social aggressor, but did not consider herself the queen bee. Like Lexi, Mandy believed that she became socially aggressive after being bullied and continued her social aggressive behavior.

Do I have friends who think they are the queen bee... Oh yeah! Yeah, I wasn't The Queen bee, but I was in the group. I wouldn't even say I was in the group like in High School... it's now. In high school I wasn't, but now I'd say it's me and my four friends and we're like yeah. (Mandy, lines 53-54, 84-86).

Rose stated that she is not a queen bee, but admitted to being a leader. She related that others might view her as a queen bee because she took on leadership roles, but was adamant that she was not a queen bee. She admitted to being friends with the queen bee, but not close enough to where she felt her influence.

I wouldn't consider myself a queen bee although I've been told that I kind of was. I was never mean just to be mean. If I targeted you it was once and because of something you

did. I wasn't going to be that girl. So maybe other people not in my close circle perceived me that way because I was a leader like in sports and stuff, but there is a difference between a leader and a queen bee. I think a queen bee doesn't know how to lead. They use fear to lead instead of having people follow them because of positive reasons. (Rose, lines 79-84).

Rose continued to state that she was associated and “friends with the popular group and the queen bee, but she did not see herself as one of them. Rather she saw herself as a leader in other ways.

In soccer I was a leader, but I didn't claw my way to the top, I was good and unselfish. I wanted to win more than anything and I think that was the difference. I competed with teams and she competed with people. I stayed out of it. (Rose, lines 87-91)

Abby admitted to having been a queen bee the last couple months of her senior year. She believed that prior to that she was simply one of the popular girls that was on top, but not quite a queen bee because she did not consider herself a mean girl. Because she shared the spotlight with one of her best friends at the time, when the two had a falling out over a relationship, she was ostracized and bullied. She felt that event caused her to become a bully.

Similar to Rose, Abby had a good understanding of the differences in types of leaders, and an impressive description of a Queen bee.

To me a queen bee is like that snarky female dog that just kind of... she has friends, but she's also pushed everybody away because she puts people down just to have the dominance over everybody else like, not just conceded, but condescending... there we go, condescending to everybody else like cliquey.... At school, she would typically, be like the captain of the cheer squad or dance team or the best athlete, the one who has the most recognition and the most confidence in the team, the more confident they would be so, to

have that confidence some people handled it and stuff like that well, but then there were others that did not know how to handle all the attention and it turned into like ‘ooo I like this and I want more’. I don't think a queen bee is just like one person, I think it's those who don't know how to handle like all of it. (Abby, lines 63-66, 77-83)

When asked if she considered herself to be a queen bee, Abby elaborated further on that role as a leader,

I was at one point. Towards the end of the year, it was kind of strange because it was with that group of friends. That group of enemies turned into my group of friends. We started targeting that girl. So, it was kind of like a ping pong me and her as queen bees between that group of friends. We did to her, what they had been doing to me all year. Granted it wasn't for 9 months, it was more like two, but I still played the part as the leader. I guess it's kind of what the queen bee is, the leader, but just not in a positive way. I've been one and I'm not proud of it, just because.. (Abby, lines 235-239)

Abby continued to discuss the reasons as to why she was not proud of her queen bee status.

Just like who really wants to rally somebody to hurt somebody else. Then, in my eyes, she deserved it, but maybe not the way I really did it. But typically it wasn't face-to-face it was like... social media played a big part. I mean I guess it is verbal because it is your words on the screen. Social media is probably the worst that I contributed to being the queen bee, like as a leader as far as getting others to do what I was doing. (Abby, lines 239-245)

Like Abby, Lala considered herself to be a queen bee. However, Lala didn't just consider herself to be the queen bee because of her social status that was in addition to her hierarchical status at home, “my mom used to call me queen bee because I'm the oldest girl”. (Lala, lines 85-86). She continued to explain why she self-identified as a queen bee.

I would consider myself in ways to be a queen bee... like I'm very... if something is like not my way, I don't want it. I always want to take action like everything I do. Like whether it's like a group project or you know band, I wanted to be like the drum major because I wanted to be in control. Or like in cheerleading, I wanted to be on top. I've always been like, I want to be in front and I want to take control. I want it my way. So, I would consider myself the queen bee, especially being like the oldest girl and like so everyone would always spoil me so... It's like, well, I grew up that way, so I'm just so used to it now. (Lala, lines 92-98)

Although both participants considered themselves queen bees, Abby and Lala acknowledged that they would no longer consider themselves queen bees and tried not to be socially aggressive.

Both believed themselves to be over the cattiness that they committed in the past.

I am not a nasty person who's going to be spreading bad bad vibes, as opposed to the one who was my friend, and they were mean... those would be the ones I would target. Which hopefully I'll grow out of that because it's really petty. I'm happy I'm not in high school anymore. (Abby, lines 424-427).

Safe haven: Passage to the Loveliest Garden You Ever Saw

The name of this theme came from its categories of Reputation and Right vs Wrong and resulted from the comparison of the findings to flowers in the garden of Alice in Wonderland, which I describe in Chapter 5. The theme describes the ways that participants viewed their reputation as means to keep themselves safe (to not be aggressed upon), as well as the acknowledgement of choice on their behavior to keep themselves protected or to establish status. The following graphic (Figure 7) gives a visual representation of the categories contributing to this theme.

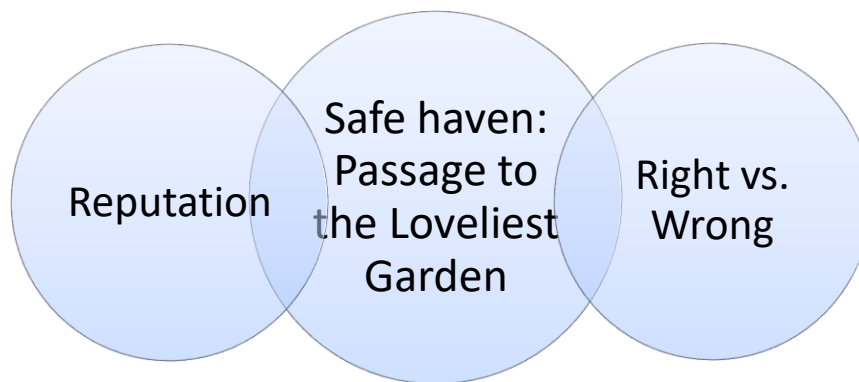


Figure 7. Theme of Safe haven: Passage to the Loveliest Garden and the contributing categories

Reputation was an important contributing category in this theme because it was an expression that the participants used that either increased their popularity amongst their peers or changed the way others perceived them. Lala felt a need and made an effort to control negative rumors that could harm her reputation. “If something had got out, my whole reputation would be ruined and so I always made sure I was on top of it. So, no one had... no one can use something against me (Lala, lines 226-228). She believed that perception was reality and she was not going to have a negative reputation. She described that she had leverage and insight about others, but no one had anything on her, and she used that to her advantage. She made sure to configure her reputation early, when moving from elementary to high school.

If they wanted to say something, I wanted to make sure that the first thing they said to me was that was rude, that they knew I was going to fight back and I wasn't going to just sit there and let them talk bad about me because then I'll be known as a person who....gets bullied, versus the person who can stand for themselves. (Lala, lines 533-537)

Part of the way that the participants established reputation was to make people afraid. Socially aggressing others and causing fear, insured they would no longer be bullied. Lala stated, “I was always bullied when I was little and so I never wanted it that happen again. So I would bully other people” (Lala, lines 515-516). She added that

People knew I could beat them up. Which is like, but like bad, but along with cheer, I also played softball and so I was very fit like I'm... I had muscles. And my face always looked mad, even though I wasn't mad, you know, it was just my face. And so people were scared of me. And so no one wanted to touch me. And I felt like people thought that I was going to beat them up, but I'm not very aggressive, like an aggressive person or a physical person, you know, like I feel like that's my enemy. You know, and like and then I had that mentality like who's going to beat my ass, nobody and so... I still kind of do now, like you're gonna beat my ass, no! And of course like growing up with boys is like, you can't really hurt me and I do boxing too so, it wasn't like if someone did hit me, it wasn't like I wasn't going to be able to not hit them back and you know, and do it on my terms. So, I wasn't afraid of it either, but it never happened. (Lala, lines 541-551).

Lexi continued Lala's sentiment when establishing grounds for a fearful reputation. “I think that after a while, they got scared of me because I never acted like I was afraid” She added, I don't know why, I should have gotten hit so many times. Like I'm not even kidding. Like no one's ever hit me, which is really surprising. I mean it's a good thing” (Lexi, lines 178-79)

Lexi embraced the negative reputation and confirmed the perception that others had of her and her group of friends. She stated that, “In my group we were all pretty we were are all Mean Girls. We judged everybody. We were those mean people in high school judging who I thought was pretty” (Lexi, lines 65-67). Lexi's adopted reputation impacted the way she

approached relationships, in positive and negative ways because the perception others had of her was their version of who she was.

Everyone just knew I was mean, even the football guys. Everyone who came to school, new, they like found out. I like found this out from a few people. I walked with a mean look. I had a mean look. I was just always like straight-faced. Oh yeah, everyone knew how I was. (Lexi, lines 212-214)

Lexi continued to explain that her behavior was sometimes used to entertain others.

Sometimes, I just wanted to be mean. I was trying to be funny because everyone thought it was funny. Like random people, they thought it was funny. They would laugh; they'd give me high fives and be like dude that was funny. (Lexi, lines 268-269, 104-113)

Mandy was more impressed with the way her reputation changed and made her someone. She was considered someone to be reckoned with. She went from being no one on the social scale to someone.

Going to fight someone at a park in the ghetto just changed the whole, everything! I mean, only a few people saw me. As it got out, they saw me differently for sure. I wasn't, um, I wasn't a nobody anymore. Everyone knew I would tell you how it is and then it was, oh look that's the girl who fought so and so (Mandy, lines 216-219)

Her reputation changed based on her actions, but the impact of how others perceive her was what changed her.

They tried to make me seem like I was the most, like I guess, like I was a bully. Yeah I don't know if I changed for good reason or not, but <shrug> don't get me wrong, it was a couple years ago so now I can care less. But I'm not the only mean person. Okay like they saw me be mean, but I'm like, I'm not the only one who's like just rude and ruthless

to everyone, but you know, it's everyone; it's not just one person. I wasn't seen as the nice innocent girl anymore. (Mandy, 210-219)

Rose saw her reputation as an asset and didn't want that reputation ruined or have others perceive her as "that girl", the one that is callous and cruel.

I was always friends with the popular people and the Queen bee, but I didn't follow her, neither did my circle. She did her thing and we stayed out of it. We cheered together, but I wasn't like her. I saw how she wanted and had to be on top and what she would be like to you if you tried to get to that spot, and it wasn't worth it. I wasn't going to be that girl. (Rose, lines 81-88)

Abby worried about her reputation and how others perceived her. She did not want to be seen as a mean girl because she didn't feel that anyone deserved to be treated that way. When it came to Abby's perception of the reason she became queen bee, she believed it was because of her kindness, not her aggression. She believed that the power of her reputation attracted others.

They realized I actually had the power because I forgave them all. And then they switched to me, so I guess it is a power thing. The high school sense because it wasn't like there was money involved. It was more like reputation. (Abby, lines 268- 271)

She also worried that the perception of her actions was going to make others feel a certain way about her. She described, "Like when I was called a whore I was like woah! Like I don't have sex with a lot of guys; it was just the one, so does that mean I'm like undesirable now? Am I at the level of a prostitute?" (Abby, lines 280-282).

Another aspect of reputation was the way that the participants considered themselves to be smart. They prided themselves by being different from the stereotype where they were cast.

You think of a cheerleader, you think of someone dumb. You know you think of this stupid dumb cheerleader who doesn't know anything, but I was smart. To top it off I was always one of the smartest people in class. So it was like, she's a cheerleader and she's smart! You know, I feel like I could use my knowledge against these people and like if anyone argues with me (Lala, lines 489-490, 502-503)

Part of the status for each girl was that they were seen not only as popular, but as smart. Several of the participants explained that they didn't fit into the stereotypical category of pretty, popular, and dumb. They self-identified as smart.

I was always bullied when I was little and so I never wanted it that happen again. So I would bully other people back and be like, well you're dumb because you get Fs and or you're wrong dadada and then with the combination of my knowledge, I knew I had so much power against these people. No one could fight me back. (Lala, lines 515-518)

Lala added that she knew how to use vocabulary and rhetoric to inflict hurt.

I know how to use your words negatively against you. Like if it's not agreeing with me, it's like well you said this, which means this, which means this. And then other people would be like "oh well, yeah I get it" and I'd get it like yeah, you know like that's kind of messed up. And so it was like the advantage for me was just like my words until like everyone would be like oh yeah well she smart. The top it off I was always one of the smartest people in class and so like you're not going to argue with a smart girl. Because everyone was like oh she's so smart. So it was just weird. (Lala, lines 485-491)

Abby related experiences similar to Lala's. She also used her intellect to socially aggress. She was the valedictorian of her class (which confirmed her reputation for being smart), but was a cheerleader as well (which added to her social status and popularity). She stated, "When I'm on

my own, I'm smarter, like I use bigger words. But, when I'm with a group, I usually let the other people say things and I'm just there as a number" (Abby, lines 234-235).

Participants were well aware that their social aggressive actions were wrong, even at the time that they were being committed, but chose the wrong action anyway.

The way we see it, we know we're being mean, but we tell each other that girls are doing the same thing to us. We know so many girls talk crap about us; we know so many girls are like look at her. I know it's wrong, but I do it anyway. (Mandy, lines 170-172)

Because of the ways others perceived Mandy and because of the way she was treated, she stated that she now will confront her friends to let them know when they have gone too far with their actions. "Before I wouldn't care how my friends treated people and now I let them know when they're being too "mean" to someone" (Mandy, lines 4-5). Lexi was well aware of her actions being bad, but did not completely see them as wrong when it's among her friends. "We just don't care. I see nothing wrong, only because I know it's happened to me so much. I've been in group messages. I've been in screenshots soooo, I see nothing wrong with it with my friends" (Lexi, lines 166-168). But she did see a difference in social aggression when it was no longer amongst her friends making comments about a picture, but was in front of other people. When referring to the Queen bee, her friend, at her school being socially aggressive toward someone, she recalled that she felt that her unconscionable actions were extremely wrong.

She would body shame her and talk about how big of a whale she was and how she was just fat. She was so ugly with it and I would just stand there like...Dang that makes me feel bad for her. I mean she did it in front of everybody, like in the cafeteria. She was yelling it and people were laughing and throwing food at her. (Lexi, lines 254-257)

Lexi began to laugh when she recalled the incident. Her laughter, as she recalled the incident was difficult to define. It seemed as if she really enjoyed the occurrence, but also it seemed as if

she was embarrassed that it happened. She understood the feelings of the queen bee that caused her to react that way, but she did not seem to agree with the extreme fashion that it was done. “Honestly, it was reeaally mean. That girl like never came back to school. Now, I feel really bad” (Lexi, lines 257-258), She continued to explain that although she felt sorry for the girl that was tormented, she never felt like she was involved because she never contributed to the torment other than to sit and watch. “I did sit there laughing though, but honestly, I wouldn't have done that. Now I wouldn't! Now, I see everything that I've ever done was just mean! It was Unnecessary!” (Lexi, lines 260-261)

As Lexi continued to explain the occurrence of the incident, she explained that her concern was more about the way her circle of friends would have been perceived had something happened to her.

So for that incident, like throwing food at her and calling her a whale, calling her fat and making her feel bad about herself, like she could have killed herself. Like it could have led to a suicide and that would have made us look bad because it was us who were involved. I would have not like... made her feel like that because she never came back. (Lexi, lines 267-273)

For Lala, it was not that she did not see anything wrong with her actions. She knew what she was doing. She admitted to intentionally trying to hurt people, partly because of the way she was raised.

For me it was because I grew up with everything being confrontational. Like I wasn't someone to say something online and shy away from it. I was always like, if you want to say it, say it to my face! So I would say stuff like, ‘why did you post that? That was gross!’ And then like shut people out. (Lala, lines 206-214)

As Lala continued to explain her actions, she acknowledged that they were mean, and expressed remorse for her behavior.

I hate that I was like that. That's just the way I was and like I think it was mainly because I had that mentality. Like I'm the boss, who's going to tell me something...

Nobody! That was just my mentality all the time. (Lala, lines 204-210)

When asked if she had any issues making others feel badly, she responded with a short and simple no. As she continued, she explained that she had no issues making others feel badly and how easy it was.

I did it because I know what to say and how to say it because I know what worked on me. I know it's going to hurt them because like I know as I got older, I got a little more aware and so like I know if someone has like an issue with weight, like especially a girl in a middle school. They're gonna flip when I target them in that way, or like the way they dress and then they're going to flip, (Lala, lines 436-437)

Lala continued to explain that her insight about people allowed her to be able to expose their vulnerability as her vulnerability was once exposed.

I knew how people would behave and how they would act and what would get to them. And so and I know like from experience that it was gonna hurt them a lot. And so it was never like, I wonder if this will get them. It was like I know this is going to hurt them.. which is kind of... you know, but I'm being honest here. (Lala, lines 433-442)

Abby put a little more simply. She asserted that you do and say mean things with the intention of hurting someone, you ignore your better judgement, or you wouldn't do or say things at all.

I think that most of the time people know, I mean you know you're not supposed to be doing it and you do it anyway. I mean it's not often that you call somebody a name and expect them not to be hurt. Most of the time... I'm the type of person that is very careful

with what I say and when I say it. I mean other people I know, they may not own up to it, but most of the time you know what you're doing and what you're saying and how you're acting. The thing is that when you imply it, it's all meant to hurt somebody. With words, I'm completely aware when I say something mean. I was completely aware then, and I still did it... so... (Abby, lines 220-222, 226-230)

Abby explained that at times, when she chose to do the wrong thing, there was no satisfaction in her actions and that she was guilt consumed. She described an incident where the first comment, at a school event, was said to her by her ex-best friend, who had been tormenting her for the past nine months, and that for the first time in nine months, she responded to the comment.

I felt so bad because, I mean, I understood what it felt like, but just seeing her crying in the corner and seeing all her friends and saying, 'I can't believe she actually said something'. It hurt me even more because I hurt her and I didn't even get to enjoy the moment. Like immediately later, I kind of enjoyed the moment, I mean I put up with them for a year and I finally got my jabs in. But it didn't even give me the satisfaction that I wanted because I felt guilty about it... (Abby, lines 183-189)

Another example Amy gave was trying to be the voice of reason, but not press the issue so as to not become a target. She stated, "I would be like, maybe we shouldn't be like that or do that, but they would still go and do it, you know what I mean, like I was just there like hearing the gossip" (Amy, lines 65-66).

For Rose, it was different. She participated in social aggression by standing up for herself and confronting someone, but wasn't aware that being confrontational was a means of social aggression, or uncongenial behavior. Rose stated, "I didn't know I was participating in social aggression. I thought I was doing the right thing, but in reality I was destroying her friendships and ruining her social life" (Rose, lines 37-38).

Things change: How Curiously It Twists

This theme, made up of the categories Trigger Happy, Follow the Leader, and Do it to Me / Do it to You, describes the way that participants recalled issues or events that would provoke them, how they viewed leadership and power in their social circle, their justification for their actions, and how situations and relationships could easily change. The following graphic (Figure 8) shows the categories contributing to this theme.

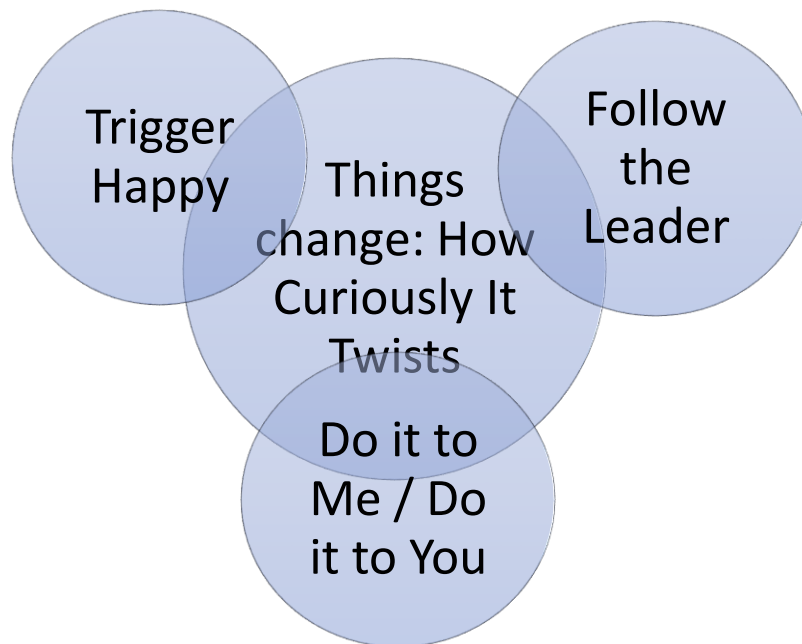


Figure 8. Theme of Things change: How Curiously It Twists and the contributing categories

Participants described triggers as anything that would provoke someone or cause someone to act a certain way. There were different types of triggers that emerged throughout the data, such as: betrayal/cheating, reacting, comments, and fake girls/two faced. Do it to me, do it to you is mixed in each trigger, since it was the way the participants reacted to certain triggers. Abby explained it best when she said, “that action is what caused me to retaliate in anger! It was frustration! It was betrayal!” (Abby, lines 397-398). Lexi also explained the feeling of betrayal

being one of her triggers. If she felt that she was betrayed in any way, she reacted aggressively, exemplifying her do it to me, do it to you attitude.

She really screwed me over by sleeping with this guy that I was talking to. And so I got like really mad and she lied to my face. She slept with every single guy, like everybody else's boyfriend or somebody that they were talking to. She would also sleep with ex-boyfriends. She was a total slut! (Lexi, lines 235- 242)

Abby related her aggression to being cheated on by her boyfriend and felt betrayed by her best friend whom he cheated with.

Typically, when you're aggressive towards somebody, it's because you know them or sort of do and they've done something to hurt you. Like for me, the times and I was usually socially aggressive towards somebody is because I had been friends with them, and they offended me in a really bad way and I didn't forgive them. So for me, usually it was because I was a friend to them or like they turned their back on me. I don't really know. It's probably not everybody though; it might just be me. So, I don't think it's the same so I guess the signifier would be, would be like a betrayed friendship or an action. Something that really really hurt you, so you retaliate. (Abby, lines 370-383)

Abby continued to explain her thoughts as she socially aggressed someone and gave an example.

I mean, like for example, we were best friends and then I found out the day... it was a Thursday. I didn't go to school, which probably saved his life <laughing> And that whole time I didn't talk to him, I just kind of stayed quiet and people would come to me and they would ask me, "how do you feel" and I was like "I don't want to talk about it today, ask me tomorrow". The first thing I said was before I get mad at them, let's take a minute to think about the situation, maybe they actually like each other. The first thing I did was, I forgave them verbally and in front of the group of friends just so nobody would

be mean to any other person. So, my first reaction was forgiveness, which I completely regret, and even that Friday nobody would sit with her on the bus to go to the game. We were both cheerleaders, so I sat with her and I made sure that everybody was like nice to her. (Abby, lines 384-394)

Abby chose to forgive her friend and boyfriend (at the time) because she felt like it may have been a mistake, or perhaps that they spent so much time together that they just fell for each other. She expected them to be honest and tell her the nature of their relationship.

Like I went out of my way to help the person who hurt me, and the reason why I can't stand her anymore is because even after I forgave her, she went back and did it again.

That action is what caused me to like, she kind of deserved it! She did something bad and she didn't own up to it, even after, so it wasn't necessarily... It wasn't my first go to.

(Abby, lines 371-380)

Abby continued to explain that she was reacting to the situation the way that she was taught at home. For example, she stated, "I didn't immediately say 'I want to be aggressive towards you' it was more like let's just calm down and work it out. Most of the time that's what my parents do, so that's what I've learned to do" (Abby, lines 394-406). She described knowing triggers but discussed appropriate ways to deal with them.

Lala explained that since she gave her friendship freely to others, she expected that they be real friends, because the minute she felt like they were not, she would show her queen bee side and purposefully hurt them displaying her do it to me, do it to you outlook.

For the most part I was nice to people. It was like if you needed me, I got your back, but don't mess with me! And so it was always like, okay, well she did this for me, so I'm going to do this for her. And that's why I felt so protective because I never screwed anybody over. You know, like not, not like me talking about them, but I would never

like go with their boyfriend or do this and or like say I'm going to hangout them and not hang out. I was always there, and... and so they would, you know, they would protect me because I'd protect them if they needed it. (Lala, lines 460-466)

Lexi continued to discuss that negative comments that mentioned her or comments that implied something about her would cause her to react hostilely. "I think that different scenarios would trigger it. Like one time she posted a picture... this girl posted a picture and tagged her best friend and referred my name in it and I saw it, so that made me mad". (Lexi, lines 134-136)

Lexi also discussed an example of the way she dealt with the situation of someone commenting or posting something unflattering.

The next day I confronted her about it or another time this girl was like ewww it stinks in the hallway and there was just me and this other girl in the hallway and she was her friend so I knew it was about me and so that triggered it. I guess any little, any kind, any comment they made would piss me off if it was about me. If it wasn't even close to being nice it would piss me off. (Lexi, lines 134-140)

An example she gave that exemplified her disdainful, un-empathetic, and unremorseful reaction was as follows:

It was about him having a new girlfriend 'cuz she was like in the comment was like how she was so much uglier than the old girlfriend because his old girlfriend was UGLY. And so I was apparently ugly or something. It was more like the comment that was attached to the tag calling me ugly, but her being uglier than me and I got called Jewish once because of my nose and that pissed me off. Because you know Jewish people have big noses. <Shrugging shoulders> Apparently, I look Jewish...When they said Jew, ugh, I got livid... I was pissed, I got mad!(Lexi, lines 150-162)

Another instance recalled by Lexi demonstrated her explosive reaction to the comments made about her.

We were in class and.... I like slammed my book on her desk and it was literally in front of the whole class and I started screaming at her and threatening her and I was being very rude, very mean, but I was like so fed up with it and after that she like, she herself left me alone and like one of the other girls apologized to me for being like that, but all the other girls kept on (Lexi, lines 128-134)

Like Lexi, Amy reacted about comments made about her by becoming confrontational. Amy recalled an example of an instance that happened. She stated, "I'd even told this girl off because like she didn't have her facts straight and I made sure, so I like called her out on it . When like, 'cuz of a relationship problem." (Amy, lines 101-103)

Fake girls, or fake people was a trigger for some participants. The term fake girl or person was used to describe someone who is two faced.

Well from experience, I've come across so many fake girls. I'll have one person tell me something nice and then one of my personally close friends will then tell me how they've said ugly or mean stuff about me. Also, to be honest I've been fake with people before and my girlfriends are fake too. I've definitely always known girls are fake or "two-faced" in other words. (Mandy, lines 10-13)

Mandy's example of participating in being "fake" was, "Me and my friends will be on social media we're just there and we look at a girl and we're like, Oh my God she doesn't look like this in person, like look at her! She's so fake". (Mandy, lines 155-156)

Mandy continued to express how someone two faced triggers her and expresses a do it to me, do it to you view.

I would say girls are fake. I don't ever really think that you're someone's friend, you're just acquaintances because once you say, “hi” and “by”, the second you leave, they're going to be like, what the hell is she wearing? That's exactly how it is (Mandy, lines 200-202). Yeah I don't trust them with my life out of all my four friends will talk about one another and I'm sure they do the same to me yeah (Mandy, lines 454-455)

Lexi corroborated Mandy's views about fake girls. Although fake is a trigger, it also causes some participants to react by doing to others and saying things about others, as they have had done or said to them.

Yeah we all say we're best friends, but were all fake with each other like I personally know I can't trust them with my deepest darkest secrets because I know it's going to get out to either one of them, or it's going to get out completely. I can't trust them, but they're my best friends and I love them, but I just can't trust them (Lexi, lines 449-452).

Although Abby did not use the term fake, she gave of an example of someone who she thought was a friend, but realized that she was two faced or “fake”.

Anything that I feel that they can use against me, I just don't go there, which is kind of sad, but smarter. It was like, I was hurt and that person who hurt me deserves to feel the exact same thing. (Abby, lines 15-16, 30-31)

Like Abby, Rose did not use the term fake, but did express her aggression toward the two faced person by stating that, “She was going around school talking mess about people, but then on Twitter was pretending to be friends. I called her out on it and explained the situation and what she was... had been doing” (Rose, lines 29-32). On the other hand, Lexi recalled her own fake actions in her retaliation over a comment made about her on Twitter. She responded with the intention to hurt the girl that made the comment. She stated, “I was so mad, I made her boyfriend cheat on her with me and I told her about it. I was mean!” (Lexi, lines 162-164).

I don't matter: What Else is it Good For?

This theme, made up of the category Who Cares and I'm Over It, which described the way that participants felt about administration when being socially aggressed and while being the aggressor. Participant felt as if they didn't matter to administration when being aggressed upon or while being the aggressor. The following graphic (Figure 9) provides a visual representation of this theme and its contributing categories.

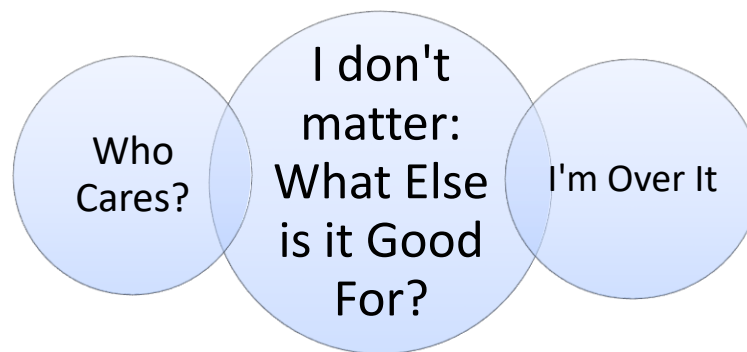


Figure 9. Theme of I don't matter: What Else is it Good For? and the contributing categories

The participants expressed various views regarding administration. They discussed the way that a school culture is influenced by administrators. Administrators wield enormous influence over school conditions and student success. When a student feels that their school is led by a poor leader, their confidence and morale sinks and negativity permeates the culture of the school. Lala expressed negativity toward her counselor (who is considered part of the administrative staff) because she felt that the administration had very flippant attitudes toward certain issues. Lala explained an issue at school that she experienced where boys were posting sexually explicit comments or pictures to demean certain girls. She recalled friends who were

affected by these postings talking to the counselor regarding the issue. Lala felt as if her friends were not helped in their situation because no punishments were issued regarding the occurrence, therefore the attitude that they adopted toward Administration was, “who cares”.

You praised your counselor in elementary. You always met them for anything wrong.

But, you know after seeing like there's these little girls like pictures and videos and everyone's talking crap about them and these boys don't care about what these girls think about this girl... They just want to be like known. It was like, “who cares”. (Lala, lines 345-348)

Lala continued to say that the feeling they had regarding the administration and the reaction the administration had on the issues that they were facing only made them feel sad because they knew that their best interest was not at heart.

You know, you don't tell somebody like, you know, who doesn't care about your feelings about your feelings... Kind of thing. So it was like, you know, like they don't care!

They're just here for the money. Like they didn't want to open that box. It was kind of sad. (Lala, lines 348- 354)

After that incident, Lala understood that administration was not going to follow through with their student code of conduct or any kind of disciplinary issues, so she adopted a different attitude that exemplified the, “don't care” mentality.

I was like, I don't care because I had that mentality like it was just the mentality that really kept me like at that. Like who cares? What are you gonna do, beat me up? Like what do you do, tell on me, like it was just like, you know, nothing's gonna happen.

(Lala, lines 560-563)

Mandy also expressed disappointment in her administration. In one of the examples that Mandy spoke about, she mentioned that she was bullied at school and that when she fought back, the

administration was finally told about the physical incident, yet it was skewed to make her seem as if she were the bully. This incident gave her the ‘don't care’ attitude. While recalling the incident, she retrospectively says, ‘since I've graduated, I can care less about it all, it's just, would I go back and not do the things I've done, for sure, um, but I really don't care anymore.’ (Mandy, lines 322-324)

Although Lala has now graduated, she continues to have specific views regarding the administration at her old middle school since her sister is attending the school and having difficulties with bullies.

I would like for the schools to be more involved. Like I said, like the administrators, you could tell like they don't care and it's like this little girl, because she's a person who is struggling in school because of this, and it's like you don't care that she doesn't... she can't focus in class. You don't care that she can't read do you! You don't care about that! You just care about the reputation of your school. (Lala, lines 377-379)

Lala continued to express what she wished administration would do to help her sister become successful, since the tormenting was hindering her school environment and causing her to lose focus. She wished that administration would do for her what was never done when she was there, she stated, “So, I wish that they would take the time to like, you know, ummm, I just wish like they cared more because then I feel like it would stop at school because then they'd be like afraid to get in trouble at school” (Lala, lines 377-414).

Rose had a completely different “don't care” attitude regarding her school administration. Rose stated that she didn't regard them in any real manner. She simply saw them as a component of the school, albeit not very effective. “I don't think anything about them. They are doing a job. Look at the ratio of admin to students... it's ridiculous! It's a wonder they can get anything done at all” (Rose, lines 57-58).

By issuing and following through on consequences it allows others the ability to get over it, like Mandy stated when things, “got too much for me, I was just over it.” She wanted some sort of closure to the issue so that she could feel a sense of justice and move on. Lala believed that “it changes the person, you know, like it changes how they feel in their school.” She believed that it would have changed the bullies because they would have known that the behavior was not acceptable and that it would change the view her sister had regarding administration, so that she felt safe and supported (Lala, lines 414-416).

Abby disliked the double standard of her administration. She believed that her administration would broadcast what they did differently than what was reality. She even stated that some of the staff and teachers had expressed their negative opinions regarding administration and their policies. She continued to explain the behavior changes that freshman or new students displayed after being in the environment for some time. She said, “it was more like a polluted environment because nobody put a stop to it, so it would get worse, and then it pulled everybody in” (Abby, lines 416-418). She continued to say, “now even the nicest people from sophomore and freshman year are now some of the meanest” (Abby, lines 419-423). She further stated that their behavior was not typically a characteristic of themselves, she felt that their change was “what happened just because they were in the wrong environment” (Abby, lines 443-445).

Abby believed that her ruined senior year could have been saved early in the year, had her administration put a stop to those that were socially aggressing her. She also felt that the girl she socially aggressed could have been helped had the administration issued consequences to her as well. She felt as if she didn’t matter, whether being bullied or bullying someone else, because the administration did nothing in either aspect. She stated, “I should have gotten something, maybe detention or even suspension from future retreats or something to keep that from

happening again”. (Abby, lines 584-588) However, because she stated consequences were never given and punishments never followed through, the behavior continued.

Summary

The chapter provided an understanding of the data gathered regarding the problem of social aggression and bullying causes for victims, which resulted in the four themes: Who In the World Am I?; Passage to The Loveliest Garden You Ever Saw; How Curiously It Twists; What Else is it Good For? Further, the chapter emphasized the responses of the research questions through the dialogue of the participants. Additionally, the data was reflective of a cultural concern, in particular, it explored the reasoning of the aggressor / bully to behave with social aggression and the ways in which social aggression occurred amongst girls of different ethnicities, particularly in the Hispanic culture.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In Chapter I, I discussed incidences where scholars in education, criminology, and psychology noted that the mean girl phenomenon of bullying and social aggression has been overwhelmingly perceived as a White upper-class problem (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004, 2008; Gonick, 2004; Ringrose, 2006) because of this, my study sought to understand how Hispanic females who identified as bullies processed the cultural discourse of social aggression and bullying. The main goal throughout the course of the study was to tell the stories and experiences recollected from the participants past social aggressive experiences to understand the process of the mean girl phenomenon of bullying and social aggression (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004, 2008; Gonick, 2006; Ringrose, 2006). Because the majority of the research found on relational or social aggression pertained to white, middle to upper class females (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003), I purposely chose to explore the narratives of Hispanic females as relational or social aggressors, as South Texas is highly populated with Hispanic females and the university is considered a Hispanic Serving Institute. As reflected by the data shared by the participants, the problem of bullying and social aggression is not specific to class or race. Similar to the research conducted of white middle to upper class, the data suggests that the Hispanic female social aggressors that participated in my study were also trying to find ways to react and express aggressiveness without “breaking out of the expectant mold of passiveness and niceness” to outsiders (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003).

Parts of the Study

Statement of the Problem

Social aggression can result in a psychological pain that exemplifies anxiety, loss of self-esteem or self-confidence, and damages the ability to properly function in relationships (Owens, Slee, & Shute, 2000 b). Moreover, Baumeister (1990) explains that in extreme cases, the desire

to flee a situation or person who is socially aggressive can manifest into a suicide (Olafsen & Viemerö, 2000).

A covert form of aggression, also referred to as “relational” or “social” aggression, is a means aimed at destroying other girls (Galen & Underwood, 1997). Since most research (Lagerspetz et al., 1988; Owens, Slee, & Shute, 2000 a; Archer & Coyne, 2005; (Krahé, 2013) has shown females to be more relationally aggressive than are males, the rationale “to inflict harm on peers, in ways that best thwart or damage the goals that are valued by their respective gender peer groups” (Crick & Grotpeter 1995, p.710) is interesting because relational aggression is particularly effective in hurting females (Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowen, 2001; Shute et al., 2002). Moreover, because females relate peer feedback to their self-worth, especially regarding physical appearance, attractiveness, and acceptance, they will attempt to harness and use this undiscovered power to the benefit of one's popularity. Moreover, females are known to employ devious and manipulative tactics to maintain their social position by using indirect aggression, which is defined in the social scientific scholarship as a form of social manipulation (Kelly & Pomerantz, 2009).

In addition, studies have found that females are impacted differently by relational aggression because they are discouraged from using physical aggression (Shute, 2002). A study conducted by Owens, Shute, and Slee (2002) exposed the functions of relationally aggressive behaviors in adolescents “own words.” Their study was conducted with high school girls that were asked to explain the occurrences in a scenario that encompassed relational aggression from her peers. The bullying tactics associated with indirect aggression include gossiping, social exclusion, stealing friends, not talking to someone, and threatening to withdraw friendship (Crothers et al., 2005). Owens, Shute, and Slee (2002) concluded that the most common reason for aggressive behavior, such as breaking confidences or gossip, was to alleviate boredom

because the behavior was thought to be fun and added excitement to their lives. Additionally, the study exposed that the participants explained that relational aggression was more commonly used in friendship and group processes, as substantiated by Simmons (2002), girls attack within close friendship networks or cliques. The leader of the clique, the social aggressor/ bully, is framed as using boundary maintenance as a bullying tactic, allowing her to exclude other girls from friendship groups (Bjorkqvist, et al., 1992). Getting this kind of attention and perhaps emulation, allows the Queen Bee to disguise her aggression. Because her aggression is hidden, she escapes consequences, while inflicting long term pain on other girls (Kelly & Pomerantz, 2009); thus, provoking feelings of jealousy, and revenge from the Queen Bee's "loyal subjects willing to do her bidding" (Shute et al., 2002).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand through retrospective accounts the motivation and experiences of six Hispanic females between the age of 19 and 23 that attended school in a South Texas school district and who self-identify as having bullied or committed social aggression. The participants self-identified as social aggressors or as queen bee social aggressors.

Research Questions

The research questions which guided the study were:

1. How do self-identified Hispanic female social aggressors retrospectively describe their secondary school bullying behavior?
2. What thoughts do self-identified Hispanic female social aggressors report they engaged in while bullying in secondary school?

What thoughts do self-identified Hispanic female social aggressors retrospectively report engaging in after the bullying occurred?

Methodology

I used an interpretivist lens to study social life and bullying and to conceptualize the action and understand the meaning (Schwandt, 2007). Additionally, I incorporated an arts-informed approach to explore the meanings and conclusions relevant to the research data. Because arts-informed research is influenced by, but not based in arts-based research (Given, 2008), I was able to enhance the understanding of the human condition to reach multiple and diverse audiences. As stated in Chapter II, “arts-based research is a form of qualitative research in the human studies that employs the premises, procedures, and principles of the arts” (Barone, 2008, p.29), whereas “arts-informed research is an approach to qualitative research in the social sciences that is situated in sound understandings of qualitative research approaches” (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. 32) in three ways. First, it is “inspired by an art form”; second, it “draws from artistic processes”; and, third, is a “representation of the research (the telling of the research story) that relies heavily on art forms characteristic of the arts' preceding defining qualities” (p. 32). Because arts-informed research is “the creative meshing of scholarly and artistic endeavors” (Knowles & Cole, 2008 p. 33) the approach helps researchers question the occurrences in their research, with a process that allows the researcher to interpret and report the participants’ story (Barone & Eisner, 1997), I used the arts-informed approach to conceptualize knowledge through the use of *Alice in Wonderland* as a comparison.

As a qualitative researcher, a shift in thinking from theory (Carawan, Knight, Wittman, Pokorny, & Velde, 2011) to conceptualizing (Morse, 2005) occurred for me when trying to deduce and interpret the human phenomena of social aggression (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). In order to feature the visceral perception of the participants (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011), qualitative researchers draw from their own experience. While writing up my data, I stepped away to conceptualize the experience of the participants. I sat down and watched Disney animated version of *Alice in Wonderland* with my four year old. As he and I watched, the

garden scene played, he turned to me and said, “Mom, those flowers are mean.” Because my data was on my mind, the concept of social aggression made sense as Mimesis and inspired me to use the garden scene of *Alice in Wonderland* as a conceptualization of my data.

Mimesis is the representation of the relationship between art and nature (Thomas, 2015), and “Life is lived and knowledge is made in the imaginative space created by a good book” (Given, 2008, p. 31). Thus, examining and exploring my research data through a selection of literature to “imitate” the action of life, led me to see a strong similarity between the actions of the characters in Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* in comparison to the participants data. Mimetic behavior was viewed as the representation of “something animate and concrete with characteristics that are similar to the characteristics to other phenomena” (Zoran, 2015), which allowed the data to be represented through the idea of Lewis Carroll’s writing.

Because each participant’s experience was so captivating, I chose to depict each through an arts-informed representation (Creswell, 2009; Herman, 2000, Knowles & Cole, 2008). Although it was not my intent to present the research through a traditional arts-based form, it is my intention to highlight the ways in which an arts-informed approach functioned for me while conducting qualitative research. I came to the realization that I needed to portray a more complete representation of the participants that was authentic to both the storyteller and to the stories being shared (Given, 2008). I wanted the audience experience to be as I had, to be immersed in an engaging experience. My emersion in the data led me to see a strong resemblance between the participants’ experiences and Lewis Carroll’s stories.

Arts-Informed Comparison to Lewis Carroll’s Books

Over 100 years ago, Lewis Carroll wrote two books, *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) in which he depicted meanness or bullying and social aggression through fictional characters, many of which were imaginary

creatures such as talking flowers. *Through the Looking Glass* is a world that reflects, rather than distorts Alice's perspectives and it illustrates the disappointing consequences awaiting the girl who would be queen (Schanoes, 2017). As I examined the data from the interviews, I observed that Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* made a striking comparison to the data that I had collected. Specifically, Carroll's garden scene reflects the experiences of the participants in this study.

Because Carroll portrayed the reactions of children brought to a "Wonderland", I found Carroll's setting significant as my participants referred to their world as something different than the reality that everybody else is living. Similarly, my study explored the actions and reactions of children and adolescents through the memory of their adult selves in their life adventure.

The personality of Carroll's Alice was very childlike. Throughout the scenes she displayed her bewilderment, anger, and confusion, but she also lacked confidence. Her lack of confidence was tested because the creatures never hesitated to insult or belittle her, which often drove her to tears. During the time Alice in which was reared, gardens in the Victorian era represented a place of physical and spiritual regeneration (Pierce, 2000). For Alice in *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland*, a garden was a safe haven that represented beauty and leisure, much like school. According to Pierce (2000, p. 1), in the Victorian times, when Carroll wrote his book, the idea of the garden, was an enduring presence that represented an "Edenic paradise". In life, people tend to want to be a part of a social "Garden" to have understanding, a semblance of power, and find acceptance among the others. Alice understood that to have any power in Wonderland, it must be in the garden. According to Pierce (2000) Carroll created gardens in his books as women's places. The gardens paralleled the control for females, and the nonsensical nature of Carroll's Wonderland allows readers to deal with the eccentricities of real life through a screen of entertaining fiction. For the participants, school was perceived as their

safe haven, a garden, like the symbolism of a garden for Alice in Carroll's Wonderland. A comparison of Alice's experiences and those of the participants affords a mimetic journey into the garden to help better conceptualize social aggression (Thomas, 2015). Although the participants viewed school as a safe haven, at some point their perception became tainted, and they realized the hypocritical nature of a safe haven. According to Watson, the schoolhouse, as a safe haven, where "American's young will learn in a protected environment nurtured by caring adults" is a myth (Watson & Watson, 2002). Similarly, Alice perceived her garden a place where she, as queen, would have authority and be safe within her garden realm, yet she recognized that she had no real power in her safe garden because the other characters were mean and taunted her and that her perception was merely an illusion. Both Alice and the participants in my study realized that the reality about a safe haven is that real issues can happen that lessen the safety of the inhabitants if proactive measure do not exist. It is not to say that the place is not safe, rather the feeling of safety may be absent in a place that is supposed to be, in the participant's minds, free from anything malicious. According to Schargel (2014, p. 1) "students, parents, and school staff want, need, and deserve a safe learning environment, and schools are supposed to be places where children are safe and secure," although the vulnerability of schools exists and is seen or felt by some especially in regards to bullying or social aggression.

Alice changed a great deal between *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice realized the trajectory of her life was a result of her inevitable maturation and acceptance of womanhood. As her maturation process developed, the characters, though critical were a bit more helpful and Alice matured enough to learn to ignore and not to talk back. Alice also learned both honesty and insults from the creatures. Upon entering the garden, she realized that the flowers were like everything else... opposite and hypercritical. Everything that she had known to be ludicrous and nonsensical was

suddenly truth and vice versa. Similarly, by the time of the interviews, the participants were young adult women who were able to retrospectively explain to me the events of their middle and high school experiences as social aggressors.

Because our consciousness is built from a mimetic understanding of reality made up of networks of symbols, the following section shows each participant as a flower from the garden in *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland*.

Participants

“You can learn a lot of things from flowers.”

Alice- Walt Disney’s *Alice in Wonderland*

Daisy (Amy): Daisies are the first line of defense in the garden because they outline the

flowerbeds that surround the willow tree in the garden. My daisy would be Amy. She believes that she was a part of everything and even assisted in aggressing, but was never the aggressor.

Larkspur (Rose): The Larkspur flower is a beautiful outlier that can be among the others but isn’t affected by the toxins around them. Rose would be a Larkspur because she wasn’t affected by the negativity and tried to avoid it. She saw the one who wanted the top spot and what she would be like to you if you tried to take it.

Violets (Lexie and Mandy): The violets in the garden were quiet for a while, but once triggered they began being rude to Alice as well.

Rose (Lala): Rose was the opinionated, mean, rude flower that commented on everything that Alice and Tigerlilly were talking about. Rose believed Alice to be a different type of flower that allowed her to move and she wondered how, almost jealous of her ability to do so, but was very aggressive in her tone and attitude toward Alice. Lala, as my queen bee, not to be ousted from her spot would be a rose.

Tigerlily (Abby): The first flower to speak to Alice was rather nice to her, despite the comment of her fallen petals, which may not have been critical, but said out of concern, as opposed to Rose's comments. Tigerlily explained much about the garden and seemed to befriend Alice. Tigerlily seems to be able to control the others, but isn't mean for the sake of being mean, she seems to use it justifiably. Abby would be Tigerlily.

Gardener (Administration): Absent gardener would be the administration, as all participants find them to be absent while most if not all aggression is happening.

Willow tree (researcher): Mythology views the hollow willow as one to confide secrets in, but willows are found in moist soil. I find this perplexing because the flowers say their beds are not moist but hard, which has allowed them to speak. Perhaps the willow tree takes the water away, allowing them to adapt. I see myself as the Willow tree. I am trying to give each participant a platform to speak and tell her story. I have heard their secrets and have been taken through the looking glass to their wonderland.

Art Imitates Life as Found in the Themes

The following sections describe the memetic nature of the themes found in Chapter IV and the ways in which they relate to Carroll's characters, as well as the social science response through Erickson's psychosocial development.

Who In the World am I?

In this Garden of Live Flowers, it's hard to be a flower. Flowers come in different colors and shapes. Flowers go through a maturation process, much like the way a girl blooms into a woman. Before a seed matures, sometimes a gardener has no idea what it will be. When girls begin establishing who they are, no one knows how they will be, yet they learn from their environment. As a plant evolves, it grows, buds, and matures, deepening its roots. As a girl becomes an adolescent or a teenager, she too blooms and matures and later evolves into the

woman she will become. However, the more difficult seasons the flower encounters, the more different it becomes. It becomes resilient and better than it was before. When girls encounter difficulty and overcome, they become different than they were before. My participants believe that they became more resilient and stronger, due to their experiences.

While growing, a flower can wilt for different reasons. Too little or too much of something can harm your flower. If a flower does not receive enough water, it will wilt. When my participants did not receive enough attention, they didn't feel pretty or became jealous, they began to show signs, like a wilting flower. When my participants were hurt, betrayed, or wronged, they became very insecure. Insecure flowers may or may not be strong enough to make it to the next season, especially when there are other flowers and weeds competing for the Sun. The Sun is the relationship with someone they respect, care for, love... perhaps someone nurturing. In the instance of the participants this relationship could be an authority figure such as administration, faculty, or parent.

Pierce (2000) stated that “the garden's existence as physical place, idea, and action propels many of the images that are associated with it”(p. 4). For example, in the garden, the flowers find Alice odd and question whether they should accept her. In order to decide they ask her if she is a wildflower. In their experience wildflowers can move, however they comment to her that her petals are drooping [their assessment of her dress] and soon decide that she's a weed. Weeds are something unacceptable in garden, and because of their assessment of her they begin to pick on her. Flowering weeds can be just as beautiful as a flower, but for some reason don't hold the same luster. What is a weed if not a flower growing in an undesirable spot. The participants' relationships were much the same way. The participants were in a specific sociological environment that allowed a certain higher order. The participants were also insecure (am I as good or as pretty, am I a flower or a weed) because their past victimization made them

question where they belonged. Since they felt their upbringing was molding them to be a specific person, but they observed a contradictory action either by their mother's or by others, they didn't trust easily, especially when placed in a different venue (social media). They were unsure if they need to display the façade (balance of art and nature), or if they were able to display their wildness of nature? The participants expressed that they were easy to take advantage of (when they were nice), but continued to show respect (to the sun).

It is impossible for a flower to unfold when other things are preventing it, but when a flower blooms through adversity or a weed continues to grow in your yard, despite all efforts, you have to look at it for all its marvel (dandelion). Through the unique capacity for nourishment, flowers grow and change and produce their own significance. Through their individual maturation processes, the participants all bloomed out of adversity. Some participants learned to focus on other things to occupy their time and energy to not get engulfed in the drama, like sports or scholastic obligations., Others, through the maturation process understood that bullies will always exist because there will always be people unhappy with themselves, yet they have transcended the negativity and learned to be happy with who they are, and are not dwelling on what they have done or what has happened to them. They know that they will be fine and can look at bullying as a nuisance and annoying (a weed).

The theme of *Who In the World Am I?* encompasses Carroll's journey of Alice's towards growth begins and ends in a garden. The maturation process can be chronicled in and through the garden. The process of maturation in the participants parallels the theme of maturation in Carroll's books through the change from flower in the garden to queen. Because Alice was eager to participate and have a sense of power that she has never possessed, she quickly learned that it is more fun to be a participant in the workings of the garden (queen) than a flower standing by and watching the action. The view of the participants in my research was similar

and addressed research question 3, as all had the realization that they were powerless at some point by being victims of social aggression and bullying and found themselves participating in the same actions to not be on the recipient end of it again and flexed the new found power that allowed them to be untouchable in their peaceful and comforting tamed space that was cultivated by their order (the garden).

However, before the participants were keepers of their garden, they were very insecure about their place. Like Alice wanting to gain entrance in the most beautiful garden she'd ever seen, so did my participants. They wanted the safe haven and peaceful beauty that was not afforded to them as victims. But like Alice encounters, the first garden is locked and walled and she is excluded from entering this garden, as the participants were excluded from the social garden that they initially tried to be a part of accessible only to those who fit the criteria. The realization that they must change to enter the garden and find where they fit occurred in my participants as well as Carroll's Alice. As Alice submitted to an alteration of her natural state, so too did the participants.

In addition to the mimesis of the theme of Who In the World Am I?, the social science perspective would explain the way the participants began to assert control and power over their environment by accomplishing tasks and facing challenges. Erick Erickson called this ego identity (1993), which is the conscious sense of self developed through social interaction and is continuously changing due to new experiences. The participants found it difficult to establish in identity because at each stage of their maturation process, they found themselves different.

Things change: How Curiously It Twists

As can be seen in Carroll's garden, not all flowers are as sweet and innocent as they appear, some are pungent, predators, or poisonous. Pungent flowers are warning that the rest of the flower is dangerous. Similarly, my beautiful participants gave warning to their harmful

triggers. Whether it be a relationship (scent to flower), betrayal (masked beauty), a reaction (defense mechanism), or a threat, there was warning.

Predators survive through stealth, strategy, and ambush techniques. The participants had a tendency to do the same. Stealth was shown through subtweets and other social media outlets. Strategy was shown through planning confrontations and group messaging. Ambush was shown in the level of dominance of the participants, whether it be to follow, oust, encourage, or target and gang up on someone.

Like plants, children cannot move to escape “Predators” if their parents have grown or established roots (family, job. etc), so they need other means of protecting themselves. Some plants/ flowers have a physical defense, as do humans, but the most common defense for a plant is toxicity. Plants evolve to defend themselves. As their environment changes per season, they adapt to adequately defend themselves. I think my participants learned to do the same. Each participant encountered “Predators” that caused a change. They were not afraid and began to use their toxicity (bullying) to keep people away and hurt others. Their words and actions were harmful (poison) because their purpose was to hurt and to make someone feel like nothing, like trash because they felt like they deserved it.

The theme of Things change: How Curiously It Twists addresses research question 1 by addressing the behavior of the participants. In Lewis Carroll’s books, Alice is such an integral part of the garden that it cannot fully come to life until she sets foot in it. Sometimes, it takes someone from the outside to set foot in “their world” to look at the behavior and see more than the beautiful façade that is on display. The inner workings of their social dominance showed the extent of the viciousness through dominance, just like the way the gardens in Carroll’s books comes alive with a vengeance when Alice sets foot in them. This theme also addresses power, or the semblance of power, which addresses research question 2, the thoughts social aggressors

engage in while bullying. Because the participants expressed either a means to be dominant in a group, or simply a means of navigating through it without being a target, they parallel the desire of Alice to get into the garden to be her own ruler or at the very least know the garden and those in it, and understand the way this environment works. Because of this desire to have a sense of control, Alice strives to be the Queen, as ruler over this garden (as several participants stated as the reason for their actions to address research question 3.) However, the Queen roles in Carroll's books serves as an example of social aggression and unchecked or unaddressed behaviors in "gardens" when they are allowed to be uncultivated (absent gardener) and grow out of control.

Additionally, the theme Things change: How Curiously It Twists contributes to the social sciences by using Erickson's industry versus inferiority stage of psychosocial development (1993). School and social interaction play an important role during this time, allowing their social world to expand considerably, as they enter school and gain new friendships with peers. Through social interactions, a sense of pride in accomplishments and abilities begin to develop. Friends and classmates play a role in the progress through the industry versus inferiority stage.

Safe haven: Passage to the Loveliest Garden You Ever Saw

In *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland*, Alice ventured into a flower garden. Because Alice saw these flowers as innocent, she attempted to befriend the flowers. All of the flowers in this Garden were cared for and had a "reputation" for being beautiful, talented, and smart. The flower on top, or the leader was Tigerlilly.

Like the characters in Carroll's garden, my participants also identified with reputation. They believed themselves to be smart, pretty, leaders, but were afraid that as the seasons

changed, they were no longer seen as innocent. Also, they didn't identify with someone who was mean for the purpose of being mean (Rose).

The theme of Safe haven: Passage to the Loveliest Garden You Ever Saw addresses Research Question 2 and 3 through the participants' sense of taking power and being accepted, as well as their sense of superficiality. Like Carroll's Alice, the participants believed that they should be as much a part of this garden as these carefully cultivated flowers. However, two of them decided that instead of becoming a flower in another person's garden, they should be the keeper of their own. Like Alice, two participants were queens of their own garden, but were stuck by the crown that brought a semblance of power. Research question 3 was addressed by this false semblance of power provided by the self-ordained crown because it weighed heavily on the participants. They understood that their actions impressed upon others were hurtful and they regretted the occurrence, even if they believed that their actions were justified.

The other participants simply wanted to be accepted and be a flower in a garden, even if they felt muted at times. Research question 2 is addressed by participants' and Alice's experiences of being surrounded, as well as becoming superficial. In the garden, the flowers (participants) show the signs of being well-brought-up females. Like the flowers of the garden, the participants were concerned with appearance and knew when to bow to appropriate authority.

The social science response to this theme is from Erickson's identity versus confusion stage of [psychosocial development](#) (1993). This stage not only encourages adolescents to explore their independence and develop a sense of self, but it influences the way one feels about themselves by finding a sense of personal identity. Friends, social groups, schoolmates, societal trends, and even popular culture all play a role in shaping and forming an identity.

I don't matter: What Else is It Good For?

In Carroll's garden, a gardener is never seen or mentioned. In fact, the gardener seems nonexistent as Alice asks, "aren't you sometimes frightened at being planted out here with nobody to take care of you?" to which the Rose answers, "there's a tree in the middle to bark". A gardener cares for the garden and its maintenance, much like an administrator would care for the students and the maintenance of the school. In order to create a healthy environment, the Gardener must use preventatives so that the plants will not be harmed, like an administrator would stop detrimental behavior before it starts. However, if nothing is done then nothing will change; it will continue to be a negative environment or turn into a negative environment. As a gardener does not just dig up a plant they think might have a fungus, they treat the plant and continue to monitor its progress. The participants felt that an administrator should follow up and not issue a consequence without constantly looking at the continual behavior because lack of attention to persistent negative behavior can allow future instances, like one participant states "they allowed me to be violated and still did nothing". Lala shared that she felt that her school had a particular culture because of the seemingly absent administration. She stated, "the administration is so dumb, but that's so now our culture! Oh, they did nothing! Absolutely, nothing for sure! I know like schools make it out so that bullying is like their number one priority. It's not! It's sad because you think like you... you send your kids to school so that they can feel safe and they don't! And these adults, like they don't care! I wish they'd show that they're attempting to care. I feel like because there are so many reports, you know, when kids do go to report it, that there's no follow-up. That if they followed up and continuously showed this kid effort that I do care, like, I'm going to sit here in class and make sure you're okay. I'm going to call you in. I'm going to make sure you're ok. Then, it would be like, wow, because it changes the person, you know. It like changes how they feel in their school. You would like want them to follow up with the victim and the bully because then it would be seen as both ya'll,

stop the action, help the victim and make sure those punished don't do it again, but then both the are being taken care of too. So like I said, I was... kind of like them, so I feel like as long as both of them are being monitored, then it would be fine. In her opinion, if behavioral observations are done as a consequence, than further bullying instances could be prevented. Abby stated that when behaviors go unaddressed, they become "Like the spread of disease. They infect everything." It's not enough to "bark" to deter behavior, safety has to be the primary concern, and my participants believed that their safety was never the priority.

The theme of I don't matter: What Else is it Good For? addressed research question 1, through the participants' description of their behavior as calculated or as a response to an action or behavior. For Carroll's Alice, her motive of listening and paying attention to others was used to strategize how to get to the eighth square and become a queen in her own right. It became apparent to the participants and Carroll's Alice that to be a queen of your own garden required one to be calculated and strategic in playing the game. As Alice and my participants learned that the progression of power to queen of the garden involved no real achievement, they also discovered the irony that it held no power.

The false sense of power and dominance can be overshadowed and revoked by the power that existed in both the worlds of the participants and Carroll's by the absent gardener. Although the gardener seems absent in the Carroll books, the cultivation and maintenance was evident as it was in the lives of the participants. Although the participants felt that the gardeners should have had a greater presence to not allow all the queens to rule as they did or have the flowers feel muted, the gardeners were simply looking at the façade and tended their garden as needed to keep it peaceful or remove the invasive species if necessary.

The theme of I don't matter: What Else is it Good For? is represented in the social sciences through Erickson's stage of trust vs mistrust (1993). This stage encompasses the care

that one receives from their parents and other adults. Because the participants were taught from the beginning of their school years to trust administration to keep you safe and report any negative occurrences so that it could be dealt with, the time that administration does not address the bullying behavior while being aggressed upon or while aggressing others, the participants lost trust. This is easily seen in the category “Who Cares?” which makes up this theme. The participants all expressed some version of the expressed feeling of who cares what they (administration) say or do now, they didn’t care about me (while I was being victimized), so who cares? The mistrust allows one to understand the perception of the participants “not mattering” to administration because their behavior as a victim and a bully went unaddressed, so they were over the fact that anything they did went unexamined.

Conclusions

In Response to Research Questions:

Research Question 1: How do social aggressors describe their behavior?

The social aggressors describe their behavior as a response to an action or behavior. All of the social aggressors that participated in my research stated that their aggressive actions were reactions to someone else. They felt that that social aggression was used to defend themselves.

Abby, one of my participants, described social aggression as something that society has taught us. She states, “I don't think it's something natural though, I think it's something that society has shown us. Maybe that's why women, because of the way we've been brought up, hurt with your words. You sting with your only real form of defense... and offense I guess. As opposed to guys, who really aren't just smart enough to use just their words, but typically I feel like it's more or it's instilled very little. I mean they are told to never hit or never hit girls, we were told other things like just not to fight. It should be a natural thing, but I don't think that it is a natural thing because if it were natural, then guys should have it too. But technically, we’re

equal in dignity and likeness and if girls are nasty on the inside, I think guys should be nasty on the inside.

Research Question 2: What thoughts do social aggressors engage in while bullying?

The participants believed that they were setting the story straight when committing social aggression or were so enraged that they reacted aggressively. Some felt guilt for their actions, even while it occurred because of the viciousness attached to it. However, behind every reaction was the intention to hurt someone to the point that the behavior would not be reciprocated or to exemplify that the behavior should not happen again.

Each participant had different thoughts, but the thoughts that seemed to be a consensus of the participants were to feel nothing or that bullying made them feel better. Abby stated that, “wanting somebody else to feel what I went through” was the reason she engaged in social aggression. However, Lala stated, “I can't feel anything. I feel like I don't care”. Lexi stated that, “I enjoy doing it and I didn't see anything wrong with it because it made me feel good. It makes you feel better about yourself. It gives you a rush, it's like “yeah, I did that. I won she lost kind of thing”. It makes you feel like you're the winner! You have all this adrenaline... you feel like you can do anything!” Lexi stated that she had some issues with making others feel the way she did. She said, “sometimes I do, I'll make others feel how I did if they're mean to me because I know how other people made me feel bad about myself and I use those words to make others feel that way, like nothing. That's how I felt.”

Research Question 3: What thoughts do Hispanic female social aggressors experience in retrospect regarding the bullying that occurred?

Social aggressors retrospectively reported that they had ambivalence about their identity. As the participants recalled their thoughts about the way they bullied, distinct emotions emerged. Each participant viewed their experience as a social aggressor differently. Although each

participant recalled their actions as reactionary, their current feelings toward their reactions were expressed differently.

As each participant recalled the thoughts that entered their mind as they bullied or committed social aggression, some shared a definite 'I feel guilty' or 'I don't care.' While Rose felt guilt regarding a friendship that she ruined, she stated, "I probably shouldn't have done that because I know those girls made her feel bad every day after that and it started with me", Lexi still doesn't have remorse. She stated, "I'm not a mean person, but with social aggression nothing has changed" she considered herself to this day a social aggressor, although she admitted to trying not to do it as much. Like Lexi, Mandy stated, "I've grown up. I've matured a lot, but as far as social aggression nothing has changed." She admitted to continuing her social aggressive and relational aggressive actions. Other participants related that they felt a bit of both. Due to the many times each participant apologized for her thoughts or said, "that sounds so bad," I began to perceive a sense of shame. As Abby recalled her reasons for social aggression, she expressed her confusion of emotions. "I've never once been mean to like a random person. Like even if a person gives me an ugly look I'm not going to like stalk them on social media and start throwing jabs at them or being mean to them. I've really only ever been mean to the people who hurt my friends or hurt me."

Implications

Implications for Educational Policy

Each of the participants in my study were in school during the time that the counseling mandates for bullies and victims were made into laws requiring the implementation of a program to address the bullying issue, but none of the participants related that they had experienced a beneficial program, or recalled a program or intervention being placed in their schools. As the 2011 law required both bully and victim to be counseled, they, as the bullies, would have

received benefits that they said were not afforded to them. When asked if they would have wanted help, all of them said they would because they believed that they could have been taught ways to better address their feelings and reactions toward others. Education leaders need to address victims of bullying as early as possible in order to deter them from later becoming the perpetrators of bullying. Education leaders need to ensure preventative counseling measures be implemented to decrease issues associated with bullying. Consequences need to be issued, continually checked, and followed through to ensure the bullying behavior is not continuing in any form, as well as serving as a means for bystanders to understand that the behavior is not condoned or acceptable.

Federal Legislation. According to Stopbullying.gov (2014), the United States has not directly addressed bullying through a federal law. However, bullying may overlap with laws that address some of the characteristics of bullying. There are federal laws that protect discriminatory harassment, which is covered under civil rights laws enforced by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). When the two (bullying and harassment) overlap, federally-funded schools have an obligation to resolve the issue. Regardless of the label categorizing the issue (e.g., bullying, hazing, teasing, aggression), schools are obligated by the Department of Education and Department of Justice laws to address the conduct (severe, pervasive, or persistent), environment (hostile climate at school that interferes with a student's ability to participate or benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by a school), and discrimination or harassment based on a student's race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or religion).

According to the participants, who were in school when Texas HB 1942 was enacted, none of them ever experienced the help that was to be rendered to them. They felt ignored and interpreted being ignored as permission or empowerment to continue to behave the way they did.

If representatives enact a bill, but do not designate a timeline to implement it or penalty for failing to implement, then administration may not feel the sense of urgency that the representatives did and will not provide what is required, as is evident by my results.

Implications for Student Learning

In 2017, the data collected from the School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey revealed that a greater percentage of females (23%) reported being bullied more than 10 days in the school year rather than males (Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2019). The students surveyed were also asked to indicate and rate how bullying had a negative effect on various aspects of their life. The results of the survey concluded that 27 percent of students that reported being bullied indicated a negative effect on how they felt about themselves (Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2019) and 19 percent reported that bullying either had somewhat or a lot of negative effect on their schoolwork (Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2019). This negative environment that affects their self-perception consequently affects their productivity, especially at school. This situation accurately reflects Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977) when Abby expressed that because the environment at her school was so toxic, and the school failed to take immediate, appropriate steps to respond to a complaint about harassment or bullying, to her it seemed as if they gave tacit approval because "most of the time the bystanders became the bullies because they saw people getting away with bullying and I guess they figured they could do it too. I mean it was a constant chain reaction it was like an infection."

Since the social cognitive theory takes into account a person's past experiences, which factor into whether a behavioral action will occur, and reinforces cognitive influences to determine whether a person will engage in a specific behavior and the reasons why a person engages in that behavior, SCT was exemplified by the participants by the interaction of their

environment. By being socially aggressed, through social interactions, the participants each learned that an increase in power and or social status comes with the aggressive behavior, as well as a sense of protection, since others were deterred from reciprocating the behavior (Bandura, 2002). This in turn affected their ego identity (Erickson, 1993).

Implications for Social Responsibilities in Education

Berman (1990) stated, “Schools must help students fight their feelings of powerlessness by developing their sense of community and their confidence that they can make a difference in the world.” Because contributing members of society have a responsibility to act in manner that is beneficial to society and not necessarily an individual, the morals and values that are inherent should be addressed, especially if resulting in aggression. As one of my participants said for her reasoning for committing social aggression, “females are taught things like just not to fight. Maybe that's why women, because of the way we've been brought up, hurt with words. You sting with your only real form of defense... and offense, I guess. I don't think it's something natural though, I think it's something that society has shown us, which is the only reason I chose verbal social aggression. Because, legally that was the only thing I could do, but if there was a way to get away with it, I would have done it a long time ago, physically”.

Regarding the protection of youth through cyber-aggression, a participant stated, “Schools can't prevent what happens when a child goes home and tweets something or sends a message, which causes issues that will be unpreventable. One way it could stop from being so bad in schools would be not allowing them to have access to the social media during school times. Schools don't know what someone said on social media, and they never will, but there's no way you can prevent everything someone says. You can maybe delay it a few hours when they are at school if you don't allow the use of phones. It would be hard to find something to deter social aggression simply because people use phones now as an escape for everything. All drama

or emotions of topics are simply on the phone and there would be no way to stop it from spreading because they will say what they want either way”. Whereas I agree that schools cannot prevent cyberaggression, as a society we can promote the use of filters, such as the one twitter has constructed that allows the user to block negative comments and rude people from interrupting your day. Perhaps even teaching our youth to report negative users to have accounts cancelled could be a responsible reaction to cyber-aggression.

Implications for Educational Administrators and Leadership

Administration needs to make an effort in addressing a whole student centered environment that is not strictly scholastic. More of a growth mindset should be a central curriculum to develop a whole child. As one participant stated, “schools should be inspiring their students to love, not necessarily preach, but teaching let's be nice to each other because we will appreciate it one day. I think schools should help with more positive reinforcement of character instead of being like, “don't bully, I mean like don't do this, and don't do that because people are going to do what they're told not to do. They can do less of the “no, no, no” and more of the, “try this”, “do this”, “be kind”. When there's somebody who knows how to deal with them (students) and knows how to promote the community, rather than chaos, everything's happier and nicer, and you don't have to worry about it because school is school and they should be doing some kind of happy motivational thing. I think everything would be better if we were kinder and promoted kindness”

In addition to Administration being whole student centered, more interaction with counselors should be promoted so that students are aware that someone is available to listen to their concerns, even if they are not academic. Because Texas laws now require counseling to be provided in cases of bullying (and all subsects) to victims, bullies, and bystanders, counselors need to move past the stigma of academic counselor toward guidance counselor (Patrick, 2011).

As a participant stated, “the counselors could have come in more and talk to us about our situation or like do a presentation to let us know that we could like go and talk to them about things or talk to them about things that are going on with my friends or relationship problems.”

Lastly, Administrators need to promote and emphasize collaborative learning by randomized grouping. Like a participant said, “maybe having more in class group work, not having to work with the same people. Because that's what we do now in college, you pair up with anybody or they (professors) choose for you. I feel like that's where it starts because then you are just within your clique and then you're just against everybody. I think that's how it starts.”

All stakeholders, including administrators and teachers need to address the whole child. Since students bring their home life baggage to school, addressing their signs and symptoms of physical and psychological trauma, while attempting to teach the specific subject matters is a task (Schargel, 2014). Students have nowhere else, other than school, to react to their situations, ask for help, and try to push past it all to learn. School, as an institution, has the potential to have a greater impact in the lives of our children. Dealing with the physical and emotional needs of the students is necessary before they are educated because students will not care to work if they don't perceive they are cared for. In addition to this, are the perceived school vulnerabilities that affect or disrupt student lives.

Recommendations for Further Research

Since the literature supports the social aggression phenomena as a white upper-class problem, further research should be conducted regarding social aggressors among females of other minority groups as well as white lower or middle class females.,. Studies could cover the differences in what social aggression looks like amongst males, since my data revealed that it does happen amongst the male gender as well. Additionally, it would be helpful also to gain

further knowledge regarding the prevalence of social aggression not only toward a gender, but also a community, such as the LGBT or deaf/ hard of hearing community.

I would like to see current practices of counseling programs in Texas examined regarding how they are abiding by house bill 1942, specifically regarding this law's mandate to counsel both the victim and the bully. Further research should be conducted to determine what programs are used as preventions in early elementary and into middle school to abide with HB1942 and David's law. Specifically, a quantitative research using a survey instrument could be conducted statewide to determine how the implementation of HB 1942 and David's law is affecting current counseling program or if there are proactive rather than reactive programs, and whether differences of a counselor's roll of guidance versus academic counselors show significance in effective programs or interventions.

Significance

Three items of significance came from this study. One was the lack of difference between White female aggressors and the Hispanic participants of the study and that the processes seemed parallel across ethnic lines. A second item was participants related that they had been victims of bullying which led them to become bullies. The third item of significance was that participants wished for adult guidance and protection.

Much of the research found on relational or social aggression pertained to white, middle to upper class females (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003). While conducting the interviews, I found that the Hispanic females I interviewed not only self-identified as being social aggressors, but followed the same types of behaviors that were exemplified in the study pertaining to the white upper class social aggressors.

Participants related that early in their scholastic years they learned that the best way to defend themselves from bullying was to have a strong offensive strategy with social aggression

at the center. Because each participant related that they had been bullied at school prior to becoming a social aggressor, it is necessary that students be taught from an early elementary age (where all participants first saw or experienced social aggression) how to deal with anger and aggressive thoughts so that the bullying behavior does not continue into adulthood. School leaders must ensure that coping strategies, as well as strategies to deal with anger and jealousy are taught to early elementary school children and that it continues into adolescent grades in a continual manner so that healthy relationship building and maintenance are at the root of the environment, to safeguard students from bullying.

Each participant from my study recalled wanting the help at the time, but not being offered a way out or a different way to deal with their issues. Perhaps, if they had the benefit of adult guidance two of the six participants would not be continuing their social aggressive behaviors had they been taught another way to deal with their anger or jealousy issues through the school counseling program, which is required by law in Texas.

Educators, parents, and students want, need, and deserve a safe environment in which to learn. Parents should have confidence that schools work in loco parentis to keep their children safe from social aggression. Students should have confidence in their administration and teachers to not only impart wisdom, but care for them and keep them safe. If the perception of a parent or student is that they are unsafe because the administration is not considering their needs regarding social aggression or is not addressing an issue that is hurting them physically or psychologically than a sense of rejection resonates with them with an already altered perception of safety which can have adverse effects on the environment or the psychological effects of the students.

Concluding Thoughts

Although schools cannot fix all the psychological issues in students' lives, they should at least afford a safe haven. Proactive programs as well as reactive programs need to be in place for counselors to address social aggressive behaviors for victims and aggressors. The perception of an absent administration can negatively affect the environment or increase a lack of confidence to keep the students safe. As educators, it is our priority to keep students safe and educate them in a safe nurturing environment. The last thing I, as an educator, want to do is to perpetuate a detrimental cycle of social aggression. I do not want to be part of an institution that looks the other way in regards to social aggression. Stakeholders need to see the damage that social aggression can have and understand that it either creates more social aggressors or can irreversibly damage their victims. In order to be able to educate our students, they need to know that they are safe, cared for, and will be provided with help to better equip themselves to deal with effects of social aggression and with emotions that cause them to socially aggress.

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APPENDIX A

First Interview Example questions:

1. Can you tell me what bullying and cyber-cide mean to you?
2. What do you think of when you hear the term “social aggression”?
3. Which gender do you think is more susceptible to social aggression/ bullying and why?
4. Can you remember or tell me about the first time you saw or heard about social aggression/ bullying?
5. Can you take me back to your most significant experience with bullying and walk me through a typical day where you have committed social aggression with cyberbullying or cyber-harassment?
6. What were the indicators for you of social aggression /bullying?
7. How would you describe the effects social aggression has/had on your school behavior/ environment?
8. Reflect on the way you viewed your administration regarding the issue of social aggression as a student? Has your view changed?
9. What do you think could deter social aggression? What would you like to be changed?
10. How do you suppose schools could play a more active role in social aggression?

APPENDIX B

Second Interview Example questions

1. Is it hard for you to talk about bullying? Have you ever been bullied?
2. Do you believe that being bullied has changed the way other people view you, the way you view yourself, and the way you view others?
3. What personal strengths and weaknesses can you attribute to your experience of bullying? How do you suppose those that you have tormented view you? How do you suppose they feel because of your behavior? How have you been able to cope with this throughout the years?
4. Recall an instance where you may have identified with someone you bullied. Explain how your social status keeps you safe from bullies.
5. How would you describe your relationships? Do you have close friends? Tell me about your relationship with your close friends? What type of relationship do you have with significant others?

APPENDIX C

Email to professors

Dear Professor _____,

My name is Melissa Delgado and I am a graduate student in the department of Educational Leadership seeking participants for my dissertation regarding social aggressors. I am writing to request permission to briefly present to your students what my research is about and to distribute recruitment materials for possible participants from your class. I would appreciate if you would allot me about 10 min of your class time to speak to your students and pass out print material.

I would appreciate any time you can spare. Please indicate whether permission is granted and inform me of dates and times that are convenient for you.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request. I look forward to hearing back from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Melissa Delgado

APPENDIX D

Recruitment flyer

Department of Educational Leadership
Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi

SOCIAL AGGRESSORS

I am looking for volunteers to take part in my doctoral dissertation study about social aggressors.

As a participant in this study, you would be involved in a one hour interview and a one hour transcript review (member check) within two weeks time.

For more information about my ongoing research efforts or to see if you would qualify as a participant, please contact: Melissa Delgado at Melissa.Delgado@ccisd.us or click on the QR code



To open QR code, use the camera on your smartphone or go to this link in your browser
https://www.ccisd.us/qualtrics.xem?fid=80670V_j0u4y5b0wAT1g0000P?it_C1111w4

You are under no obligation to participate in any research.

Upon clicking on the QR code you will receive a description of the research study and links to provide you with the contact information of the researcher to learn more.

Once you have all the details about the study, you may choose to or not to participate. Participating in research is always voluntary.

Which one were you?



APPENDIX E

Consent Form for Participation in Interviews

Addressing the Culture of Hispanic Female Social Aggressors in K-12: A Retrospective
Exploration of Narrative Experiences

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. By signing this consent form you are agreeing to participate in the study. By participating in this study, you are also certifying that you are 19 years of age or older.

You have volunteered to participate in a research project studying Hispanic female social aggressors in a K-12 setting. The purpose of this qualitative study is to retrospectively explore the narrative experiences of Hispanic females between the age of 19 and 23, who bullied or committed social aggression in a K-12 setting. You were selected to be a possible participant because you have self-identified as a social aggressor in K-12 setting.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to explain thoughts, feelings, reasons for behaviors through an interview. Participation will consist of one interview and a transcript review meeting (member check), which will occur within a two week span following the interview. Your participation will be audio recorded.

What are the risks involved in this study?

The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

What are the alternatives to being in this study?

Instead of being in this study, you may choose not to be in the research study.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

A \$10 gift card will be given to participants at the completion. Otherwise, there are no direct benefits to participants for involvement in this study.

Do I have to participate?

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi being affected.

Will I be compensated?

You will receive a \$10 gift card for completing the interview and member check in this study.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?

This study is confidential and to achieve confidentiality, all personal and private information and audio recorded data will be stored on my password encrypted personal computer for safe keeping, as no one except myself has access to the device. No one except myself and my supervisor will have access to the data and all identifiable information about participants will be omitted or renamed on the transcription.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded, and you will sign this consent form. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only Melissa Delgado and Dr. Nancy Smith will have access to the recordings. Any recordings and documents will be kept for a minimum of three years after the completion of the study and then securely erased. Additionally, any hardcopies including this consent form will be shredded.

Whom do I contact with questions about the research?

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Melissa Delgado, melissa.delgado@ccisd.us or (361)249-8018, or the PI, Dr. Nancy Smith, nancy.smith@tamucc.edu or (361) 825-2308.

Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?

This research study has been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Research Compliance Office, at (361) 825-2497 or send an email to "IRB@tamucc.edu".

Signature

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in this study. You also certify that you are 19 years of age or older by signing this form.

Signature of Participant:_____ **Date:**_____

Printed Name:_____

Signature of Person obtaining consent:_____ **Date:**_____

Printed Name:_____

APPENDIX F

Script for Recruitment in Classrooms

Hi, I'm **Melissa Delgado**. I am currently conducting a study on campus for female social aggressors.

This study focuses on **the recollection of female aggressors in a K-12 setting** through the Department of **Educational Leadership**. Most research regarding social aggression focuses on the victims of social aggression, however the voice of aggressors has had little focus. Because you may self-identify as a social aggressor, your perceptions and opinions are important to this study. Participation in this research study will involve **an interview** in an agreed upon location. Participation will consist of one interview and a transcript review meeting (member check), which will occur within a two week span following the interview.

There are no known or anticipated risks to your participation in this study. The questions asked are general. You may decline answering any questions you feel you do not wish to answer.

If you volunteer and are chosen to participate, you will receive a \$10 gift card upon completion. Beyond that, you will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary.

All information you provide will be considered confidential and grouped with responses from other participants. You will not be identified by name in any report or publication resulting from this study. The data collected through this study will be kept for a period of **three years after the completion of the study**.

You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

This study has been reviewed and approved through the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Institutional Research Board (IRB). If you have questions, you can contact them at 361-825-2497 or irb@tamucc.edu.

For all other questions, or if you would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please **snap chat or scan the QR code on the flyer** or feel free to contact **Melissa.Delgado@ccisd.us** or Dr. Nancy J. Smith at nancy.smith@tamucc.edu.

Thank you for your assistance with this project.