The purpose of this paper was to prove that since open aggression among girls is discouraged, they have developed more deceitful, hurtful ways to express their anger toward others. This paper addresses the issues that surround relational aggression such as why it is ignored, the reasons behind relational aggression, and the side effects that the bullied experience. Relational aggression in females remains unaddressed by society because it does not cause any physical damage like overt aggression employed by males does.

Many sources were used to support this claim. Relational aggression has just become a studied topic. Past studies on aggression only used a criterion which classified overt aggression, which explains why this type of aggression was overlooked. Relational aggression seems to begin at a very young age and evolves into a very secretive practice among girls. If relational aggression remains unaddressed it may develop into the use of violence by girls.

This paper addresses and gives suggestion on how to prevent relational aggression. For relational aggression to be prevented it needs to be accepted as a part of society. This type of aggression is secretive, which makes it difficult to detect. Society must stop addressing girls’ actions as girls being girls. The way that girls act is dangerous and hurtful towards others. Ostracizing each other should not be considered a normal part of growing up.
Introduction

The world of female aggression has developed a culture which many people are unaware of its inner workings. The aggressors of this underground culture have received nicknames like queen bees, alphas, and RMGs (Really Mean Girls) (Stepp, Eisner). The type of bullying employed by these girls is known as indirect aggression. The majority of girls participate in this type of aggression since adults are unable to detect it. The indirect aggression used by females equates to the physical or direct aggression used by boys. Youth turn to aggression to purposefully hurt or injure another person.

This relational aggression between females dates back to biblical times with Sarah banishing Hagar, and may even have existed among our primate ancestors (Eisner). Females are discouraged from engaging in direct forms of aggression (Dutton). Aggression is expected in males but not in females since girls are expected to be sweet and caring, but aggression does not fit into that mold (Simmons). “Mean behavior can be seen in girls as early as three” by simply refusing to play together or insulting another type of dress which a playmate is wearing (Stepp C1). Aggression in girls tends to peak during the middle school years (Burgess). As girls mature indirect aggression becomes less obvious and more refined (Lagerspetz). Bullying became a focus during the outbreak of school shootings in the late 1990’s (Dutton). Schools still define bullying as “physical and direct” acts of violence, girls’ form of aggression is not considered violent at all (Dutton 56). Girls will fight about everything and anything (Fanning). During the last decade there has been recognition that aggression can be significant in girls (Moretti).

The importance of learning and accepting girls’ aggression is crucial to learn how to prevent it. Aggression in girls has received much less attention than boys’ aggression
Indirect aggression gives the aggressor the ability to be unidentified and prevent a counterattack from the girl being attack (Lagerspetz). Some forms of relational aggression include name calling, rumor spreading, and evil stares (Lagerspetz). With aggression in boys “you know where you stand”, girls unlike boys are manipulative. They plan and premeditate their actions (Simmons). The victims can suffer from depression, eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, and many drop out of school if they fear for their own safety (Fanning). If the relational aggression in females remains unaddressed it may develop into other forms of aggression (Moretti).

A study taken by Marlene Moretti, Roy Holland, and Sue McKay discovered that girls who continually engage in relationally aggressive acts may resort to physical acts of aggression if necessary because they feel provoked. A survey taken by the Families and Work Institute found that two thirds of one thousand fifth through twelfth graders experienced some form of emotional violence, like being teased or gossiped about in mean ways. Girls were not seen as aggressive in past studies because the wrong type of criteria was used to investigate aggression in females (Mounts). Relational aggressive acts among girls include humiliation, alienation, and excluding other (Zapf). “These relationally aggressive acts are considered distressing and socially and psychologically detrimental for girls” (Moretti 111). In the study “Is Relational aggression typical in females?”, asked if indirect aggression was typical in females, it concluded that girls use indirect aggression while boys use direct means (Lagerspetz). The types of behavior that girls exhibit can be seen in the television show they watch. “Angelica of the Rugrats and Helga of Hey Arnold! are sweet and innocent to adults and wicked witches of the west to the other children” (Brown1). The sweet girl routine fools adults into believing that they
do not wrong. “Beneath girls’ docile facades lies a secret world of whispered rumors and withering glances” (Dutton C1).

Issues surrounding relational aggression usually revolve around how damaging it actually is. Relational aggression has been seen to cause emotional and social developmental problems (Moretti). Relational aggression had not been studied in past years since it was not viewed as a type of aggression among girls, so in many past studies researchers found that girls’ did not show aggression. In comparison to girls’ aggression, many people believe that they physical aggression exhibited in boys is much worse (Dutton). School administrators also do not take alternate forms of aggression in schools seriously (Dutton).

Escalation of aggression in females is caused by the lack of intervention by adults (Burgess). Alternate aggression is ignored since no physical harm or disruption of school life occurs. This paper will argue that since open aggression among girls is discouraged, they have developed more deceitful, hurtful ways to express their anger toward others.
Recent studies conducted by Moretti, Holland, and McKay, and Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist and Peltonen have proved that relational aggression developed into a problem with in our society. Studies on female aggression have just recently begun to be researched. When studies on aggression were conducted in the past they only studied physical aggression in youth instead of all different types of aggression. The more studies conducted are proving that relational aggression has become a thriving culture in the world. Many books have been written addressing aggression, specifically Rachel Simmons. In her book, *Odd Girl Out*, Rachel Simmons delves into the world of female aggression. By conducting her research Simmons unmasks the horrors of female aggression.

The study conducted by Marlene Moretti, Roy Holland and Sue McKay titled, “Self-other Representations and Relational and Overt Aggression in Adolescent Girls and Boys, address the idea that girls have been perceived to be less aggressive than boys. The researcher of the study stress the importance of creating a “bilateral model” of aggression since the types of aggression vary in gender. Several factors like self representation and hostile behavior were studied to see if they could be used to help predict relational aggression. This study proved that relational aggression is strongly associated with girls who have negative feelings about themselves. The study discovered that bullying girls “are heavily engaged in controlling and manipulating their social networks and are quite ready to lash out physically.” Startling information discovered by the researchers’ states that “girls who engage in relational aggression may be at a significant risk for engaging in serious overt aggression and violence.” The study concludes that girls’ aggression
needs to be recognized by people to prevent girls from becoming involved in other forms of aggression.

A study conducted by Kirsti Lagerspetz, Kaj Bjorkqvist, and Tarja Peltonen researched to discover if indirect aggression is typically practiced in females. In their study, “Is indirect aggression typical in females?”, the researchers discovered that “girls make greater use of indirect means of aggression.” The researchers stated that female aggression was unnoticed in psychological studies because the techniques used in the past only detected components of direct aggression. Their study, conducted using eleven and twelve year old girls and boys, found that girls did prefer indirect means of aggression over overt forms. The researchers discovered that indirect aggression “toned down” as girls matured but still does exist among older girls. They also concluded that relational aggression tends to “thrive” among eleven and twelve year olds.

In Rachel Simmons novel, Odd Girl Out, she addresses the culture of indirect aggression that has become a part of girls’ lives. Ms. Simmons personally interviewed many girls who told their stories of being bullied relationally by another female. Simmons repeatedly proves that not only is relational aggression alive and flourishing among girls but is employed by many girls who would not be suspected to act in this way. Networking develops among girls, one girl will single out another which develops into an outcast against her bully and all other females. Actions can range from an act as little as evil stares to whispering and rumor spreading. Rachel Simmons clearly depicts the hurt and anguish that many girls experience from relational aggression. In her book Simmons proves that relational aggression cannot be detected like overt aggression but is just as damaging if not more damaging than physical aggression.
Refutation

A study researched by Marlene M. Moretti, Roy Holland, and Sue McKay titled, “Self-Other Representations and Relational and Overt Aggression in Adolescent Boys and Girls”, had some flaws. When the study was conducted it only contained 32 girls and 52 boys between the ages of ten and seventeen. While the age range covers the ages when relational aggression peaks and lowers, the amount of youths interviewed is extremely low. The youths participated were referred to the researchers for assessment because of problems associated with delinquent behavior and significant aggression. The economic backgrounds of the youth’s were all mostly the same, low-middle socioeconomic status. A lack of diversity among the participant exists. Eighty six percent of the boys and fifty eight percent of the girls were Caucasian. Fifty percent of the girls’ interviewed were living away from home in foster placement compared to only twenty seven percent of boys. Four percent of boys and nine percent of girls lived in other types of care settings. This did not present an accurate representation of normal living situations; therefore difficulty in distinguishing if aggression commonly occurs among all youth or just relatively common among troubled youth. Sixty three percent of the boys and seventy two percent of the girls interviewed met a criterion for having a conduct disorder. This study was a part of a larger study in which participations received thirty dollars for participating in the study. The results did not specify if these students were paid to participate or not. Offering money to have an interview conducted could result in incorrect findings because people would just be answering so they receive the money.
The study, “Is Indirect Aggression Typical of Females?”, researched by Kirsti M.J Lagerspetz, Kaj Bjorkqvist, and Tarja Peltonen conducted a survey amongst 167 children between the ages of eleven and twelve. The children interviewed attended four different schools. Two of the schools were located in the center of the city while the remaining two schools were located in the suburbs. The sizes of the classes varied from as little as 14 to as high as 32. Eighty nine boys and seventy eight girls participated in the study. One segment entitled, Friendship questionnaire, was not taken by all of the students because of time, one class did not participate. After the friendship questionnaire was completed fifteen girls and fourteen boys were taken aside and interviewed individually. From the five classes that participated in the original study, only three of the classes participated in the interview segment. Five boys and five girls, with the exception of one class that only had four boys participate, were interviewed. These students were chosen because they belonged to different friendships groups with in their classes. The amount of students used to complete this survey is a very small group. While city and suburban schools were studied, no information was provided stating the economic backgrounds of these children and whether they have a history of aggressive behavior. Not interviewing all of the classes provides skewed results since the amount of youth interviewed is even smaller. The way that students were chosen to be interviewed lends itself for ‘fixing’ of the results. Since students were hand picked researchers were able to direct questions that would relate specifically to that child instead of children in general.

The book, Odd Girl Out, by Rachel Simmons discusses aggression among girls. She conducted interviews at ten schools to conclude her results. Simmons interviewed many girls from different ethnicities, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. She
conducted her surveys in a variety of cities. While interviewing many different types of people Simmons loses the ability to see trends over the youth of the same culture since a wide range of students were interviewed. She only interviewed girls about relational aggression which provides insufficient results because boys do participate in relational aggression, just not as much as girls. Equal amount of time was not spent at all of the schools resulting in a difference of answer since the schools she spent more time at would grow more comfortable with her and be more open. The race difference could sway the opinion and cooperativeness of the youth interviewed as well. Simmons states her background as a white, middle class woman who could have trouble connecting with the lower class, black females in the intercity. She interviewed fifty adult women by phone. While their stories of being bullied may help prove that relational aggression has existed for a very long time, the type and ways in which females in the past and females now participate in relational aggression varies. As times change the degree that relational aggression takes place has also changed.
Conclusion

This paper helps prove that girls have developed more deceitful, hurtful ways to express their anger toward other girls since open aggression is discouraged. Female aggression dates back to biblical times and has evolved into a type of hidden culture for girls today. Indirect female aggression equates to overt aggression in boys. Female aggression causes physical and emotional damages to girls. If acceptance of female aggression does not occur, it can develop into physical violence.

Many surprising results were found on the topic of female aggression. The enormity of this issue was more widespread than originally thought. The means and networks girls create are shocking. They employ ruthlessness, scheming, and cutthroat actions to achieve their desired outcome. Society does not acknowledge the occurrence of relational aggression in females yet they portray females as relationally aggressive on the television and in the movies. Bullying causes severe side effects in the girls who are the recipients of relational aggression like emotional distress, eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, and severe adjustment problems. Relational aggression begins at a young age yet people still pay no attention to it. The majority of females who are now mothers were the aggressor, recipient, or the bystander of indirect aggression but they do not try to prevent it in their daughters’ lives. The disturbing reality of this issue has developed into an acceptance of ‘girls being girls’. Instead of preventing girls’ horrible actions towards each other, society justifies it as a normal occurrence of girls growing up.

The research on this paper reaffirmed the seriousness of relational aggression. The lack of studies on this topic proves that this issue needs to be addressed. The current research conducted proves that relational aggression becomes a way of life for girls
because they are not taught how to deal with the anger they feel toward others. Girls target each other because of boys, clothes, and appearance just to name a few. Girls should not have the ability to terrorize and ostracize their peers just because society refuses to address their anger.

Since relational aggression remains an unaddressed issue many facets of this type of aggression remain unexplored. Society should attempt to learn and understand why girls are relational aggressive toward each other to begin prevention against it. Society has to accept indirect aggression to help prevent it from occurring. Programs should be developed to help the girls who are bullied and to help the aggressor with their anger and resentment.

Many topics involving relational aggression are able to be studied since research on this subject has just recently begun. To discover more about relational aggression researchers should conduct a study following a variety of girls from the start of elementary school to the end of high school. By following the lives of these females for such an extended period of time researchers gain the ability to pinpoint the age in which aggression peaks and diminishes. The development and evolution of indirect aggression can be studied among these girls as they complete their schooling. By studying a wide variety of girls for a long period of time researchers can discover how girls who are not the aggressor or the bullied participate in relational aggression. Another study which could help understand aggression would be to attempt to discover why girls feel the need to be relationally aggressive toward their peers. Several questions that should be asked address where girls learn to use aggression to express their anger, how they gain the ability to get other girls to single out another female, and why they feel the need to
involve other girls in a dispute they have with another female. Another way to learn about relational aggression would be to study the long term effects that it has on females. Questions should be addressed to women who were either the recipient or the aggressor of relationally aggressive acts. These women should be asked if they encourage or condone their daughters to be relationally aggressive to settle their disputes. These women should also be asked if in high school they employed relational aggression to settle any disputes with their peers. A final suggestion to study relational aggression may provide interesting results. This particular study would ask how males are involved in relational aggression. Males should be asked if they help spread rumors that girls start about each other, are relationally aggressive towards girls who they do not like, and do they often use relationally aggressive acts toward their male peers.

This book provided much of the information for the paper. It provided most information that made researching the topic easier.


This source provided background information on the subject. It presented main ideas that were to be covered in the paper.


This article provided information about the effect of relational aggression. It also provided information that boys experienced the same thing but in a different form.


This article provided an account of females who actually experienced alternative aggression. It provided information about the lack of attention paid to girls who use alternative aggression as a form of getting even.

Eisner, Jane. “Girls will be (mean) girls, and maybe that’s part of maturing.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* 03/24/02 Ed. City-D pgC01

This source provided background information on the issue and presents a different viewpoint from many of the other articles written on the topic.

Fanning, Karen. “Girlfight” *Scholastic Choices* Oct.2002 Vol.18 Is.2 pg.25

This article supplied the information on the side effects that are caused by relational aggression. It also presents information on why the practice is not well known.


This study provided information that supported the argument that this paper provides. It enabled the argument to be better supported.


This source was a study conducted on boys and girls. It proved information about how the feelings about self and how others feel about a person effect why or whether they bully.

Mounts, Nina S. “What about girls? Are they really not aggressive? *Human*
Guidetti

Development and Family Life Bulletin Vol.3 Is.2 summer 1997
This source provided information on the subject of the paper. It also provided information in which information about studies could be found.

Simmons, Rachel Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls Harcourt Inc. USA, 2002
This book provided much information on aggression in girls from the perspective of many girls. It gave information on both the bully and the child being bullied. In this book studies that were conducted where mentioned which made it easier to find studies related to this topic.

Stepp, Laura Sessions “Sugar and Spice and Not So Nice” The Washington Post 05/01/02 Ed. F Sect. Style Pg C1
This article provided information about when relational aggression can begin and why girls are involved in it.

Zapf, Karen “Ostracism and words typical of bullying by girls” Tribune East Available: PittsburghLIVE.com
This article provided information about the way that girls participate in relational aggression. It also provides information about what a negative effect it has on girls.