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RELATIONAL AND SOCIAL AGGRESSION: A SCOPING LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Angela M. Fidazzo

October 2021

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Angela M. Fidazzo

2021

RELATIONAL AND SOCIAL AGGRESSION: A SCOPING LITERATURE REVIEW

By

Angela M. Fidazzo

Approved October 11, 2021

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Laura M. Crothers, D.Ed.  
Professor  
Department of Counseling, Psychology, and  
Special Education  
(Committee Chair)

---

Ara J. Schmitt, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Department of Counseling, Psychology, and  
Special Education  
(Committee Member)

---

Jered B. Kolbert, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Department of Counseling, Psychology, and  
Special Education  
(Committee Member)

---

David A. Nolfi, MLS, AHIP  
Librarian Head  
Research Engagement, Health Science/STEM  
Initiatives and Assessment Coordinator  
(Committee Member)

## ABSTRACT

### RELATIONAL AND SOCIAL AGGRESSION: A SCOPING LITERATURE REVIEW

By

Angela M. Fidazzo

October 2021

Dissertation supervised by Laura M. Crothers, D.Ed.

School violence is an omnipresent problem within the United States, at worst, resulting in the death of children and teachers across the nation. Over time, numerous strategies and tools have been introduced in order to reduce aggression within schools. However, as both overt and covert forms of aggression contribute to school violence, it is necessary for researchers to investigate covert, indirect forms of aggression as a way to better identify and prevent a salient contribution to this problem. Although much research has investigated bullying in general, further research is needed in better understanding the forms of covert bullying, relational and social aggression, as these types of bullying are just as detrimental to children as overt forms of bullying. Thus, in this current study, I examine the concepts of social and relational aggression using a scoping literature review in order to investigate the way in which relational and social aggression are conceptualized across the extant literature base. In this study, I specifically investigate the statistical discernment of these respective concepts in the literature as well as distinguishable subtypes and the uniformity of their definitions in the literature. The results of the study indicate that, while social and relational aggression are able to be differentiated from

one another, there continues to be a lack of agreement in the literature regarding their distinguishable qualities.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my selfless and supportive parents, Judy and Allen. To my father, for constantly demonstrating an example of hard work and dedication. For supporting my goals and inciting in me the courage to do so. You have always been an inspiration to me and an invaluable role model. And to my mother, your encouragement and belief in me has been unwavering, even when I could not find it in myself. You have a gift of seeing the talents in others and helping them achieve their truest strength. Your goodness and heart is unmatched and is the reason I have had the opportunity to pursue higher education. Both of you have sacrificed so much for me to be here and this document is a testament to your strength and love.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my loving partner, Gregory Love, and amazing family and friends. Thank you for being patient, understanding, and continuous lights in my life. Your faith in me has been constant and the appreciation I have for all of you cannot be met with words.

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I would also like to thank Mr. David Nolfi and the Gumberg Library who have provided assistance in understanding and completing a scoping literature review. I would have not been able to complete my dissertation without your support. Your kind demeanor and expansive knowledge were instrumental in providing me with motivation and direction.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a persistent problem in United States (U.S.) schools; Carlyle and Steinman (2007) found that 15-20% of elementary school students and 20-28% of secondary school students reported being bullied within a six-month to one-year period. Furthermore, national studies have suggested that 20% to 30% of students are involved in bullying as a perpetrator and/or victim (Carlyle & Steinman, 2007). Specifically, in a nationally-representative study of 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> graders, data revealed that 13% of students were identified as bullies, 11% as victims, and 6% as bully-victims. Olweus (1978) defines bullying as a non-provoked imbalance of power between perpetrator (the aggressor) and victim (the target of aggression) that tends to be repeated over time. Bullying may be overt or covert, manifested through such behaviors as physical injury, slander, threats, rumors, social exclusion, and harassment through electronic means, and may result in both short- and long-term negative consequences for both perpetrators and victims.

Although the prevalence of bullying is high, there are some forms of bullying that are not reported or recognized due to their discreet nature. Prior to the 1980s, most research on aggression focused on overt forms. However, there is a subtler form of aggression that is just as damaging, known as indirect aggression. In the extant literature on indirect aggression, several different definitions have been published. Buss (1961) was the first person to use the term indirect aggression, defining it as either verbal (spreading rumors) or physical (destruction of property). Given that indirect forms of aggression are manifested through more subtle means, the victim may not be aware of the perpetrator's identity or the malicious intent of the behavior (Björkqvist et al., 1992). Therefore, indirect aggression appears to be more easily disguised than

are direct forms of aggression, suggesting that instances of indirect bullying are more difficult for educators to identify and in which to intervene (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

When such bullying goes undetected, it often transpires without consequences, leaving both victims and bullies subject to negative outcomes. Holt et al. (2015) demonstrated that there is a higher prevalence of depression and suicide ideation among both bullies and victims. Both perpetrators and victims have been recognized as developing health problems given the range of adjustment problems they are likely to experience, including poor mental health and violent behavior (Juvonen et al., 2003). Both victims and perpetrators are likely to encounter academic difficulties, psychological maladjustment, and social relationship problems (Swearer, 2010). Victims of bullying often suffer from problems such as low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Olweus & Limber, 2010). Perhaps more worrisome, victims will often internalize their feelings of isolation and the bullying behavior, which can result in the development of emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Although victims have received much attention in the existing research, it is also important to understand the impact that bullying has on the perpetrators. Specifically, bullies are at risk of engaging in antisocial activities and delinquent behaviors in both the short and long term (Sourander et al., 2007). Additionally, Shetgiri et al. (2012) found that 25% of perpetrators report having emotional, developmental, or behavior problems, with depression being a common theme among them. Furthermore, perpetrators often report negative feelings toward self and negative self-cognitions as well as being 2.1 times more likely than peers not involved in bullying to attempt suicide. In their research, Farrington and Baldry (2010) noted that perpetrators tend to demonstrate impulsivity and high levels of hyperactivity with a lower IQ and poor social problem-solving skills, while victims will often internalize their feelings of isolation



and the bullying behavior, which results in the development of emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Understanding the negative consequences that occur as a result of both overt and covert forms of bullying results in a need for a compilation of the extant research published on these topics. In the current study, I will therefore conduct a scoping literature review as a way to thoroughly review the current research that exists on the topic of relational and social aggression; two common, yet destructive forms of indirect bullying. The research may be utilized as a way to identify gaps in the current literature in order to better target future research areas that may further the understanding of identifying and preventing such expressions of indirect bullying in the future.

In order to better understand the overall aim of the study as well as the literature presented, the terms: scoping literature review, relational aggression, and social aggression will be defined. A scoping literature review is a process of summarizing research in a certain field, which highlights the breadth of evidence that currently exists within its bounds (Levac et al., 2010). Relational aggression refers to behaviors that harm others through the damaging, or threat of damaging, relationships or compromising of one's feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). In contrast, social aggression refers to as the manipulation of group acceptance through methods such as alienation and the defamation of character, which may manifest through direct, physical forms, such as verbalized rejection, body movement, and facial expressions (Cairns et al., 1989).

## **Theoretical Basis**

### **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory**

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological theory is as a theoretical framework that is often used to understand the environmental contexts that support or insulate children from school bullying. Within research on school bullying, Bronfenbrenner's theory is referred to as a social-ecological model, focusing on the understanding how the individual characteristics of children interact with their unique environmental contexts or systems that promote or prevent victimization and perpetration (Espelage, 2014). The connection between ecological theory and school bullying lies in the idea that the systems in which youth are functioning can have a direct, indirect, and dynamic influence on both development and behavior. More specifically, microsystems such as peers (socialization during adolescence), family (violence, lack of parental monitoring), community (exposure to violence), and schools (teacher attitudes, climate) contribute to the rates of bullying both perpetrated and experienced by children and adolescents. The interacting components of the microsystem are referred to as the mesosystem, which offers insight into how contexts may exacerbate or buffer experiences for individuals who are involved in bullying (i.e., family support may buffer the impact of peer victimization; Espelage, 2014).

### **Bandura's Social Learning Theory**

Another theoretical framework often discussed in the literature for aggressive behaviors is the social learning theory. Through social learning theory, children learn behaviors deemed appropriate through role modeling, reinforcement, and punishment (Pressley & McCormick, 2007). Consequently, adolescent girls come to understand that they are to engage in more feminine behaviors through the witness of their parents and teachers modeling such behaviors as well as through reinforcement for gender-typical behaviors and punishment for gender-atypical

behaviors (Galambos, 2004). Consequently, adolescent girls may be reproached for using overt forms of aggression, since physical aggression is not viewed as gender-appropriate behavior (Bowie, 2007). Therefore, adolescent girls will likely internalize such gender boundaries in handling conflict and search for other means by which to solve problems with peers, which often leads them towards more covert forms of bullying such as relational and social aggression (Field et al., 2006)

### **Social Information Processing Model**

All aggressive behavior, whether overt or covert, is determined by a complex interaction consisting of social, cognitive, emotional, and biological factors (Goldstein & Tisak, 2009), which is a common theme in theoretical models of bullying. The social information processing (SIP) model of aggression is one such theoretical framework, which has been useful in understanding the specific cognitive processing mechanisms that are related to the development and maintenance of aggressive behavior.

The premise of the SIP model is that the ways in which an individual conceptualizes social behavior and processes social stimuli mediate relations between previous learning histories, emotional arousal, and aggressive behavior (Goldstein & Tisak, 2009). Although SIP models have been less extensively researched on relational aggression, an understanding of social-cognitive factors associated with relational aggression is critical for aggression prevention and intervention efforts. Musher-Eizenman et al. (2004) found that beliefs about the acceptability of responding to provocation in a relationally-aggressive manner predicted relational aggression. In explanation, participants who were more accepting of such responses were likely to have higher levels of relational aggression. Additionally, Werner and Nixon (2005) investigated the connection between beliefs about the acceptability of relational

aggression and relationally-aggressive behavior in two samples of early adolescents, finding that accepted beliefs about relational aggression uniquely predicted relationally-aggressive behavior. Similarly, accepted beliefs about physical aggression predicted physically-aggressive behavior. In a sample of young adults, Bailey and Ostrov (2008) report similar connections between acceptability beliefs about relational aggression and relationally-aggressive behavior.

### **Social Domain Theory**

The social domain theory is another theoretical model that explores the connection between reasoning about social behavior and resultant actions (Goldstein & Tisak, 2009). The theory is based in the belief that cognitions are organized within social knowledge domains that are constructed through individual experiences with the environment. Researchers have demonstrated that children's and adolescents' social reasoning about behavior is influenced by the categorization of the action (i.e., a moral violation, conventional transgression, or a personal act). Children and adolescents evaluate moral, conventional, and personal behaviors on several dimensions, including their evaluations of the acceptability of the behavior and the reasoning behind their beliefs.

Within this black and white framework, physically-injurious behaviors are considered to be morally wrong, while conventional violations are only seen as wrong if there are explicit rules regulating the act. However, personal attributes and behaviors such as style of hair and friendship choice are often evaluated through personal discretion (Goldstein & Tisak, 2009). In regards to the connection to indirect aggression, preschool-age children rated group exclusion based on gender stereotypes as being morally wrong, which echoes through to children and young adolescents. However, when comparing beliefs about indirect aggression and overt

aggression, preschool children believed physical aggression to be more morally wrong than friendship termination (Goldstein & Tisak, 2009).

### **Relevant Literature**

Although the literature connecting scoping literature reviews and relational and social aggression is scant, certain studies have been reviewed to understand scoping reviews as a method to investigate bullying. Brochado and colleagues (2017) conducted a scoping review on studies of cyberbullying prevalence among adolescents. The purpose of the study was to understand how the prevalence of cyberbullying has been estimated across studies. One hundred and fifty-nine studies were included in the scoping review as determined by an identification process and the use of three bibliographic databases to search for relevant papers from January 2004 to August 2014. The researchers found that there was a high variability found in the estimates that were observed and that the way in which the prevalence of cyberbullying is estimated is influenced by methodological research options.

The study conducted by Brochado et al. (2017) is particularly significant in that it portrays a scoping literature review as a methodology to study bullying. Although the study focused on cyberbullying rather than social and relational aggression, similar studies may be accomplished using different types of bullying. The researchers also focused on a specific topic under cyberbullying; how the prevalence of cyberbullying has been estimated across studies, demonstrating that scoping reviews can be used to investigate prevalence rate estimations. In order to conduct the scoping review, Brochado et al. (2017) utilized the methodological framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) that outlines a five-stage approach including identifying the research question; searching for relevant studies; selecting studies; charting data; and collating, summarizing, and reporting the results.

Further linking a relationship between scoping literature reviews and bullying was a study conducted by Quinlan et al. (2014) in which the researchers examined interventions to reduce bullying in health care organizations. The purpose of the scoping review was to synthesize the research results of interventions designed to address bullying among coworkers within healthcare workplaces. The researchers utilized an adapted version of the Arksey and O'Malley (2005) framework as a way to locate and review empirical studies that involve interventions designed to address bullying in health care workplaces. Eight articles were selected from three countries that discussed interventions, including educative programming, bullying champions/advocates, and zero-tolerance policies. From the research, Quinlan et al. (2014) discovered that the most effective reported outcomes were from participatory interventions. The study further demonstrated that scoping reviews within bullying research may be used to synthesize research on bullying interventions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

School violence has been an omnipresent problem within the U.S., resulting in the death of children and teachers across the nation. Many small towns such as Littleton, Colorado, Jonesboro, Arkansas, West Paducah, Kentucky, Peral, Mississippi, Edinboro, Pennsylvania, and Springfield, Colorado have been home to episodes of school violence (Crothers & Levinson, 2004). The U.S. Secret Service interviewed 40 males who were involved in school shootings, finding that many perpetrators were humiliated and harassed by peers repeatedly over time (Simonvich & White Stack, 2000). Therefore, a theme of childhood bullying emerged as a factor in the episodes of school violence. Furthermore, Batsche (1997) found that bullying is a significant and pervasive form of school violence.

Over time, numerous strategies and tools have been introduced in order to reduce aggression within schools. However, it is the covert, indirect forms of aggression that require further research as a way to better identify, prevent, and intervene in such a potentially-debilitating form of aggression. Although much research has been devoted to understanding bullying in general, further study is needed regarding instances of relational and social aggression, as these types of bullying are just as detrimental to children as overt forms of aggression.

Currently, the literature is lacking regarding the use of a scoping literature review as a means to specifically study relational and social aggression. It is essential to examine these two constructs in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the current literature that exists regarding these often-undetected forms of bullying. The research literature may be utilized as a way to identify gaps in the current literature in order to better target future research areas that may further the understanding of identifying and preventing such a harmful and disguised form of bullying.

Therefore, the overall aim of this study is to examine the current research base of social and relational aggression through the use of a scoping literature review. Based upon an identification of the most germane studies on this topic, I will then conduct a follow-up meta-analysis as a way to measure the current research that exists on the topics of relational and social aggression. This study will contribute to the limited research base on the use of a scoping literature review as a way to investigate social and relational aggression and will additionally contribute to the current understanding of the research that exists on relational and social aggression.

## The Current Study

After investigating the existing literature regarding scoping reviews as a means to analyze bullying, I have proposed the current study to address the following research questions.

1. **Research Question:** Are relational and social aggression statically distinguished in the literature?
  - a. **Hypothesis:** Relational and social aggression are statically defined subtypes of indirect aggression across the literature base.
2. **Research Question:** Are there statistically discernable subtypes of relational and social aggression discussed in the literature?
  - a. **Hypothesis:** There are statistically discernable subtypes of relational and social aggression.
3. **Research Question:** Is there a commonly accepted definition of relational and social aggression in the literature?
  - a. **Hypothesis:** There is not a commonly-accepted definition of relational and social aggression among researchers at this time.

## Summary

In this chapter, I present a brief introduction to the topic of interest. Bullying is a common and significant problem throughout childhood and adolescence, and indirect methods of bullying often occur undetected due to their covert nature. Relational and social aggression are both subtypes of indirect aggression but both use different methodologies of inflicting harm through subtle outlets. Evidence-based practice targeted for childhood bullying often emphasize a comprehensive approach including assessment, prevention, and intervention. Assessment



methods such as observations, interviews, sociometric measures, surveys, questionnaires, teacher rating scales, focus groups and self-report measures are common within bullying research.

Another methodology that can be used within bullying research is a scoping literature review, also known as a scoping review. Scoping reviews are used as a way to summarize the research in a specific field. Often, scoping reviews require a narrow topic with defined search parameters (Leva et al., 2010). Relatedly, an example of a research topic that could be analyzed through a scoping review is bullying. In the current study, I will employ a scoping literature review in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research base for relational and social aggression. Therefore, it is my hope that this the paper will contribute to the literature base on scoping literature reviews as a qualitative methodology to study relational and social aggression.

Now that an overview of the problem has been introduced, it is essential to delve deeper into the literature on scoping literature reviews, bullying, types of bullying, and social and relational aggression to fully understand the constructs as separate entities. I will now engage in an in-depth review of the literature, including the most relevant background information, research studies, and theories of explanation in order to provide the need for the proposed investigation in Chapter Two of this dissertation study.

## Chapter II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Bullying**

##### **Brief Overview of Bullying**

Olweus (1978) defines bullying as a non-provoked imbalance of power between perpetrator (the aggressor) and victim (the target of aggression) that tends to be repeated over time. More recently, Espelage and Colbert (2016) defined bullying as any form of unwanted aggressive behavior by another individual or group of individuals who are not siblings or current dating partners, which results in an observed or perceived imbalance of power that is repeated or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may be overt or covert, manifested through such behaviors as physical injury, slander, threats, rumors, social exclusion, and harassment through electronic means, and may result in both short- and long-term negative consequences for both perpetrators and victims.

Throughout the literature, there are two distinctive subtypes of bullying referred to as overt and covert behaviors. Although both forms of bullying are destructive in their own right, the current paper, I will focus on covert forms of bullying; specifically, relational and social aggression. Relational aggression refers to behaviors that harm others through the damaging, or threat of damaging, relationships or compromising of one's feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). In contrast, social aggression refers to as the manipulation of group acceptance through methods such as alienation and the defamation of character, which may manifest through direct, physical forms, such as verbalized rejection, body movement, and facial expressions (Cairns et al., 1989).

## Ways to Analyze Bullying

Given the broad nature of bullying, it is not surprising that there are different methodologies that are employed in order to assess its occurrence. Evidence-based practice targeted for childhood bullying often emphasize a comprehensive approach including assessment, prevention, and intervention. Thus, in order to create a bullying prevention program, it is necessary to establish an effective assessment program. Assessment methods such as observations, interviews, sociometric measures, surveys, questionnaires, teacher rating scales, focus groups, and self-report measures are common within bullying research.

**Observations.** Observations may be delineated into unstructured and structured practices. Crothers and Levinson (2004) described unstructured observations as the seemingly simplest method of assessing bullying. In order to assess for bullying through an unstructured observation, a time and location that is common for the bullying behavior to occur is selected. In order to gather information prior to determining the time and location, informal conversations with students and teachers prove to be helpful. Commonplace settings for bullying include the playground, cafeteria, restroom, buses, locker rooms, and physical education classrooms (Crothers & Levinson, 2004). It is imperative during unstructured observations that the observer remains discreet and follows a variable pattern of observations so as to gather a naturalistic portrayal of the perpetrator.

Similar to unstructured observations, structured observation methods may be utilized as a way to gather information regarding the problematic interactions between bullies and victims. Methods that are categorized as structured observations include frequency and duration recordings or behavior as well as indicating the nature of bullying that is occurring on playgrounds and in classrooms (i.e., direct, indirect, physical, and verbal). Altman (1974)

devised a structured observational method known as focal individual sampling as a way to observe bullying behavior on a school playground. Contrived playgroups are further defined as a structured observation as they are utilized to examine behavioral patterns that contribute to chronic peer victimization in middle childhood. Through contrived playgroups, play, conversations, aggression, and bullying are analyzed through satisfactory interrater reliability probes (Schwartz et al., 1993).

**Interviews.** Interviews are vastly used in bullying research as a way to assess for the impact on student development, the incidence of bullying behavior, and the effectiveness of anti-bullying interventions (Crothers & Levinson, 2004). Interviews are helpful in formulating a comprehensive account of victims' experiences that include details or characteristics of bullying events, perceptions of relationships with perpetrators, and emotional and behavioral coping responses (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001). In order to create an environment in which a student may be less concerned about revealing sensitive information to school administrators, outside personnel may be used instead. Furthermore, students interviewed by outside personnel may be more likely to discuss the motivating factors of the perpetrator and the effectiveness of anti-bullying intervention strategies (Crothers & Levinson, 2004). Glover and colleagues (2000) discussed the unique quality of interviews in that students are given the opportunity to address issues regarding bullying that may not be covered by formal assessment measures.

**Sociometric procedures.** Another effective way to analyze bullying behavior is through sociometric procedures, which include peer nominations, questionnaires, and surveys. Sociometric procedures and peer assessment methods are often appropriate when planning class-wide interventions (Crothers & Levinson, 2004).

**Peer nominations.** Examining children's social status is often used in gathering data on the participants of peer victimization. One way in which to examine social status is through peer nominations. One study conducted by Dodge et al. (1990) used "liking" and "disliking" nominations that were subsequently summed and standardized within each grade level to find the way in which peers viewed one another in regards to social status. The use of pictures as a nomination tool has also been researched, such as having students identify the three most liked students and the three least liked students when it comes to playing together, inviting other children to a birthday party, and sitting next to one another on the bus (Boivin & Hymel, 1997).

**Questionnaires and surveys.** Olweus (1993) argued that the best way to examine the prevalence of bullying behavior is through the use of student surveys and questionnaires. Questionnaires and surveys are useful in that they enable the researcher to gather of large amount of data in an abbreviated amount of time. However, questionnaires and surveys often cost more than other methodologies and require more manpower than is needed for other measurement approaches (Crothers & Levinson, 2004).

**Teacher ratings.** Teacher ratings are often helpful in identifying both bullies and victims within the classroom. Teacher ratings may be designed in a way that asks educators to identify students who are bullies or victims when given a list of students' names. Teacher ratings may also involve educators matching children to certain characteristics that are associated with perpetrators and victims. Teacher ratings may be used when data regarding bullying need to be gathered with haste and ease as educators quickly are able assess large numbers of students. Additionally, the cost of teacher surveys is minimal and can be easily compared to other teacher reports. However, due to differing opinions with the accuracy of teacher in bully identification, it

is recommended that teacher ratings be used with sociometric procedures, interviews, or observations (Crothers & Levinson, 2004).

**Self-report.** Self-report measures are utilized by some researchers as a way to assess bullying through the actual participant of bully-victim conflicts. The strengths of self-report measures include time, manpower, and cost-efficiency; however, a student may report victimization that is not congruent with reports from teachers and peers. Additionally, self-report measures yield information that is typically an underestimate of bullying behavior due to social desirability and an underreporting of aggressive acts (Crothers & Levinson, 2004).

## **General Research on Bullying**

### **Definition of Bullying**

**How we came to a definition.** In order to understand how a definition of bullying came to be, it is necessary to understand the context of school violence. School violence has been an omnipresent worry within the U.S., resulting in the death of children and teachers across the nation. Many small towns, such as Littleton, Colorado, Jonesboro, Arkansas, West Paducah, Kentucky, Pearl, Mississippi, Edinboro, Pennsylvania, and Springfield, Colorado have been home to victims of school violence (Crothers & Levinson, 2004). The U.S. Secret Service interviewed 40 males who were involved in school shootings, finding that many perpetrators were humiliated and harassed by peers repeatedly over time (Simonvich & White Stack, 2000). Therefore, a theme of childhood bullying emerged as a factor to predict episodes of school violence.

Olweus (1993), as the leading expert in peer victimization, offered the first definition of bullying, stating that it is a repeated exposure to negative actions by one or more students over time (Olweus, 1993). Olweus (1993) defined negative actions as a purposeful attempt to injure or

inflict discomfort on another through means such as words, physical contact, gestures, or group exclusion. Although the definition of bullying excludes occasional negative actions that are not perceived as being serious or are directed toward different targets, a single instance of serious victimization may be perceived as bullying (Olweus, 1993).

### **Types of Bullying**

Brank and colleagues (2012) assert that there are four general domains of bullying behavior consisting of physical, verbal, relational, and cyber. Physical bullying was described as being characterized by pushing, hitting, and kicking. Verbal bullying refers to name-calling and teasing. Furthermore, Brank et al. (2012) defined relational bullying as relating to social areas such as spreading rumors and exclusion. Similar to definitions posited by Yang and Salmivalli (2013), cyberbullying was defined as the use of technology against others through means such as texting and emailing (Brank et al., 2012).

The literature on bullying is clear in that it comes in different forms. The first is direct aggression, which includes physical and verbal bullying. The second is indirect aggression, which includes behaviors such as spreading rumors, manipulating, or excluding others. There is another form of bullying that appears within the literature, which is referred to as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying incorporates the use of electronic means to taunt, insult, threaten, harass, and intimidate a peer (Yang & Salmivalli, 2013).

**Direct bullying.** Olweus (1993) was the first to distinguish between direct and indirect bullying, defining direct bullying as undefended attacks on a victim. Most overt forms of bullying include physical and verbal peer victimization. Direct physical aggression is purposeful and aims to injure or make someone uncomfortable through physical contact such as hitting, pushing, or hair pulling (Olweus, 1993). Direct aggression involves confrontation between the

aggressor and victim, in which the goal is to harm another delivered through face-to-face interaction. Direct verbal aggression consists of negative actions such as name-calling, shouting, abusing, and accusing (Björkqvist et al., 1992).

**Cyberbullying.** Cyberbullying is a purposeful and repeated infliction of harm through the use of technology (e.g., computers, cellphones, electronic devices; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). The most defining aspects of cyberbullying are that it is willful (i.e., the behavior is intentional), repeated (not an isolated event), harmful (the action is perceived as injurious by the victim), and occurs through electronic means. Cyberbullying can include sending harassing or threatening messages via text or email. Furthermore, cyberbullying involves posting derogatory comments about an individual on a website or social networking site. The occurrence of cyberbullying may further include physically threatening or intimidating someone in a variety of online settings. Similar to other forms of bullying, cyberbullying can include more minor forms of behavior such as being ignored, disrespected, picked on, or otherwise hassled. The spreading of rumors about someone, stalking, or physically threatening another person through electronic communications tend to be considered more debasing forms of cyberbullying. Variables such as the harmful nature of the act and the seriousness of the incident within the context of the occurrence as well as the surrounding circumstances impact victim outcomes (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

**Sexual harassment.** The term, sexual harassment, refers to any form of unwanted conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment involves a non-provoked imbalance of power between perpetrator (the aggressor) and victim (the target of aggression) that tends to be repeated over time; therefore, sexual harassment is considered to be a type of bullying. Similar to other forms of bullying, sexual harassment may occur through non-verbal, verbal, physical, or cyber means. Non-verbal sexual harassment may include sexually-suggestive gestures or a display of



sexual material. Verbal sexual harassment occurs through sexually-suggestive comments or jokes. Physical sexual harassment includes touching, hugging, kissing, and rape. Lastly, sexual harassment through cyber means occurs through offensive, sexually-explicit emails or text messages and inappropriate advances via electronic devices and social networking sites (Hoel & Vartia, 2018).

**Indirect bullying.** Prior to the 1980s, most research on aggression focused on overt behaviors. However, there is a subtler form of aggression that is just as damaging, known as indirect aggression. Throughout the literature on indirect aggression, there are several different definitions that have been published. Buss (1961) was the first person to use the term indirect aggression, defining it as either verbal (spreading rumors) or physical (destruction of property). Feshback (1969) expanded on the original definition, stating that indirect aggression occurs through social exclusion, ignoring, and rejection. Such terms are still used in today's definition of indirect aggression.

For example, Björkqvist and colleagues (1991) defined indirect aggression as a way in which a perpetrator inflicts pain in such a way that makes it seem as though there was no intent to harm. Specifically, the authors explained that behaviors such as spreading rumors and purposefully excluding others encompasses their definition of indirect aggression, which is comparable to that of Feshback's (1969). Björkqvist et al. (1992) explained indirect aggression in terms of the indirect-direct dichotomy, which distinguishes between harm that is delivered in face-to-face situations and harm that is delivered obliquely. Furthermore, the idea that an aggressor may remain anonymous, which results in the avoidance of a possible counterattack from the victim, was introduced into this expanded definition of indirect aggression.

**Relational aggression.** The term, indirect aggression, is an overarching one, and it is often confused with the term, relational aggression. However, Crick and Grotpeter (1995) delineated indirect aggression into a subtype, which they defined as relational aggression. This term was defined as including behaviors that harm others through the damaging, or threat of damaging, relationships or compromising of one's feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion. One important component of relational aggression is that it can be overt. In explanation, the intent to harm through relational aggression may be directly inflicted upon victims, rather than presented in an anonymous manner. For example, the perpetrator may directly state his or her intent of exclusion to the victim or actively avoid conversation with the victim while being in the presence of each other. Therefore, the victim will know who the aggressor is and know the aggressor's intentions, nulling the subtle nature of indirect aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

***Comparing indirect and relational aggression.*** Despite the distinction between indirect aggression and relational aggression, there can be overlap between the two. For example, gossiping, spreading rumors, and divulging personal information about another person are intentional ways to harm relationships and may be orchestrated in a circuitous manner. Given the similarities between the two forms of aggression, Björkqvist et al. (2001) argued that relational aggression is simply indirect aggression with a new name. However, the literature supports the distinction between the two, in which there have been shown to be aggressive acts that are solely relational in nature (Crick et al., 1999; French et al., 2002). For instance, an aggressive act threatening a dyadic relationship (e.g., ignoring a friend) is strictly an attack upon a relationship, and thus supports the distinction. The fact that relational aggression is manifested more

specifically within a dyadic relationship is a defining feature that differentiates it from indirect aggression, as well (Crothers et al., 2008).

Crick and Grotpeter (1995) termed the point of distinction between indirect and relational aggression as the two concepts' core defining features. Specifically, relational aggression centers upon the importance of relationships and their manipulations. In explanation, the aim of relational aggression is to harm or manipulate relationships, which may manifest through the spreading of rumors or other more covert means in order to harm a friendship. In contrast, indirect aggression is broader in nature and encompasses social and relational aspects of aggression in group contexts (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Archer and Coyne (2005) further emphasized the difference between relational and indirect aggression by highlighting the anonymity of the aggressor. A hallmark feature of indirect aggression is that the victim is unaware of the aggressor's identity; however, that is not always the case in relational aggression.

**Social aggression.** Cairns and colleagues (1989) delineated indirect aggression, forming social aggression as a subtype. Initially, social aggression was defined as the manipulation of group acceptance through methods such as alienation and the defamation of character. Galen and Underwood (1997) added to the definition of social aggression by including self-esteem and social status targets. Social aggression may also manifest through direct, physical forms, such as verbalized rejection, body movement, and facial expressions. Owens et al. (2000) argued that the definition of social aggression should be treated as its own entity as it encompasses relational and indirect aggression components while adding nonverbal aggression (e.g., eye rolling, dirty looks). Therefore, researchers emphasize the fact that social aggression incorporates more gestural forms of communication than its counterparts.

The term, social aggression, includes overt and covert forms of aggression while simultaneously incorporating nonverbal behaviors, which makes it a unique form of aggression. The aim of social aggression is to harm an individual's social standing within a group while incorporating aspects of relational and indirect aggression. Victims of social aggression tend to suffer from social isolation, public confrontation, or have their relationships with others intentionally sabotaged (Field et al., 2006). Furthermore, social aggression tends to occur between acquaintances, which is in contrast to relational aggression where close friendships or bonds are the target.

### **Actors in Bullying**

Within the bullying dyad, researchers describe two principal roles: bullies and victims. Victims are generally described as those who are less likely to retaliate when confronted with abusive behaviors from their peers (Arseneault, 2017). Victims are part of a heterogeneous and vulnerable group who often experience adversity, adjustment difficulties, and mental health problems at some point in the lives, exclusive of being bullied. Therefore, a symbiotic relationship exists between the act of being bullied and the poor after-effects among victims due to their predisposition for adverse outcomes (Arseneault, 2017). Many bullied youths, especially those who experience mental health problems, have felt rejected at home or were maltreated by an adult, had parents with emotional problems, or have a family history significant for attempted or completed suicide (Arseneault, 2017).

**Perpetrators.** Individuals who demonstrate instrumental, aggressive behavior toward others that results in an imbalance of power between peers are known as perpetrators. Often, a lack of parental involvement can result in an increase in bullying behavior exhibited by perpetrators. Perpetrators may report poor communication with parents, low levels of trust in

parents, conflict with parents, and low parental monitoring as well as low emotional warmth from caregivers. Furthermore, perpetrators often come from homes with a variety of parental risk factors such as single parenthood, becoming a parent at a young age, low educational level, parental unemployment, and low socioeconomic status (Geckler, 2016). Shetgiri and colleagues (2012) have also noted that many perpetrators of bullying behavior have mothers who identified as having poorer mental health and live in unsafe neighborhoods or low-income housing.

**Victims.** Duncan (2011) found that male victims often come from unique home environments. Specifically, victims tend to have overprotective, highly responsive, and overly controlling mothers. Additionally, their fathers are often critical, distant, and uninvolved (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). On the other hand, female victims occasionally experience withdrawal of love from mothers as they reject their daughters as a form of punishment for misbehavior. Furthermore, female victims tend to have mothers they describe as being abusive and hostile. Female victims also display poor communication skills, low levels of affection, and higher levels of dysfunction in the home (i.e., lack of communication among family members and low levels of empathy) than perpetrators (Geckler, 2016). Although victims of bullying are typically not considered to represent a behavioral problem, there are certain behavioral characteristics that are associated with different types of victims. Specifically, two victim personas have been described in the literature: passive victims and provocative victims (Olweus, 1978).

**Passive victims.** Passive victims are often described as displaying more anxious, cautious, sensitive, or insecure types of behavior when confronted by a perpetrator (Olweus, 1978). Passive victims are also referred to as non-aggressive victims throughout the literature because of their lack of externalizing behaviors as a result of bullying. Passive victims also tend to be perceived as withdrawn, depressed, anxious, and avoidant of conflict (Fox & Boulton, 2005).

***Provocative victims.*** Provocative victims are characterized by both anxious and aggressive behaviors in response to being bullied. Provocative victims may also intentionally provoke aggression by bullies as well as exhibit externalized behaviors that aggravate peers (Olweus, 1978), which is why they are also referred to as aggressive victims throughout the literature. Externalized behaviors exhibited by aggressive victims often include argumentativeness, putting blame on others, disruptiveness, lying, and stealing (Fox & Boulton, 2005).

### **Protective Factors for the Risk of Bullying**

Given the detrimental effects of bullying, it is important to understand the factors that protect against the negative consequences of being bullied. For example, there is research that supports the importance that the role of social support, stable home lives, and strong academic performance play in protecting individuals from the impact of bullying (Ttofi et al., 2014). Social support has been shown to be of particular importance when it comes to buffering victimization. Although there are some known protective factors warding off the negative effects of bullying, there is still much more research to be done.

### **Effects of Bullying**

The identification and prevention of bullying is vital to the improvement of mental health in victims of peer aggression. Holt et al. (2015) demonstrated that there is an increase in the prevalence of depression and suicide ideation among both bullies and victims. Both perpetrators and victims have been recognized as developing health problems given the range of adjustment problems that frequently ensue, including poor mental health and violent behavior (Juvonen et al., 2003). Despite such risks of bullying, 15-20% of elementary school students and 20-28% of secondary school students reported being bullied within a six-month to one-year period (Carlyle

& Steinman, 2007). Furthermore, 20% to 30% of students are involved in bullying as a perpetrator and/or victim (Carlyle & Steinman, 2007). Specifically, a nationally-representative study of 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> graders demonstrated that 13% of students were identified as bullies, 11% as victims, and 6% as bully-victims (Carlyle & Steinman, 2007).

Adverse effects as a result of being bullied have also translated to academic development and educational outcome problems. For instance, the increased levels of depression, social anxiety, and low self-esteem that perpetrators and victims experience can experience negatively affect academic achievement as evidenced through self-reported academic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal challenges (Cook et al., 2010). Additionally, Juvonen and colleagues (2010) found through a longitudinal study that grade point averages and teacher-rated academic engagement were predicted by self-perceptions of victimization and peer nominations of victim reputation. Mulvey et al. (2018) further emphasized the deleterious effects of bullying, including factors such as school truancy and anxiety.

**Perpetrators.** Shetgiri et al. (2012) found that 25% of perpetrators report having emotional, developmental, or behavior problems, with depression being a common theme among them. Furthermore, perpetrators often report negative feelings toward self and negative self-cognitions as well as being two point one times more likely than peers not involved in bullying to attempt suicide. Farrington and Baldry (2010) found that perpetrators also tend to demonstrate impulsivity and high levels of hyperactivity with a lower IQ and poor social problem-solving skills in comparison to those not involved in bully/victim conflicts.

Within the school environment, perpetrators often have poor peer relationships, low levels of social wellbeing, and high levels of peer conflict. Provided that perpetrators have social skills deficits and engage in bullying behaviors, they have difficulty interacting in a healthy

manner and experience isolation and marginalization (Geckler, 2016), as well as engaging in deviant behavior (Juvonen et al., 2003). In addition to negative social interactions, perpetrators experience academic difficulties, having below average grades and perceived dissatisfaction with their schools (Spriggs et al., 2007). Not surprisingly, then, bullies often hold negative attitudes toward school and may be more inclined to engage in drug use (Juvonen et al., 2003).

**Victims.** In a longitudinal study conducted by Ttofi and colleagues (2011), researchers reported that victims of bullying suffer from deficits in their social and emotional capabilities in addition to physical health abnormalities. Victims who observe that the perpetrator has power over them reported higher levels of depression and suicidal ideation than those who did not perceive a power differential (Ybarra et al., 2014). It is evident within the research that bullies, victims, and bully-victims all share psychosocial adjustment difficulties; however, each comes with a unique manifestation (Juvonen et al., 2003). While victims report feelings of insecurity and loneliness, bully-victims seem to fare worse, displaying the most severe psychosocial adjustment difficulties as any of those involved in bully/victim conflicts (Juvonen et al., 2003).

Young victims may manifest signs of psychological distress through being tearful or irritable as well as loss of motivation and sleep problems. Additionally, victims are often unhappy at school, have difficulties with school adjustment, and report poor school perceptions. Furthermore, victims of bullying can manifest symptoms synonymous with psychopathology. In explanation, studies have found that victims demonstrate an increased risk for self-harm and suicidal ideation (Arseneault, 2017). The extent to which being a victim contributes to the development of mental health problems is vital in prevention of as well as identification of appropriate interventions for bullying.



Within the school environment, victims often experience marginalization and isolation from their peers as the targets of perpetrators. For many students, school is considered to be a safe environment; however, victims perceive that school is dangerous due to the bullying behavior they face from peers. Therefore, victims tend to disengage from school and exhibit poor school adjustment, which can negatively impact school performance. Victims have lower achievement and lower grade point averages than same-age peers. Unfortunately, victims will often internalize their feelings of isolation and the bullying behavior, which results in the development of emotional and behavioral difficulties (Geckler, 2016).

In addition to emotional and behavioral difficulties, victims may also experience somatic symptoms such as headaches, backaches, stomachaches, sleeping problems, low appetite, and bed-wetting (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009). Targets of bullying often have an increase in heart rate and skin conductance (i.e., galvanic skin response, suggesting that the skin will momentarily become a better conductor of electricity) as well as emotional difficulties synonymous with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Victims who further report feelings of rejection at home indicated higher rates of suicidal ideation, depression, and anxiety. Similarly, long-term depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem are potential long-term risks for victims (Geckler, 2016).

Victims of bullying, including victim characteristics and resultant effects, have frequented the literature. The way in which these characteristics and effects have been researched involve in-depth studies utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research designs. These specific types of designs as well as ways in which bullying has been researched will be discussed in the following section of this paper.

## **Investigating a Research Topic**

Historically, there are many different methodologies that have been used in order to investigate a research topic. Specifically, within the field of social and behavioral sciences, there have been methodological waves. Johnson and colleagues (2005) labeled the waves as the traditional science period, the crisis period, and the current synthesis period. The traditional science period was characterized by the use of the scientific method and prevailed through the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which was dominated by quantitative research methods. The second methodological wave was characterized by the critiquing of the scientific method and its assumptions for the study of social and psychological phenomena. Qualitative research emerged as a way to provide a more appropriate paradigm for studying human subjectivity. Therefore, by the end of the second methodological wave, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were being employed, with quantitative research remaining dominant (Powell et al., 2008).

Throughout the third methodological wave, researchers from different fields within the social and behavioral sciences began combining the use of the quantitative and qualitative approaches. Therefore, the third wave became commonly known as mixed methods research. However, research continues to be dominated by the use of quantitative and qualitative methodology within the field of psychology. Qualitative research aims to describe an entity, while quantitative research is more concerned with determining the amount of the entity. In explanation, qualitative research is concerned with providing an encompassing and descriptive explanation of a phenomenon that is under investigation. In contrast, quantitative research is more focused on counting occurrences, volumes, or the size of associations that exists between entities (Johnson et al., 2005).

The distinct difference that exists between qualitative and quantitative approaches is how the data are analyzed. In explanation, quantitative research requires a numerical value to be assigned to the phenomenon that is being investigated. However, qualitative data involves the collection of data through naturalistic verbal reports, where the analysis is contextual rather than numerical. Therefore, the interpretation is conveyed through narratives such as detailed reports of participants' perceptions. The basis for qualitative research lies in the theoretical framework that language is a fundamental property of human communication, interpretation, and understanding (Johnson et al., 2005).

In order to determine whether a qualitative or quantitative framework should be employed, it is important to consider the research question, orientation, and execution. However, overlap can be found between the two. Specifically, researchers of a quantitative study may seek to provide a detailed explanation of statistical accounts, while a qualitative study may aim to produce causal relationships. It has been argued by Hayes (1997) that the analytic process employed in qualitative research has characteristics seen in quantitative research. In explanation, qualitative researchers make judgements through implicit and explicit means as a way to convey the strength, category, or property that is being reported. Furthermore, individuals are compared with one another through a variety of dimensions. Similarly, quantitative research builds on the principles of qualitative research, such that quantitative research involves interpretation from the researcher (Johnson et al., 2005).

Within psychological research, qualitative studies are typically employed for exploring, describing, and interpreting personal and social experiences of participants. It is common within qualitative research for the focus to be on understanding a small number of participants' perceptions and understandings of the work rather than testing a hypothesis on a large sample,

which is common for quantitative research. Furthermore, some qualitative researchers aim to gain a deeper understanding of the way in which meanings are formed.

It is important to consider the heterogeneous nature of qualitative research in that there are a variety of approaches that can be utilized when deciding upon a methodology. For example, a qualitative researcher may employ a methodological framework that aims to discover a human situation through variables that view the individual as part of a natural system of causes and effects. Conversely, a qualitative researcher may conceptualize participants' perceptions as a result of their social interpretations that aid in the formation of their perceptions. Some qualitative researchers further view individuals as results of their meanings, which is often used within phenomenological research (Johnson et al., 2005).

One such method that utilizes principles of qualitative research is a scoping literature review. As one aim of qualitative research is to explore research in a given field, which aligns with the purpose of conducting a scoping literature review, scoping literature reviews also focus on a narrative interpretation of data, such as detailed reports of articles, rather than on numerical data seen in quantitative research.

### **Scoping Review**

Grant and Booth (2009) identified 14 different ways in which to conduct a literature review. One such methodology is known as a scoping literature review. A scoping literature review is a process of summarizing research in a certain field, which highlights the breadth of evidence that currently exists within its bounds (Levac et al., 2010). Essentially, it is a form of knowledge synthesis aimed at addressing an exploratory research question. Scoping reviews are a way to map key concepts, types of evidence, and gaps in research as related to a defined field

through systematically searching, selecting, and synthesizing knowledge that is already in existence. Therefore, scoping reviews are often described as being used for reconnaissance.

It is important to note the distinction between a scoping literature review and a systematic review. Specifically, scoping reviews typically do not assess the quality of included studies. In order to differentiate between a literature review and a scoping review, the question of whether there is analytical reinterpretation is important to consider. Scoping reviews often involve some form of analytical aspect that is lacking in literature reviews.

Given the broad nature of scoping reviews, there is not one universal definition. Rather, different authors provide unique purposes of scoping reviews throughout the research. For example, Arksey and O'Malley (2005) define a scoping review as an aim to map the key concepts that underlie a research area as well as the main sources and types of evidence. They further describe the purpose of a scoping review as to examine the extent, range, and nature of research. Anderson et al. (2008) stated that scoping studies are concerned with identifying the current state of understanding within a particular domain of study, with the purpose being to identify areas of research that are lacking.

Taken together, it can be said that scoping reviews are a way to examine the extent, range, and nature of current research, determine the value of conducting a full systematic review, summarize and disseminate research findings, or identify gaps in the existing literature (Levac et al., 2010). Results from scoping reviews can be utilized to refine research questions and clarify complex concepts. Furthermore, scoping reviews can be used as a way to make recommendations for future research and provides a map of the current body of literature within a specific field. Scoping reviews are ideal in disciplines with emerging evidence because of the lack of randomized controlled trials necessary for systematic reviews.

The first framework for scoping reviews was published in the year 2005. Specifically, Arksey and O'Malley (2005) outlined the six steps within a methodological framework for conducting a scoping review. The first step is to identify the research question, which provides the direction for the subsequent stages. It is important for the research question to be clearly defined and broad in nature. Levac et al. (2010) suggest considering the rationale for the scoping review as a way to help clarify the purpose of the study. The second stage is to identify the relevant studies to use within the scoping review. During this stage, search terms are identified and the studies to be utilized are selected. Sources can range from electronic databases to organizations and conferences. It is important to consider the time allotted, budget, and personnel resources available. It may be beneficial to assemble a team of members who have expertise in the content and methodologies commonly used within the field to aid in identifying relevant studies (Levac et al., 2010).

The third stage of conducting a scoping review is study selection. The process of selecting studies involves the use of *post hoc* analyses using specified inclusion and exclusion criteria. The criteria are selected based on the research questions, which is why it is important to have clearly defined the parameters. Levac et al. (2010) suggest meeting with the selected team to discuss decisions regarding study inclusion and exclusion. Furthermore, at least two reviewers should be selected to review the abstracts of studies that are to be included. The reviewers should meet at the beginning, middle, and during the final stages of the abstract review process to discuss challenges related to the study selection process. The current search strategy may be altered if needed. Additionally, there should be two researchers who review the full articles that have been chosen for selection. A third reviewer may be brought in to rectify any disputes that occur between study inclusion discrepancies.

Once the studies have been selected, charting the data can begin. Data-charting is defined as a way to extract data from the studies using a descriptive analytical method. Specifically, a qualitative content analysis approach may be utilized. Essentially, the goal is to gather the current results of each study that had previously been selected (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The research team should be consulted and collectively develop the data-charting strategy that is to be utilized. It should be determined as to which variables will be extracted from each study in order to answer the research questions. Levac et al. (2010) suggest that two authors work independently on the first five to ten studies extracting data using the data-charting method that was selected to determine whether the process is consistent with the purpose of the scoping review.

The data should then be collated, summarized, and reported. Typically, a thematic construction is utilized as a way to provide an overview of the breadth of the literature. A chart or table is used to depict the nature of studies followed by the thematic analysis. Clarity and consistency are important aspects of the summarizing stage. Levac et al. (2010) suggest breaking the stage into three independent steps. First, is the analysis, which includes a descriptive numerical summary analysis and a qualitative thematic analysis. Second, the results should be reported in a way that relates back to the overall purpose or research questions. Lastly, the implications for future research as well as practice and policy should be discussed.

After the data are summarized, the last and final stage of consultation can begin. Through consultation, additional references can be suggested from those familiar with the field and literature. Furthermore, insight can be provided by experts that may go beyond what is found within the literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Prior to consultation, a clear purpose should be

established. Preliminary findings may be used as a way to inform the consultant with an emphasis on incorporating knowledge transfer.

Scoping studies have been used across many different academic disciplines, including agricultural research, environmental studies, and process engineering. However, they have been most useful in disciplines related to public services such as education, housing, and health care (Anderson et al., 2008). Pham et al. (2015) investigated the emerging popularity of scoping reviews and which disciplines more frequently employ such a methodology. The researchers found that 344 scoping reviews were published from 1999 to October 2012, 68.9% of which were published after 2009. From those 344 scoping reviews, 74.1% addressed a health topic. Pham et al. (2015) further found that scoping review completion time ranges from two weeks to 20 months, in which 51% of researchers used a published methodological framework.

Scoping reviews have been used across many different fields, in which researchers have examined specific areas of inquiry within disciplines. For instance, it was noted that the use of scoping reviews in software engineering has increased, with 92.7% of them being published after 2010. However, the topics within software engineering that were analyzed varied greatly. In explanation, the topics ranged from multiplayer online role-playing games to factors that influence antibiotic prophylaxis administration. Other scoping review topics covered by Pham et al. (2015) include the diagnosis, treatment, and management of obesity in older adults and investigating the published evidence of an association between hospital volume and operative mortality for surgical repair of un-ruptured and ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysms (Pham et al., 2015).

Pham et al. (2015) identified the methodological characteristics of the included scoping reviews within their research. It was found that 50.6% of the included reviews used one or more



methodological frameworks. However, the Arksey and O'Malley (2005) framework was the most frequently used, being reported in 62.6% of studies that reported the use of a framework. Other popular frameworks utilized were by Kitchenham and Charters (2007) and Peterson et al. (2008). Throughout the scoping reviews, it was evident that the use of a framework increased over time, from 31.6% of reviews published in 2000-2004 to 55.3% of reviews published from 2010 onward.

Pham et al. (2015) used the framework developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), who emphasized the importance of inclusion and exclusion criteria to screen for studies that were relevant to the research question. Pham et al. (2015) found that 79.7% of the selected studies utilized efficient inclusion and exclusion criteria; however, the data characterization and charting of the individual studies were lacking in comparison. Specifically, 23.8% of reviews did not report any detail as to how the included studies were characterized. Furthermore, 77.7% of reviews did not address the methodological quality of the included articles (Pham et al., 2015).

Through an analysis of existing scoping reviews, it was found that the level of detail reported about the search strategy to locate articles was varied across studies. Again, it was demonstrated that the amount of detail increased over time, with 78.06% of reviews after 2009 reporting a complete list of search terms and only 57.89% similarly situated between the years 2000 and 2004. Pham et al. (2015) considered search terms, search periods, search limits, search date, updated search, and data sources when analyzing included articles. Overall, it was evident that the various frameworks were able to be followed with success, which led to an accumulation of research across specific domains.

## **Quantitative and Qualitative Methodology for Investigating Bullying**

Bullying has been studied by a number of researchers in the past three decades since Dan Olweus (1977) published his first study on bullying (Meyer, 2007). However, much is still unknown about this phenomenon. In a review of the more recent empirical literature on the topic of childhood bullying, Griffin and Gross (2004) noted that a comprehensive understanding of childhood bullying behavior has yet to be achieved, which is attributed, in part, to the types of methods that have been utilized. Many researchers on bullying have conventionally employed quantitative methodology to generate statistical findings with large samples (e.g., Bosworth et al., 1999; Espelage et al., 2000; Espelage et al., 2003; Nansel et al., 2001; Orpinas et al., 2003; Rodkin et al., 2006). Furthermore, a review of quantitative research on bullying was conducted by Powell et al. (2008). The researchers identified 75 empirical studies between the years of 2000 and 2004, which demonstrated that only seven of the 75 studies involved a qualitative approach, and 12 were mixed methods studies.

Much research on measuring bullying separates it into indirect and direct aggression, making the research more targeted for a comprehensive understanding that exceeds a broad instrument. For the purposes of this paper, the studies regarding indirect, relational, and social aggression as well as the methodologies employed to conduct such studies will be discussed.

A variety of methods have been used to measure indirect aggression. In explanation, observations have been used from preschool to school ages, up to 10 to 11 years, typically involving recording the frequency of operationally-defined acts of aggression. The original studies of indirect aggression conducted by Feshbach (1969) measured social exclusion and rejection when a new individual was introduced to an established playgroup. More recently,

studies have used technological aids, such as a wireless microphone and hidden camera, to observe children in school playgrounds and at other break times (Tapper & Boulton, 2002).

The first systematic research on a range of categories of indirect aggression occurred in Finland. The researchers utilized peer estimations (i.e., ratings; Lagerspetz et al., 1988). The Direct and Indirect Aggression Scale (DIAS; Björkqvist et al., 1992) involves participants' rating on a Likert scale how much each person in the focal group (i.e., the class) uses specific items of aggressive behavior when angry. Participants rated highly on certain aggressive behaviors by their peers were considered to be aggressive. According to Björkqvist et al., 1992, peers were the experts regarding who was aggressive and who was not. In explanation, teachers and parents are often not aware of who is indirectly aggressive as this behavior, by definition, is covert in nature. Self-report measures were not viewed as valid for assessing indirect aggression in children as children seek to keep this hidden from adults.

Studies of relational aggression typically involve peer nominations, in which participants are required to nominate three peers who behaved in certain aggressive ways (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). This approach is different from the Finnish method, in which peers rate individuals from the whole class. According to Björkqvist (2001), the peer rating or estimation technique is much more sensitive and informative. Multiple ratings of each child provide an accurate picture of who is actually aggressive. With peer nominations, only blatantly aggressive children may come easily to mind. Thus, quieter, and maybe more manipulative, aggressors are not rated as such.

***Young Adult Social Behavior Scale (YASB)***. One quantitative instrument that has been developed to distinguish relational and social aggression from prosocial friendship behaviors is the Young Adult Social Behavior Scale (YASB; Crothers et al., 2009). The YASB was distributed to a sample of college students, resulting in the self-report measure indicating that

socially-aggressive behaviors are, in fact, distinct from direct relationally-aggressive behaviors (Crothers et al., 2009). The researchers employed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to identify the factor structure of the YASB (Crothers et al., 2009). According to the CFA, the most parsimonious model was comprised of three factors that distinguished between relational aggression, social aggression, and interpersonal maturity (Crothers et al., 2009). The findings demonstrated how relational and social aggression are different constructs, and the behaviors associated with these types of aggression can be delineated into two separate categories (Crothers et al., 2009).

***Bullying-behaviour scale (BBS).*** The BBS was developed by Austin and Joseph (1996) in order to assess direct bully/victim problems at school. The BBC was embedded into the Harter's Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC; Harter, 1985). The BBC consists of six forced-choice items, representing negative verbal actions. One weakness of the BBC is that it does not measure relational victimization. Internal consistency has been found to be satisfactory, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of .82. Validity tests demonstrated that boys scored higher than girls.

**Measurement of indirect aggression (qualitative).** While there is a focus on quantitative research, qualitative research methodologies have also been utilized within the bullying framework literature. Qualitative research on school bullying has focused upon elaborating and explicating the experiences of bullies, victims, and bystanders as well as relevant adults (e.g., parents, teachers, and school counselors). Research shows that qualitative data, such as emic and iterative approaches, may be more effective than surveys. Specifically, qualitative research is useful when working with populations who have historically been marginalized or underrepresented within research samples. In explanation, the participants' unique experiences as

a disadvantaged minority group are highlighted through in-depth interviews, rather than having the focus on the researcher (Patton et al., 2015). Furthermore, qualitative approaches view participants as the experts, which eliminates the problem of power relations. Power relations refer to the unequal distribution of power between the researcher and participant, which is often observed in quantitative research on bullying.

Another benefit of qualitative research is that it is context specific. Therefore, the conditions that influence the participants' narratives are able to be identified. In explanation, the complex relations between what participants do and how and where they live can be more easily captured through qualitative means. Within bullying research, context-specific data is important in understanding how such forces (e.g., home, neighborhood, and school) influence and why bullying occurs. With a greater depiction of how contextual factors interact with and influence bullying, a more comprehensive understanding of what triggers bullying can be identified (Patton et al., 2015). Furthermore, through qualitative research, new hypotheses and research directions can be identified as well as directions of phenomena that can guide further research.

The two most common qualitative methodologies used are individual interviews and focus group interviews, which have utilized an emic approach (Patton et al., 2015). In explanation, an emic approach refers to the research participants' perspectives and experiences as a way to understand the constructions of an individual, group, or community in relation to the specific phenomenon (i.e., bullying).

***Emic approaches.*** Through an emic approach, the perspective is context driven and serves as a way to uncover unexpected findings. Emic approaches as a qualitative method focuses on the participant as the expert on the topic of concern. Data are often collected through engaging in conversation and conducting one-on-one interviews. Commonly, face-to-face

interactions are suggested between the researcher and the participant. Therefore, there is an opportunity for the exploration of individual experiences and perceptions is greater depth.

***Iterative approaches.*** Iterative approaches are also common qualitative methodologies that are utilized in bullying research. An iterative approach refers to a system of repetitive and recursive processes that involve sequential tasks carried out in the same way with several executions. Focus groups are identified in an iterative approach as the researcher has the opportunity to examine the same phenomena across several different demographic groups through repeatedly asking the same questions (Patton et al., 2015).

***Scoping literature review.*** Another qualitative methodology that can be used within bullying research is a scoping literature review, also known as a scoping review, which will be discussed in the next section of this paper. Although there are many benefits of qualitative research on school bullying, it is important to consider the limitations of selecting it as a methodology. One such limitation is the lack of generalizability that comes from the results of a qualitative study. Additionally, focus groups may not be appropriate when it comes to in-depth studies involving sensitive and controversial issues concerning children. In explanation, children who have been a victim or perpetrator of bullying may be uncomfortable sharing their experiences within a group setting (Patton et al., 2015).

### **Scoping Review to Investigate Bullying**

Although the literature connecting scoping literature reviews and relational and social aggression is sparse, certain studies have been reviewed to understand scoping reviews as a method to investigate bullying. Brochado and colleagues (2017) conducted a scoping review on studies of cyberbullying prevalence among adolescents. The purpose of the study was to understand how the prevalence of cyberbullying has been estimated across studies. One hundred

and fifty-nine studies were included in the scoping review as determined by an identification process and the use of three bibliographic databases to search for relevant papers from January 2004 to August 2014. The researchers found that there was a high variability found in the estimates that were observed and that the way in which the prevalence of cyberbullying is estimated is influenced by methodological research options.

The study conducted by Brochado et al. (2017) is particularly significant in that it portrays a scoping literature review as a methodology to study bullying. Although the study focused on cyberbullying rather than social and relational aggression, the use of this methodology in a related inquiry suggests that it also may be used to investigate relational and social aggression. The researchers also focused on a specific topic under cyberbullying; how the prevalence of cyberbullying has been estimated across studies, demonstrating that scoping reviews can be used to investigate prevalence rate estimations. In order to conduct the scoping review, Brochado et al. (2017) utilized the methodological framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) that outlines a five-stage approach including identifying the research question; searching for relevant studies; selecting studies; charting data; and collating, summarizing, and reporting the results.

Further linking a relationship between scoping literature reviews and bullying was a study conducted by Quinlan et al. (2014), in which the researchers examined interventions to reduce bullying in health care organizations. The purpose of the scoping review was to synthesize the research results of interventions designed to address bullying among coworkers within healthcare workplaces. The researchers utilized an adapted version of the Arksey and O'Malley (2005) framework as a way to locate and review empirical studies that involve interventions designed to address bullying in healthcare workplaces. Eight articles were selected

from three countries that discussed interventions including educative programming, bullying champions/advocates, and zero-tolerance policies. From the research, Quinlan et al. (2014) discovered that the most effective reported outcomes were from participatory interventions. The study further demonstrated that scoping reviews within bullying research may be used to synthesize research on bullying interventions.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the definition and types of bullying were reviewed, as well as the assessment methods that are used to study bullying, such as observations, interviews, sociometric measures, surveys, questionnaires, teacher rating scales, focus groups and self-report measures. In order to develop a better understanding of the research that currently exists regarding social and relational aggression and its adverse effects upon perpetrators and victims, the current study will employ a qualitative study through a scoping literature review. A scoping literature review is a process of summarizing research in a certain field, which highlights the breadth of evidence that currently exists within its boundaries (Levac et al., 2010). Essentially, it is a form of knowledge synthesis aimed at addressing an exploratory research question. Scoping literature reviews have been used sparingly as a method to analyze bullying. The current study aims to expand upon the use of a scoping literature as a means to analyze indirect bullying, specifically focusing on relational and social aggression.



## Chapter III

### METHODS

In this chapter, I clarify the purpose and design of this study, detail the process of conducting a scoping review, and explain the specific methodology and limitations of the scoping review. I provide this detailed explanation of the research process in order to allow future researchers to replicate this study's design, and enhance the reliability of this investigation.

#### **Research Purpose and Design**

In the current scoping review, my first goal was to synthesize and analyze the findings of empirical studies of relational and social aggression. Consequently, the purpose of this scoping review was to examine the contributions of the existing literature regarding relational and social aggression in order to determine what is not yet known about these topics and establish if there is an empirically supported definition for relational and social aggression.

#### **Preparation of a Scoping Review**

The methodological framework utilized for the scoping literature review (or scoping review) was developed in part by Arskey and O'Malley (2005). Consistent with guidelines in conducting scoping reviews (Arskey & O'Malley, 2005), all published and identifiable unpublished studies relevant to the research topic (i.e., relational and social aggression) were collected in order to determine all sources of evidence currently available.

The process is largely based upon the established framework for conducting systematic reviews. Both systematic reviews and scoping reviews involve a thorough review and analysis of the literature, during which the researcher is expected to employ the same level of rigor as would be required to conduct primary research. The depth and breadth of the review process is

necessary to ensure that the evidence gathered throughout the review process is reflective of an exhaustive current level of knowledge regarding the research topic (Arskey & O'Malley, 2005).

Given the similar goals of systematic reviews and scoping reviews, methodological similarities are expected. However, scoping literature reviews differ from systematic reviews in that scoping reviews are meant to identify all relevant studies, regardless of study design. Furthermore, scoping reviews are more flexible than systematic reviews in that the search methods may be modified throughout the review process. Therefore, when conducting a scoping review, the researcher is permitted less strict limitations on search terms as well as methods of study identification. In contrast, a systematic review tends to be more linear with a rigid process (Arskey & O'Malley, 2005). Systematic reviews and scoping reviews further differ in that scoping reviews do not include an assessment of the quality of the included studies (Arskey & O'Malley, 2005).

Scoping reviews are often utilized when one seeks to summarize and disseminate research findings through describing findings and the range of research in particular areas of study (Arskey & O'Malley, 2005). Scoping reviews are further beneficial to use when examining the extent, range, and nature of current research as well as when determining the value of undertaking a full systematic review or to identify research gaps in the existing literature base (Arskey & O'Malley, 2005). The current scoping review was conducted in order to identify research gaps in the existing literature as well as to summarize and disseminate research findings. Given that scoping reviews are expected to be transparent and replicable, all key terms used to retrieve articles for this study as well as the databases from which they were retrieved are presented in this review.

## Search Strategy

The current scoping review was conducted in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current literature and the gaps in the literature that exists for relational and social aggression. Studies published between the years of 1985 and 2021 on the topics of relational or social aggression were included for consideration. The date range was selected with consideration to enhancing feasibility to complete the scoping review as well as the landmark studies conducted by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) and Cairns et al. (1989) introducing the topics of relational and social aggression, respectively. The studies included in this review involved collection of primary empirical data; therefore, all conceptual and theoretical formulations are considered only in the literature review section of this investigation.

Arskey and O'Malley (2005) emphasized the importance of defining search parameters prior to conducting the scoping review, therefore reducing the likelihood of missing relevant articles. The key terms of *social aggression, relational aggression, abusive power and control, bullying among cliques, character assassination (defaming), covert aggression, damaging of victim reputations, eye rolling as social aggression, gestures as bullying, gossiping to damage social standing, indirect aggression, nonverbal relational aggression, nonverbal social aggression, proactive relational aggression, proactive social aggression, reactive relational aggression, reactive social aggression, relational bullying, relational disorder, relational victimization, relationship manipulation, shunning peers, social bullying, social disorder, social standing and relationships as targets, social victimization, and spreading rumors as bullying* were searched in the databases of PsycINFO, Business Source Premier, ERIC, and MEDLINE. From the selected databases, 2,329 studies were identified as being relevant to the previously-mentioned key terms, and were subsequently reviewed by the author using the software package

Covidence. Covidence is a web-based software that streamlines the process of a scoping literature review by supporting the framework outlines by Arskey and O'Malley (2005).

Additional articles were identified through reference lists. An experienced librarian (Mr. David Nolfi) was consulted regarding the search. Google Scholar was consulted as a way to review relevant citations within selected articles for analysis, also known as progeny searching.

Considering the unfeasibility of searching through such a large sample, the articles were briefly reviewed to help determine how the search parameters could be modified to result in a more manageable article list. I observed that search results included articles about family relationships as well as social behaviors that were not directly relevant to the concepts of relational and social aggression. As a result, the terms, social and relational aggression, were placed into quotations as a way to refine the search results to including the exact terminology.

The key word terms were not further delineated into subcategories from social and relational aggression, as Arskey and O'Malley (2005) recommend that authors of scoping reviews set search parameters that will produce lists of all possibly relevant articles that are manageable in number. Therefore, there was an emphasis on the importance of maintaining a wide enough approach to searching the literature to generate both a breadth of coverage and the insurance that relevant articles were not overlooked.

In order to determine whether the studies identified in the search in fact met the inclusion criteria, I read the abstract and methodology sections of each study whose title appeared relevant to the question under review: Is there an empirically-supported definition of the forms of indirect bullying (i.e., relational and social aggression)? Studies were read in full after the abstract and methodology sections after I concluded that they met the inclusion criteria for the current scoping review.

## **Eligibility Criteria**

A study was included if it included the terms of relational or social aggression and statistically distinguished relational or social aggression as a separate construct; only articles published in peer-reviewed journals and dissertation studies are included. Grey literature was excluded. Grey literature publications are non-conventional, brief, and sometimes short-lived publications. They may include, but are not limited to the following types of materials: reports (pre-prints, preliminary progress and advanced reports, technical reports, statistical reports, memoranda, state-of-the art reports, market research reports, etc.), theses, conference proceedings, technical specifications and standards, non-commercial translations, bibliographies, technical and commercial documentation, and official documents that are not published commercially (i.e., primarily government reports and documents; Alberani et al., 1990). No restrictions were applied with respect to age, sex, race, educational status, specific population characteristics, government or private, status (casual, part-time, full-time, permanent, or contract), or country of origin.

## **Study Selection**

One reviewer (Angela Fidazzo) independently screened the results of the literature search. Prior to commencing the screening process, the expert librarian and dissertation chair were consulted in order to establish agreed upon inclusion and exclusion criteria for the reviewer to assess. Each citation (title and abstract) generated by the literature search was screened by the reviewer independently using pre-established eligibility criteria. For example, each article or dissertation study needed to refer to relational or social aggression and statistically distinguish the two as separate constructs. In the event that the reviewer was unsure as to whether an article should be included, the librarian and dissertation chair were consulted to resolve any conflicts.

One-thousand three-hundred and fifty-seven full-text articles were reviewed, of which 81 were included in the study. The Prisma figure is located in Chapter IV.

### **Charting the Data and Reporting Results**

Selected documents were then reviewed and data were extracted and organized using a data extraction form, facilitated by Covidence software. The following categories of information for each study were extracted: title, author, publication date, location of the research (context), sample population characteristics (e.g., age), provided definition of relational and social aggression, statistical analysis used to define social or relational aggression, and whether the constructs emerged as a separate entity. A content analysis approach was used for summarizing the definition of all the studies meeting the inclusion criteria, using the following steps. First, all the studies were reviewed in terms of their purpose, objectives, and analyses to ensure the studies met the inclusion criteria. The data were then extracted verbatim and added to the Covidence extraction file. The study search, selection, and data extraction process is outlined in the Prisma figure in Chapter IV.

### **Procedure**

Arksey and O'Malley (2005) outlined six steps within a methodological framework for conducting a scoping review. The first step was to identify the research question, which provided the direction for the subsequent stages: Is there an empirically-supported definition of the forms of indirect bullying (i.e., relational and social aggression)? The second stage was to identify the relevant studies to use within the scoping review. During this stage, the search terms were identified and the studies to be utilized were selected.

The third stage of conducting the current scoping review was study selection. The process of selecting studies involves specifying inclusion and exclusion criteria. The criteria were

selected based on the research questions, which is why it was important to have clearly defined the parameters. One reviewer was selected to review the abstracts of studies that were included. The reviewer consulted with their colleagues at the beginning, middle, and during the final stages of the abstract review process to discuss challenges related to the study selection process (Mr. David Nolfi and Dr. Laura Crothers). Additionally, there was one researcher who reviewed the full articles that were chosen for selection (Angela Fidazzo).

Once the studies were selected, charting the data began. Data-charting is defined as a way to extract data from the studies using a descriptive analytical method. Specifically, a qualitative content analysis approach was utilized. Essentially, the goal was to gather the current results of each study that had previously been selected (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The research team was consulted and collectively developed the data-charting strategy that was utilized.

The data charting occurred using the database program Covidence. Arksey and O'Malley (2005) recommend charting general information about each study that is selected for the scoping literature review (i.e., the population used, the type of intervention, outcome measures). The current study charted the following information from each study: Title, author, publication date, location of the research (context), sample population characteristics (e.g., age), provided definition of relational and social aggression, statistical analysis used to define social or relational aggression, and whether the constructs emerged as a separate entity.

The data were then collated, summarized, and reported. A conceptual framework was utilized as a way to provide an overview of the breadth of the literature. A chart or table was used to depict the nature of studies followed by the concept analysis. After the data were summarized, the last and final stage of consultation began.

## **Outline of Procedure**

The protocol for this scoping review follows the methodological framework presented by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and comprises five stages:

- 1) Identify the research question
- 2) Identify all relevant studies
- 3) Select studies for analysis
- 4) Organize Findings
- 5) Summarize Findings.

The methodological framework outlined by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) stipulates that the process be documented in sufficient detail to enable replication of the study by other researchers, thereby increasing the reliability of the findings and ensuring methodological rigor. Therefore, in the following section, I outline the steps taken during each stage of the review.

### *1) Identifying the research questions*

This review was guided by the following research questions:

1. Are relational and social aggression statically distinguished in the literature?
2. Are there statistically discernable subtypes of relational and social aggression discussed in the literature?
3. Is there a commonly-accepted definition of relational and social aggression in the literature?

### *2) Sources used to identify relevant studies:*

- Electronic search of databases such as PsycINFO, Business Source Premier, ERIC, and MEDLINE
- Hand searching of reference lists of key articles



- Cited reference searching of ‘key articles’ to identify other potentially relevant articles that may have cited the ‘key articles’ as references

However, search results using the aforementioned keywords continuously retrieved large numbers of irrelevant studies. Through an iterative process of indexing key articles and examining the nature of the retrieval, it was noted that the original search terms that included verbal aggression and social exclusion were returning literature that was not directly related to social and relational aggression and were adding an abundance of articles that were impacting the feasibility of the study. Thus, after removal of such terms and revising the list through indexing key articles, a more reasonable retrieval was obtained. Employment of all of the various search mechanisms generated a retrieval of 2,329 articles.

### *3) Selecting studies for analysis*

While initial exclusion criteria are set, it is acknowledged that the process of study selection in a scoping review is iterative, and as familiarity with the literature increases, researchers will likely choose to redefine search terms. Therefore, initially, there are often not strict limitations on search terms, identification of relevant studies, and study selection (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005).

Accordingly, initial exclusion consisted of removing those articles which were duplicates, not written in English, or published before the year 1985. Additionally, only articles that were peer reviewed were included in the current study. As familiarity with the literature increased, more sensitive exclusion criteria were developed. Specifically, only empirical studies were considered from PsycINFO. The remaining 2,329 studies were screened based on their abstracts, and excluded if they did not pertain to social or relational aggression. Additionally, if the relevance of the study was unclear from the abstract, the full article was obtained.

#### *4) Organizing findings*

- Research findings were grouped according to statistical analysis utilized to define social or relational aggression.

Additionally, the Arksey and O'Malley (2005) protocol recommends the 'charting' of key items. This concept provides a technique for synthesizing and interpreting qualitative data by sorting the material in a narrative way, facilitating the data extraction process for the researcher as well as other potential stakeholders who may refer to the review in the future (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The information obtained in this review is charted according to title, author, publication date, location of the research (context), sample population characteristics (e.g., age), provided definition of relational and social aggression, statistical analysis used to define social or relational aggression, and whether the constructs emerged as a separate entity. The charted data may be found in Chapter IV.

#### **Data Collection**

A data abstraction form was formulated based on consultation with the librarian and dissertation chair. The data items included title, author, publication date, location of the research (context), sample population characteristics (e.g., age), provided definition of relational and social aggression, statistical analysis used to define social or relational aggression, and whether the constructs emerged as a separate entity. Major publications were then sorted from companion reports (or duplicate publications).

#### **Summary**

This chapter has included all of the essential components to execute the current study, a scoping literature review. The results of the scoping review were used to detect current gaps in the literature regarding social and relational aggression. The framework of conducting a scoping

literature review outlined by Arskey and O'Malley (2005) has been demonstrated to be a comprehensive and flexible strategy to locate all relevant studies within a discipline. This framework has been thoroughly investigated and utilized in scoping literature reviews across fields (Pham et al., 2015). In the next chapter, the results of the scoping review will be examined and discussed in order to answer the proposed research questions.

## **Chapter IV**

### **RESULTS**

In this chapter, I provide a review of the results of the scoping review in order to present the findings to my proposed research questions. In this chapter, I provide answers to the three research questions I posed in order to contribute to the research base regarding the conceptualization of relational and social aggression. Additionally, it is the design of the study for the results to allow for detection of agreements and disagreements among researchers who have defined and statistically distinguished between social and relational aggression.

In the current scoping review, I focused on the statistical definition and conceptualization of relational and social aggression by reviewing the relevant articles that incorporated relational or social aggression as separate constructs in the literature. Eighty-one documents met the inclusion criteria and were reviewed. The presented findings will be utilized to answer the research questions, add to the research base, and clarify inconsistencies and consistencies of social and relational aggression among the literature.

#### **Methodology for Research Questions One to Three**

Research questions one, two, and three were evaluated utilizing a scoping literature review. A scoping literature review is considered appropriate in answering the proposed questions due to its comprehensive and flexible nature to locate articles and extract relevant data. The Prisma model for the current scoping review is depicted in Figure 1.

#### **Research Question One**

Research question one reads as follows: “Are relational and social aggression statically distinguished in the literature?”

## Figure 1

### *Prisma Analysis for Research Questions One, Two, and Three*

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3566 references imported for screening as 3566 studies

1279 duplicates removed

2287 studies screened against title and abstract

929 studies excluded

1357 studies assessed for full-text eligibility

1276 studies excluded

1216 Wrong Statistical Analysis

51 Animal Study

6 Not empirical

3 Non-English

0 studies ongoing

0 studies awaiting classification

81 studies included

---

**Hypothesis One.** My proposed hypothesis for research question one states: “Relational and social aggression are statically defined subtypes of indirect aggression across the extant literature base.”

**Results for Research Question One.** The purpose of the current scoping review was to determine whether social and relational aggression emerge as separate constructs throughout the literature base and may be statistically differentiated from one other through factor analyses and

meta-analyses. Upon reviewing the eighty-one articles, scrutinizing provided definitions, and analyzing the terminology, it may be determined that social and relational aggression are separate constructs. However, only six articles (Albright et al., 2016; Clinton et al., 2014; Coyne et al., 2006; Crothers et al., 2009; Lansu & Cillessen, 2012; and Warren et al., 2011; see Table 1) had both relational and social aggression emerge as separate constructs in the same study.

Many other studies continue to use social and relational aggression interchangeably throughout the literature and have not statistically distinguished between the two constructs. Therefore, in order to eliminate confusion and solidify the statistical distinction between social and relational aggression, subsequent studies should continue to extend the investigation between social and relational aggression in terms of statistical differences. The current results partially support the hypothesis, suggesting that relational and social aggression have emerged as statistically discernable constructs; however, more research must be done to confirm the hypothesis and promote continuity in the research base.

### **Research Question Two**

In research question two, I state: “Are there statistically discernable subtypes of relational and social aggression discussed in the literature?”

**Hypothesis Two.** The hypothesis for the current research question proposed: “There are statistically discernable subtypes of relational and social aggression.

**Results for Research Question Two.** Eight articles discussed the statistical distinction regarding the subtypes of relational aggression. Specifically, the authors of such studies distinguish between reactive relational aggression and proactive relational aggression. Reactive relational aggression refers to relationally aggressive acts that are in response to threats, whereas proactive relational aggression refers to unprovoked acts of relational aggression (Kokkinos et

**Table 1***Results for Research Questions One, Two, and Three*

Documents Consulted (Title)	Authors	Definiton	Mean Age of Participants	Context of Study	Relational Aggression Defined as a Separate Construct ?	Which Analytic Method is used to Define Relational/Social Aggression?	Subtype of Relational/ Social Aggression	Social Aggression Defined as a Separate Construct?
LGBTQ and Heterosexual Adolescents' Use of Indirect Forms of Aggression	Albright, C. M. et al. (2016).	X	19.5	School (University)	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		X
The Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument-Bully/Target: Measurement Invariance Across Gender, Age, and Clinical Status	Balan et al. (2020).	X	13.99	Commun ity		Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		X
Examining co-occurring and pure relational and physical victimization in early childhood	Blakely-McClure, S. J., and Ostrov, J. M. (2018).	X	47.46 Months	School	X	Factor Analysis		
When Sarcasm Stings	Bowes, A. and Katz, A. (2011).	X	18	School (University)	X	Factor Analysis		

Overt and Relational Victimization in Latinos and European Americans: Measurement Equivalence Across Ethnicity, Gender, and Grade Level in Early Adolescent Groups	Buhs, E. S., McGinley, M., and Toland, M. D. (2010).	X	11.3	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
Development and Validation of the Subtypes of Antisocial Behavior Questionnaire	Bur, S. A., and Donnellan, M. B. (2009).	X	19	School (Universi ty)		Explorator y Factor Analysis		X
Growth and Aggression: 1. Childhood to Early Adolescence	Cairns, R. B. et al. (1989)		10.2	School		Explorator y Factor Analysis		X
Relational aggression and psychological control in the sibling relationship: Mediators of the association between maternal psychological control and adolescents' emotional adjustment	Campione-Barr, N. et al. (2014).	X	16.46	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
General and Ethnic-Biased Bullying Among Latino Students: Exploring Risks of Depression, Suicidal Ideation, and Substance Use	Cardoso, J. B., Szlyk, H. S., Swank, P., Zvolensky, M. J. (2018).			School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		



Relational Aggression in Marriage	Carroll, J. S. et al. (2010).		Wives: 43.44/Husbands: 45.32	Community	X	Confirmatory Factor Analysis		
Overt and Relational Victimization: A Meta-Analytic Review of Their Overlap and Associations With Social–Psychological Adjustment	Casper, D. M., and Card, N. A. (2017).	X	4 to 17		X	Meta-Analysis		
Relational aggression and victimization during adolescence: A meta-analytic review of unique associations with popularity, peer acceptance, rejection, and friendship characteristics	Casper, D. M., Card, N. A., and Barlow, C. (2020).	X			X	Meta-Analysis		
Overt and Relational Aggression Participant Role Behavior: Measurement and Relations With Sociometric Status and Depression	Casper, D. M., and Card, N. A. (2017).		12.03	School	X	Confirmatory Factor Analysis		
Digit ratio, emotional intelligence and parenting styles predict female aggression	Cleveland, E. S. (2014).	X	20	School (University)		Exploratory Factor Analysis		X
Modeling Female Social Aggression: Predictors from Multiple	Cleveland, E. S., and Yu, M. (2019).	X	20	School (University)		Exploratory Factor Analysis		X

Developmental Contexts								
A Cross-Cultural Investigation of Relational and Social Aggression in Female College Students from Puerto Rico and the United States	Clinton, A. et al. (2014).	X	20.23	School (University)	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		X
Targeted Peer Victimization and the Construction of Positive and Negative Self-cognitions: Connections to Depressive Symptoms in Children	Cole, D. A. et al. (2010).	X	10.9	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
Effects of Viewing Relational Aggression on Television on Aggressive Behavior in Adolescents: A Three-Year Longitudinal Study	Coyne, S. M. (2016).	X	14.33	Commun ity	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
“We’re Not Friends Anymore! Unless...” : The Frequency and Harmfulness of Indirect, Relational, and Social Aggression	Coyne, S. M., Archer, J., and Eslea, M. (2006).	X	12.79	School	X	Explorator y Factor Analysis		X
Pow! Boom! Kablam! Effects of Viewing Superhero Programs on Aggressive, Prosocial, and	Coyne, S. M., et al. (2017).		36-78 months	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		

Defending Behaviors in Preschool Children								
The Role of Overt Aggression, Relational Aggression, and Prosocial Behavior in the Prediction of Children's Future Social Adjustment	Crick, N. R. (1996).	X	Third-sixth graders	School	X	Exploratory Factor Analysis		
Relational and Physical Forms of Peer Victimization in Preschool	Crick, N. R., Casas, J. F., and Ku, H. (1999).	X	4 years, six months	School	X	Exploratory Factor Analysis		
Relational and Overt Aggression in Preschool	Crick, N. R., Casas, J. F., and Mosher, M. (1997).	X	5 to 5.5	School	X	Exploratory Factor Analysis		
Relational Aggression, Gender, and Social-Psychological Adjustment	Crick, N. R. and Grotpeter, J. K. (1995).	X	Third-sixth graders	School	X	Exploratory Factor Analysis		
Development and Measurement Through Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Young Adult Social Behavior Scale (YASB)	Crothers, L. M., Schrieber, J. B., Field, J. E., and Kolbert, J. B. (2009).	X	19.5	School (University)	X	Confirmatory Factor Analysis		X
Revealing the Transactional Associations among Teacher-Child Relationships, Peer	Demol, K. et al. (2020).	X	10.28	School	X	Confirmatory Factor Analysis		

Rejection and Peer Victimization in Early Adolescence								
RELATIONAL VICTIMIZATION: THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN RECALLED ADOLESCENT SOCIAL EXPERIENCES AND EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENT IN EARLY ADULTHOOD	Dempsey, A. G., and Storch, E. A. (2008).	X	19.98	School (University)	X	Exploratory Factor Analysis		
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PEER VICTIMIZATION IN CYBER AND PHYSICAL SETTINGS AND ASSOCIATED PSYCHOSOCIAL ADJUSTMENT IN EARLY ADOLESCENCE	Dempsey, A. G., et al. (2009).	X	11 to 16	Cyber	X	Confirmatory Factor Analysis		
Factor Structure of the Social Experience Questionnaire Across Time, Sex, and Grade Among Early Elementary School Children	Desjardins, T., et al. (2013).	X	6.9	School	X	Confirmatory Factor Analysis		
Gender differences in the relative impact of physical and relational bullying on adolescent	Dukes, R. L., Stein, J. A., Zane, J. I. (2010).	X	14.7	School	X	Confirmatory Factor Analysis		

injury and weapon carrying								
The Empathy Index: An Evaluation of the Psychometric Properties of a New Empathy Measure for Sex Offenders	Grady, M. D., and Rose, R. A. (2011).		38.52	Community		Exploratory Factor Analysis		X
Teaching Conflict Resolution Skills to Middle and High School Students Through Interactive Drama and Role Play	Graves, K. N., Frabutt, J. M., and Vigliano, D. (2007).	X	Middle and High School	School	X	Exploratory Factor Analysis		
The Structure of Aggression in Conflict-Prone Couples: Validation of a Measure of the Forms and Functions of Intimate Partner Aggression (FFIPA)	Halmose, M. B., Parrott, D. J., Henrich, C. C., and Eckhardt, C. I. (2020).	X	29	Community	X	Confirmatory Factor Analysis	X	
Overt and Relational Aggression in Russian Nursery-School-Age Children: Parenting Style and Marital Linkages	Hart, C. H., and Nelson, D. A. (1998).	X	5.1	School	X	Exploratory Factor Analysis		
The association between high status positions and aggressive behavior in early adolescence	Hoff, K. E., et al. (2009).	X	Sixth graders	School	X	Exploratory Factor Analysis		
The Role of Gender in the Associations Among Post traumatic	Isaksson, J., et al. (2020).		13 to 17	School		Confirmatory Factor Analysis		X

Stress Symptoms, Anger, and Aggression in Russian Adolescents								
Mediator of school belongingness and moderator of migration status in the relationship between peer victimization and depression among Chinese children: A multi-group structural equation modeling approach	Jianga, S., and Liang, Z. (2021).	X	Fourth to ninth grade	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
Differential associations between maternal and paternal parenting and physical and relational aggression	Kawabata, Y., and Crick, N. R. (2016).	X	10 to 12	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
Forms of Aggression, Social-Psychological Adjustment, and Peer Victimization in a Japanese Sample: The Moderating Role of Positive and Negative Friendship Quality	Kawabata, Y., Crick, N. R., and Hamaguchi, Y. (2010).	X	9 to 10	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
The role of culture in relational aggression: Associations with social-psychological adjustment problems in Japanese and US school-aged children	Kawabata, Y., Crick, N. R., and Hamaguchi, Y. (2010).	X	Fourth Grade	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		

The Effects of Extremely Violent Comic Books on Social Information Processing	Kirsh, S. J., and Olczak, P. V. (2002).	x	Introductory to Psychology Students	School (University)	X	Exploratory Factor Analysis		
Relational aggression, big five and hostile attribution bias in adolescents	Kokkinos, C. M., Karagianni, K., and Voulgaridou, I. (2017).	X	13.1	School		Confirmatory Factor Analysis	X	
Relational and cyber aggression among adolescents: Personality and emotion regulation as moderators	Kokkinos, C. M., and Voulgaridou, I. (2017).	X	13.1	School		Confirmatory Factor Analysis	X	
Interplay of normative beliefs and behavior in developmental patterns of physical and relational aggression in adolescence: a four-wave longitudinal study	Krahe, B., and Busching, R. (2014).	X	13.3	School	X	Confirmatory Factor Analysis		
Longitudinal effects of media violence on aggression and empathy among German adolescents	Krahe, B., and Moller, I. (2010).		13.4	School	X	Exploratory Factor Analysis		
Cyber victimization by peers: Prospective associations with adolescent social	Landoll, R. R., et al. (2015).	X	15.8	School	X	Confirmatory Factor Analysis		

anxiety and depressive symptoms								
Boys' and Girls' Relational and Physical Aggression in Nine Countries	Lansford, J. E., et al. (2012).	X	8.29	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
Peer Status in Emerging Adulthood: Associations of Popularity and Preference With Social Roles and Behavior	Lansu, T. A., Cillessen, A. H. (2012).		20.5	School (Universi ty)	X	Explorator y Factor Analysis		X
Individualism, Collectivism, and Chinese Adolescents' Aggression: Intracultural Variations	Li, Y., Wang, M., Wang, C., and Shi, J. (2010).	X	13.42	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
Are there stable factors in girls' externalizing behaviors in middle childhood?	Loeber, R. (2009).	X	five to eight	Commun ity	X	Explorator y Factor Analysis		
Exploring the Dimensional Structure of Bullying Victimization Among Primary and Lower-Secondary School Students: Is One Factor Enough, or Do We Need More?	Marengo, D., Settanni, M., Prino, L. E., Parada, R. H., and Longobardi, C. (2019).	X	9.83	School		Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		X
THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN RELATIONAL	Marshall, N. A., Arnold, D.	X	five to seventeen		X	Meta- Analysis		



AGGRESSION AND INTERNALIZING SYMPTOMS: A REVIEW AND META-ANALYSIS	H., Rolon-Arroyo, B., and Griffith, S. F. (2015).							
Biased Self-Perceived Social Competence and Engagement in Subtypes of Aggression: Examination of Peer Rejection, Social Dominance Goals, and Sex of the Child as Moderators	McQuade, J. D., et al. (2016).	X	12.82	School		Exploratory Factor Analysis	X	
Where Does Cyberbullying Fit? A Comparison of Competing Models of Adolescent Aggression	Mehari, K. R., and Farrell, A. D. (2018).	X	13	School	X	Confirmatory Factor Analysis		
Proactive, Reactive, and Romantic Relational Aggression in Adulthood: Measurement, Predictive Validity, Gender Differences, and Association with Intermittent Explosive Disorder	Murray-Close, D., et al. (2010).	X	33.8	Community		Confirmatory Factor Analysis	X	
Parental psychological control dimensions: Connections with Russian preschoolers'	Nelson, D. A., et al. (2013).	X	5.1	School	X	Confirmatory Factor Analysis		

physical and relational aggression								
Testing a Higher Order Model of Internalizing and Externalizing Behavior: The Role of Aggression Subtypes	Perry, K. J., and Ostrov, J. M. (2018).	X	47.11 months	School		Confirmat ory Factor Analysis	X	
Verbal, physical, and relational peer victimization: The role of immigrant status and gender	Pistella, J., et al. (2020).	X	Grades 6 through 13	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
Overt and Relational Aggression in Adolescents: Social–Psychological Adjustment of Aggressors and Victims	Prinstein, M. J., Boergers, J., and Vernberg, M. (2001).	X	Grades 9 through 12	School	X	Explorator y Factor Analysis		
The socializing effect of classroom aggression on the development of aggression and social rejection: A two-wave multilevel analysis	Rohlf, H., Krahe, B., and Busching, R. (2016).	X	8.35	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
Assessing Peer Victimization Across Adolescence: Measurement Invariance and Developmental Change	Rosen, L. H., Beron, K. J., and Underwood, M. K. (2013).	X	Seventh Graders	School		Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		X

Sociometric Status and Children's Peer Experiences: Use of the Daily Diary Method	Sandstrom, M. J. (2003).		10.69	School		Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		X
Overt and relational victimization and adolescent friendships: Selection, de-selection, and social influence	Sijtsema, J. J., Rambaran, A. J., and Ojanen, T. J. (2013).	X	12 to 14	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
The Intervening Role of Relational Aggression between Psychological Control and Friendship Quality	Soenens, B., et al. (2008).	X	16.93	School	X	Explorator y Factor Analysis		
Stability of Borderline Personality Disorder Features in Girls	Stepp, S. D., et al. (2010).	X	5 to 8	Commun ity	X	Explorator y Factor Analysis		
Psychometric Evaluation of the Social Experience Questionnaire in Adolescents: Descriptive Data, Reliability, and Factorial Validity	Storch, E. A., et al. (2005).	X	13 to 17	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
Etiology and Measurement of Relational Aggression: A Multi-Informant Behavior Genetic Investigation	Tackett, J. L., Waldman, I. D., and Lahey, B. B. (2009).	X	6 to 18	Commun ity	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
A Cross-Lagged Structural Equation Model of Relational	Tseng, W. L., et al. (2013).	X	10.35	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		

Aggression, Physical Aggression, and Peer Status in a Chinese Culture								
Relations of Inattention and Hyperactivity/Impulsivity to Preadolescent Peer Functioning: The Mediating Roles of Aggressive and Prosocial Behaviors	Tseng, W. L., et al. (2012).		10.06	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
Forms and Functions of Aggression in Adolescents: Validation of the Portuguese Version of the Peer Conflict Scale	Vagos, P., Rijo, D., Santo, I. M., and Marsee, M. A. (2014).	X	15.97	School		Confirmat ory Factor Analysis	X	
Self-Reported Use of Different Forms of Aggression in Late Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood	Verona, E., Sadeh, N., Case, S. M., Reed, A., and Bhattacharj ee, A. (2008).	X	20	School (Universi ty)	X	Explorator y Factor Analysis		
The Relational aggression scale (RAS): Psychometric properties of a newly developed measure of relational aggression	Voulgarido u, I., and Kokkinos, C. M. (2018).	X	12.87	School		Confirmat ory Factor Analysis	X	
The Overlap Between Cyberbullying and Traditional Bullying	Waasdorp, T. E., and Bradshaw,	X	15.93	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		

	C. P. (2015).							
Forms of aggression, peer relationships, and relational victimization among Chinese adolescent girls and boys: roles of prosocial behavior	Wang, S., et al. (2015).	X	13.73	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
Distinguishing Among Nondirect Forms of Aggression	Warren, P., Richardson, D. S., and McQuillin, S. (2011).	X	22.8	School (Universi ty)	X	Explorator y Factor Analysis		X
Involvement in Internet Aggression During Early Adolescence	Werner, N. E., Bumpus, M. F., and Rock, D. (2010).	X	Grades 6 through 8	School	X	Confirmat ory Factor Analysis		
Mothers' Cognitions about Relational Aggression: Associations with Discipline Responses, Children's Normative Beliefs, and Peer Competence	Werner, N. E. (2009).	X	Grades 3 through 6	School	X	Explorator y Factor Analysis		
Normative Beliefs and Relational Aggression: An Investigation of the Cognitive Bases of Adolescent Aggressive Behavior	Werner, N. E., and Nixon, C. L. (2005).	X	Grades 7 through 8	School	X	Explorator y Factor Analysis		

Relational Peer Victimization Interacts With Depression Severity to Predict the Timing of Alcohol Use Initiation in Adolescent Girls	Woerner, J., Ye, F., Hipwell, A. E., Chung, T., and Sartor, C. E. (2020).	X	10 to 17	School	X	Exploratory Factor Analysis		
Does Hostile Attributional Bias for Relational Provocations Mediate the Short-Term Association between Relational Victimization and Aggression in Preadolescence?	Yeung, R. S., and Leadbeater, B. J. (2007).		9.94	School	X	Confirmatory Factor Analysis		
Overt and Relational Aggression in Girls With Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	Zalecki, C. A., and Hinshaw, S. P. (2004).		6 to 12	Community	X	Exploratory Factor Analysis		

al., 2017). Confirmatory factor analyses revealed distinct factors for reactive relational aggression, proactive relational aggression, reactive overt aggression, and proactive overt aggression. Murray-Close and colleagues (2010) found a third subtype of relational aggression referred to as romantic relational aggression. Romantic relational aggression is defined as the use of a romantic relationship in order to manipulate or psychologically harm a romantic partner. After analyzing the selected articles, the current hypothesis is supported in that there are statistically discernable subtypes of relational aggression throughout the literature. However, the hypothesis was also disproven given that there are not statistically discernable subtypes of social aggression.

### **Research Question Three**

For research question three, I posed and investigated the following: “Is there a commonly accepted definition of relational and social aggression in the literature?”

**Hypothesis Three.** For the current research question, I hypothesized: “There is not a commonly-accepted definition of relational and social aggression among researchers at this time.”

**Results for Research Question Three.** Sixty-eight articles provided a definition of relational or social aggression in their literature review. In general, the definitions provided for relational aggression were similar in nature. Most researchers chose to include the definition coined by Crick and Grotpeter (1995), stating that relational aggression includes behaviors that threaten friendships, such as social isolation and spreading rumors. Researchers agreed that relational aggression is distinct from indirect aggression in that it may be overt, suggesting that the victim will know who the aggressor is as well as the aggressor’s intentions.

Throughout the scoping review, there was less agreement regarding the distinction and the definition provided for social aggression. Rather than providing a standard definition from the landmark study that differentiated social aggression (Cairns et al., 1989), researchers cited Archer and Coyne (2005), stating that social aggression is identical to relational and indirect aggression with the addition of nonverbal behavior intentioned to harm the victim, such as eye-rolling and facial expressions.

Despite the distinction in definitions provided for relational and social aggressions throughout the literature, there are many articles that did not differentiate between the concepts; therefore, the current hypothesis was not supported. In explanation, researchers would state that indirect aggression is referred to with many names, such as relational and social aggression. In the circumstances in which the researchers clarified that the terms were interchangeable, they would consistently use “relational aggression” throughout the article. The authors thus suggest that relational and social aggression are not separate constructs and may be used interchangeably. Therefore, the current scoping review yielded results suggesting that, while many researchers have acknowledged a subtype of indirect aggression, there is confusion among researchers as to whether relational and social aggression are distinct concepts and where the difference lies between the two.

## **Study Characteristics**

### **Age of participants**

In order to conceptualize the type of studies that differentiated social and relational aggression, the mean age of participants was reviewed. Participants in the studies included ranged from a mean age of 36 months to 45.32 years. The study conducted by Coyne et al. (2017) yielded results suggesting that relational aggression emerges as a separate construct when



working with children as young as 36 months. Relational aggression was defined as ignoring peers and refusing to listen by covering his/her ears when he/she was angry with a peer. A study conducted by Carroll et al. (2010) utilized husbands and wives with a mean age of 45.32. The results suggested that relational aggression continues to emerge as a separate factor into adulthood.

Coyne (2016) also conducted a longitudinal study to identify whether relational and physical aggression should be treated as separate constructs over time. The mean age of participants ranged from teenage years ( $M = 14.33$ ) to young adulthood ( $M = 18.54$ ). The researchers found that relational and physical aggression were distinct constructs when conducting confirmatory factor analyses each of the three years of the study. Therefore, the literature suggests that relational aggression consistently emerges as a distinct construct across ages.

In regards to social aggression, the current scoping review yielded results that demonstrate social aggression most often emerges as a separate construct when studying young adults in University. Mean ages ranged from 9.83 to 38.52. Marengo et al. (2019) studied the dimensional structure of bullying victimization in adolescence. The researchers found that social victimization emerges as a separate construct in adolescents with a mean age of 9.83. However, it should be noted that the authors define the three components of bullying victimization as verbal, physical, and social/relational bullying. Therefore, they do not define social victimization as its own construct independent from relational aggression. However, studies focusing on college-aged students (e.g., Albright et al., 2016; Burt & Donnellan, 2009; Crothers et al., 2009) defined social aggression in terms independently from relational aggression. Crothers et al. (2014) ascertained that social aggression requires advanced knowledge of social dynamics in

order to covertly influence other's behaviors. Therefore, social aggression may be studied more in young adults due to its sophisticated nature.

### **Context of Study**

The majority of selected studies were conducted in the school environment or utilized schools to locate participants. Twelve studies were conducted at the university level, ten studies occurred in the community setting, one study was conducted solely through the cyber setting, three studies were meta-analyses, and the remaining 55 were conducted in the school setting. The results suggest that relational and social aggression are most often studied in the school environment. However, studies conducted at the collegiate level, the community setting, and cyber setting suggest that relational and social aggression are occurring outside the context of school.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I described the analyses conducted to answer the research questions relating to the elucidation of relational and social aggression. A scoping literature review was employed for the purpose of providing information to answer the three proposed research questions. The review of the articles and inconsistencies and consistencies within the literature is reported in order to gather a comprehensive understanding of how relational and social aggression are presented in the extant literature base. From the results of the scoping review, there are several implications that may be made for future directions in research. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I will offer a thorough discussion of the findings while providing the limitations of the current study and suggestions for further research.

## Chapter V

### DISCUSSION

The reasoning for the current chapter is to discuss the results of the scoping literature review in reference to the proposed research questions and a critical analysis of the implications and conclusions of the results. Furthermore, the limitations of the current study will be presented in order to provide an understanding for how the results may be interpreted. In addition, the importance of the current research will be highlighted along with a description of future directions for research in the area of social and relational aggression.

#### **Summary of Results**

Three separate research questions were proposed and analyzed through the use of a scoping literature review. The review included 81 articles that met the relevant inclusion criteria set forth by the researcher. The inclusion criteria included the year of publication; and whether the manuscript was peer reviewed, written in English, empirical in nature, included human subjects, and statistically defined relational or social aggression using a factor analysis or meta-analysis. Covidence was utilized to allow for accurate adherence to the guidelines established by Arskey and O'Malley (2005) in conducting a scoping literature review. The Prisma for the current study is included in Figure 1 in the results section in order to further exemplify the fidelity of the methodology.

#### **Findings for Research Question One**

In the first research question, I aimed to investigate whether relational and social aggression are statistically distinguished across the literature. The results revealed that only six articles provided statistical evidence that relational and social aggression are separate constructs, independent from, not only overt aggression, but from one another. The remaining 75 articles

statistically distinguished either relational or social aggression as separate constructs from physical, verbal, and cyber bullying. Therefore, it is implied that the research base agrees that social and relational aggression are distinguishable from overt forms of aggression; however, the research base is less consistent in distinguishing between social and relational aggression from a statistical standpoint. Although social and relational aggression have been statistically distinguished from one another in a few studies, there still exists confusion among researchers as to the differences between the two constructs.

### **Findings for Research Question Two**

In research question two, I sought to determine whether the literature base provides statistically discernable subtypes of relational and social aggression. The results of the scoping review yielded eight studies that statistically defined subtypes of relational aggression. Zero studies discussed a subtype of social aggression. The subtypes of relational aggression included reactive relational aggression, proactive relational aggression, and romantic relational aggression. The studies agreed that reactive relational aggression refers to unprovoked acts of relational aggression, whereas proactive relational aggression refers to relationally aggressive acts in response to a threat or provocation. The third subtype, romantic relational aggression, is statistically distinguished as a subtype in one study. Romantic relational aggression refers to the use of a romantic relationship with the intention to psychologically harm a romantic partner. The three subtypes emerged as statistically distinguishable subtests through confirmatory factor analyses presented in the respective articles.

### **Findings for Research Question Three**

The third research question assessed whether there is a commonly accepted definition of relational and social aggression in the literature base. From the eight-one articles reviewed, sixty-

eight articles provided definitions for relational or social aggression. There was consensus among authors as to how to define relational aggression. Crick and Grotpeter's (1995) definition stating that relational aggression refers to acts that threaten friends, such as social isolation and spreading rumors, is most often cited in the literature. Despite the consensus on the definition of relational aggression, the agreement on the distinction of social aggression is less common. The authors who statistically distinguished between the two concepts differentiated social aggression by referring to the addition of nonverbal behavior, including eye-rolling and facial expressions (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

**Distinction between relational and social aggression.** Although there continues to be disagreement among researchers as to whether relational and social aggression are distinct constructs, there is evidence that the two are conceptualized differently (Crothers et al., 2009). The overarching terms of indirect aggression refers to covert aggressive acts (Lagerspetz et al., 1988). Indirect aggression has been statistically and conceptually delineated into two concepts, relational and social aggression (Albright et al., 2016; Clinton et al., 2014; Coyne et al., 2006; Crothers et al., 2009; Lansu & Cillessen, 2012; Warren et al., 2011).

The definition for relational aggression presented by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) differentiates it from indirect aggression through the endpoint of the behavior, which is to manipulate or disrupt relationships and friendships. Furthermore, relationally aggressive acts may be overt or covert in nature with the intention of harming the individual through the power of their relationship with the victim. It includes behaviors intended to threaten friendships and contribute to the loss of friendship or social connection through means such as social isolation, alienation, gossip, rumors, and exclusion (Crothers et al., 2009). The bully utilizes their personal relationship with the intended victim to compel the victim to act in a certain way. Overt

relational aggression may include a girl telling her friend that they will no longer be friends unless she (the victim) does what the perpetrator wants (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

The focus of the perpetrator in relational aggression is to establish power or harm another within a dyadic relationship with the intention of damaging a friendship. The perpetrator may establish power over a relationship by threatening to end a friendship or insulting vulnerabilities in personal appearance or qualities that were revealed through the intimacy of the relationship (Crothers et al., 2009). Relational aggression has been identified in children as young as preschool-age, using more direct forms of relational aggression. For instance, children will refuse to be friends with their peers unless they share their toys with the perpetrator (Salmivalli, 2010).

In contrast, social aggression is intended to harm the victim through disparaging their social standing and their reputation with their peers or by enhancing the perpetrators status. Galen and Underwood (1997) defined social aggression as damaging the victim's self-concept or social standing. The bully works to manipulate the social standing of the victim in order to cause the victim harm or force their compliance with the perpetrator, often through circuitous means. Social aggression is typically completed within the shared peer group of the perpetrator and the victim (Albright et al., 2016). The perpetrator intends to harm the victim by controlling the victim's access to their peer group indirectly, where the victim is not present or aware of the occurrence of bullying.

Examples of socially aggressive acts include spreading rumors about the victim with the intention of negatively impacting their popularity or convincing a peer group to exclude an individual in order to inflict harm on the victim. Social aggression also includes harmful nonverbal behaviors, such as eye-rolling and giving dirt looks (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Further

socially aggressive behaviors include sharing intimate information about the victim, spreading false information about the victim, such as sexual behavior or orientation, socially ostracizing the individual, and manipulating the reputation of the target through organized response of the group to the victim. Social aggression is most well established in older adolescent and young adult samples and is considered a more sophisticated form of aggression due to the required knowledge of social dynamics and the ability of the perpetrator to subtly influence the behavior of others to achieve their intended goal (Crothers et al., 2009).

In summary, social and relational aggression differ in relation to their endpoints. Relationally aggressive acts seek to damage a friendship whereas the intent of social aggression is to manipulate or damage another's social status or group membership. Coyne et al. (2006) also indicated that social aggression adds harmful nonverbal behaviors to the definition, such as rolling eyes or giving dirty looks. Relational aggression may be overt or covert and is detected in preschool-aged children. Distinctly, social aggression is a more sophisticated form of aggression that is more established in older populations and requires knowledge of social dynamics (Crothers et al., 2009).

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the way in which relational and social aggression is conceptualized across the literature base. In order to achieve this purpose, three research questions were devised and auxiliary information from the articles included in the scoping review were reported and analyzed. The importance of the current research resides in the damaging nature of relational and social aggression as well as the lack of research that exists in comparison to more overt forms of bullying. Without an adequate

research base and consensus on the concepts of relational and social aggression throughout the literature, effective interventions may not be established.

Due to the covert nature of indirect bullying, there is a greater likelihood that it will go undetected, which results in negative consequences. Specifically, undetected bullying has been shown to lead to an increase in depression and suicidal ideation across bullies and victims (Holt et al., 2015). Juvonen and colleagues (2003) have also demonstrated that perpetrators and victims develop greater health problems, including poor mental health and violent behavior. In addition, the literature revealed that victims and perpetrators suffer from academic concerns, relational problems, and are psychologically maladjusted (Swearer et al., 2010). Therefore, the comprehensive understanding of social and relational aggression as separate constructs is vital to proper intervention and prevention of such negative consequences.

Thus, in the current study I aimed to provide the research base with a conceptualization of social and relational aggression in order to guide future research and address where the literature differs in understanding between the concepts. It was determined that relational and social aggression have been demonstrated to be statistically distinguishable from one another through factor analyses. Despite the distinction that has been made in the literature, authors continue to use the terms indirect, relational, and social aggression interchangeably. The problem lies in the fact that, if not treated as separate constructs, the wrong interventions may be chosen and implemented, thereby inhibiting improvement through the use of improper treatment and prevention strategies. The consensus on the distinction between social and relational aggression is vital in decreasing the negative consequences that have been thoroughly studied throughout the research base.



In addition, in the current research, I sought to determine whether there are statistically discernable subtypes of relational and social aggression cited in the literature. Similar to relational and social aggression, few studies have statistically assessed subtypes of the respective constructs. However, there are six cited articles that established inherent differences between proactive relational aggression, reactive relational aggression, and romantic relational aggression. Reactive and proactive relational aggression have been treated as both subtypes and functions of relational aggression. Understanding the different functions and intentions of relationally aggressive acts is also a vital component to conceptualizing and intervening in the actions. The subtypes suggest that there are various reasons a perpetrator may engage in relationally aggressive acts and both should be treated as separate constructs and targeted with the differences in mind.

The third aim of the current study was to determine whether there is agreement regarding the way in which relational and social aggression are conceptualized by definition across the literature. It is important for there to be consensus regarding the way in which the constructs are defined in order to have continuity among research findings and implications. If researchers continue to disagree that relational and social aggression are separate constructs and use the terms interchangeably, there will continue to be confusion upon the effects of each aggressive act individually. Social aggression is cited by Crothers et al. (2014) as being a more mature form of aggression that requires knowledge of social dynamics. Therefore, perpetrators of social aggression may be subtler in their approach, causing the acts to be less detectable. Understanding the subtle nuances between social and relational aggression is necessary in order to increase awareness and intricacies of behavior.

The authors contributing to the literature base agree upon the definition of relational aggression cited by Crick and Grotpeter (1995). Therefore, researchers should continue to reference the definition provided by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) as the standard definition when referring to relational aggression. Have a standard definition utilized across researchers is important in conceptualizing the construct and differentiating it from its counterpart, social aggression.

The difference between relational and social aggression most often cited in the literature is the fact that social aggression incorporates harmful gestures intended to harm the victim, such as eye-rolling and negative facial expressions. Therefore, when defining the subtypes of indirect aggression in future research, authors should consider which type of aggression they are analyzing based upon the inherent differences between relational and social aggression, rather than using them interchangeably. It should also be distinguished as to whether the researcher is analyzing indirect aggression as a construct or its specific subtypes in order to eliminate confusion among readers and researchers.

### **Limitations**

The presented results and findings should be interpreted with caution with respect to the study's limitations. Many of the limitations cited are related to the lack of collaboration due to the nature of a dissertation study.

Perhaps the greatest threat to the current study was the fact that it was conducted by an individual rather than collaboratively. Arskey and O'Malley (2005) suggest two reviewers of the abstracts for included studies. However, due to the breadth of research that exists on relational and social aggression as well as the nature of a dissertation study, one researcher analyzed the abstracts to determine if they were relevant to answering the proposed research questions.

Having one researcher assess the articles leaves more room for error and missing relevant articles that may have been included. The dissertation chair and librarian were consulted to discuss inclusion and exclusion criteria in order to diminish error and missed articles. However, there is a possibility that not all relevant articles were included in the current review due to this limitation.

Similarly, Arskey and O'Malley (2005) suggest that two researchers read the full text articles included after the abstract screening. However, due to the number of included articles and the study being conducted for a dissertation, one researcher read each full-text article and determined if it should be included in the data extraction phase. Therefore, there may be more room for error as to which articles were included or excluded. In order to control for error, the librarian and dissertation chair were consulted to discuss criteria for excluding articles during the full-text review. Despite effort to moderate for error, the study was not conducted in a way that aligns with the recommended practice, thus creating a limitation in the methodological framework. Scoping reviews are flexible in nature and a team was consulted; however, the results should be interpreted with respects to the way the study was conducted.

In order to assess for fidelity, Arskey and O'Malley (2005) suggest at least two reviewers contribute to the data extraction phase. It is recommended that each reviewer extracts the data separately and the reviewers then compare their results. There is a discussion held to resolve any conflicts found in the data. The flexible nature of a scoping review allows for one reviewer to extract the data. In order to allow for fidelity checks with one reviewer, the dissertation chair and librarian were consulted to discuss the framework for data extraction as well as relevant data to extract from each article. Covidence also requires for the reviewer to complete a second review of each article to confirm the extracted data. Therefore, the researcher reviewed the data that was

extracted more than once to improve fidelity. However, an interrater agreement was not calculated. Rather, the results and included articles represent a consensus between the committee about the content that was selected to be reviewed.

Another limitation noted involves the lack of consistency in the literature about the discernment between relational and social aggression. Due to the lack of consistency in the definition of social aggression and its inherent differences from relational aggression, some results are generalizations of the two. In explanation, researchers in the literature base use the terms interchangeably; therefore, there may be articles that statistically distinguished relational aggression but were referring to socially aggressive acts. There may be more articles that have statistically defined social aggression, but referred to it as relational aggression. However, the described limitation is a limitation of the research base that may have impacted the current study.

Lastly, a further limitation related to the current research base includes the methodologies that were utilized to collect data. Much of the research done with relational and social aggression, particularly with younger children, relies on observational methods, which are prone to error. It is difficult to standardize observational methods, which may have resulted in behaviors being perceived differently from one researcher to another. Therefore, relationally or socially aggressive acts may have been recorded differently, thus resulting in possible errors in descriptors and results that were utilized in the current study.

### **Future Research**

Due to the limited research base regarding the current topic area, further research is necessary in order to gather a comprehensive conceptualization of the terms relational and social aggression. The current study will add to the documented research conducted in the area of relational and social aggression; however, there continues to be identified gaps in the literature

related to the conceptualization and statistical definition of relational and social aggression. The current study has discussed the current agreement and disagreement in the conceptualization of the terms, suggesting areas for future directions.

Future studies should aim to limit the divide in the terminology utilized in the literature base. Therefore, more studies should focus on statistically distinguishing between social and relational aggression, thereby creating greater evidence for the two to be treated as separate constructs. In order to advance research related to the statistical discernment of relational and social aggression, the two constructs should be variables included in the research.

In addition to adding to the literature base by statistically defining social and relational aggression in the same study, there should be a focus on fostering agreement in the literature base on the definition of social aggression and how it differs from relational aggression. Perhaps, with the focus shifting to statistically distinguishing social and relational aggression, more researchers will begin to discuss the constructs separately, thus clarifying their respective definitions.

Furthermore, social aggression is mostly statistically defined using college-aged samples. It would be interesting for future research to focus on social aggression in children and adolescents with respects to a statistical definition. Future researchers may construct a measure for social aggression and relational aggression in children, similar to the YASB created by Crothers et al. (2009).

Future research may also focus on increasing the research base related to subtypes of social and relational aggression. Currently, there are limited studies that have statistically distinguished between subtypes of relational aggression. More articles may add plausibility and attention to the different functions and reasons for relationally aggressive acts. Future research

may then highlight the difference in outcomes based upon the reason for engaging in relational aggression. Future research may also focus on identifying potential subtypes of social aggression, such as reactive and proactive social aggression.

Lastly, future research may focus on refining methodology utilized in observational studies. They may create and assess a more standardized procedure for observing and recording relationally and socially aggressive acts in order to further create continuity among researchers as to the distinction between relational and social aggressive as well as how it is manifested. Future review studies may choose to assess the methodologies utilized to collect and measure data of relational and social aggression in order to assist with creating a more standardized approach to observational methodologies.

### **Summary**

The current scoping review contributed to the limited research within the area of statistically distinguishing between relational and social aggression. The current study also highlights the lack of consistency between the terminology utilized in the field, the disagreement among the differences between relational and social aggression, and the definition of social aggression. Bullying continues to be a worrisome problem among children, adolescents, and young adults. Therefore, continued research regarding the way in which to prevent and target aggressive acts is imperative, including relational and social aggression. The current study addressed several research questions, and the results identified the conceptualization of relational and social aggression in the literature base. Consistency in the definition and conceptualization of two detrimental aggressive acts is vital in proper prevention and treatment programs to avoid the aversive effects of prolonged aggression. Future research should aim to appropriately define and statistically distinguish between relational and social aggression in order to improve

consistency in results and treatment across the literature. The next steps will then include fostering a research base that better understands social and relational aggression, which will then lead to better ways to combat the aggressive acts and maladaptive consequences. Future generations will then be better equipped to handle conflict in a more mature and assertive manner.

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