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THE IMPACT OF GENDER ROLE CONFORMITY, ETHNIC IDENTITY, AND
RELATIONAL AGGRESSION ON PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG
AFRICAN-AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATES

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JENNIFER B. GILLESPIE
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A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

BY

Dr. Denise Beesley, Chair

Dr. Lisa Frey

Dr. Jody Newman

Dr. Jeanette Davidson

Dr. Lara Mayeux

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships among gender role conformity, ethnic identity, relational aggression, and psychological distress among African-American undergraduate men and women ($N = 161$), and, in turn, to increase understanding among professionals regarding these relationships. Results showed significant correlations for male and female African-American students who reported experiences of relational aggression and higher levels of psychological distress. Results also confirmed a statistically significant correlation between the reports of African-American males who identify greater with the ethnic minority group and experiences of lower psychological distress.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview

The phenomenon of human aggression and its consequences have been a focus in research literature for centuries (Storch, Bagner, Geffken, & Baumeister, 2004; Werner & Crick, 1999). Generally defined, aggression is a social phenomenon that occurs between two or more people, and inflicts harm in some way. One plausible explanation for the etiology of aggression – physical, indirect, relational, or otherwise – emanates from the human development literature on social intelligence. Specifically, Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, and Kaukiainen (1992) proposed three different developmental stages of social intelligence, each having some overlap. Because age governs the advancement of language and reasoning skills, younger children who have yet to develop verbal and emotional coping skills naturally resort to more physical means of expression. The coping options for expression of aggression expand once verbal skills develop more fully. In other words, once an individual's social intelligence reaches a level where s/he is able to recognize and manipulate social relations, more subtle types of aggression may be utilized. It should be noted that growth in social intelligence does not automatically mean that an individual will choose more covert ways to manipulate relationships, as research has also shown that those with social intelligence and higher levels of empathy are less likely to relationally aggress and tend to fare better in resolving conflict (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 2000).

Historically, males have been viewed as more aggressive than females (Bjorkqvist, 1994). Buss (1961) claimed that aggression was typically a male

occurrence and asserted that there was no use in exploring female aggression because it happened so infrequently. Thus much of psychological research has been on physical aggression (i.e., hitting, fighting) (Basow, Cahill, Phelan, Longshore, & McGillicuddy-Delisi, 2007) to maintain dominance (Lento-Zwolinski, 2007). As of late, however, a growing body of aggression literature has emerged that appears to diffuse the “myth” about females being non-aggressive (Bjorkqvist, 2001). Also, while research now exists examining aggression among females, the quality and expression of the aggression is characterized by less physical manifestations, such as indirect, social, and relational types of aggression (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Basow et al., 2007; Bjorkqvist, 1994; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Loudin, Loukas, & Robinson, 2003; Werner & Crick, 1999).

Despite the debate in the literature regarding aggression terminology, some scholars, (e.g., Werner & Crick, 1999) conceptualize relational aggression as a TYPE of indirect aggression in which the goal is to damage peer relationships via a number of harmful behaviors including social exclusion and withholding feelings of acceptance. They also assert that relational aggression takes place within well-established or connected friendships, and tends to involve several behaviors intended to manipulate and/or sever friendships. Bjorkqvist (1994) coined the term indirect aggression in his research with aggression among older adults in the workplace, and these behaviors include criticizing and interrupting, and rumor-spreading. For the purposes of this study, the term relational aggression was used to denote the variable of interest.

Humans are interdependent beings (Jordan, 1997). Often times, traditional Western theories of development overlook this crucial reality, ultimately downplaying

the importance that healthy relationships play in identity development (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Also, these traditional theories of human development are largely based on what some believe to be normal development for males (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Conceptually, this “healthy” development includes a process of differentiation, and emphasizes individuation and autonomy (Jordan, 1997). Relational theorists, however, question these established notions and assert that relationships are central to identity development, for women and men. Moreover, relational cultural theory posits that psychological growth occurs as a process of collaboration rather than differentiation, and assert that healthy relationships are characterized by experiences of connection, mutuality, and empathy (Genero, Miller, Surrey, & Baldwin, 1992; Jordan, 1991b; Walker, 2004).

Nevertheless, powerful Western socio-cultural messages still exist that significantly impact the way men and women develop (Miller, 1991). Thus, it is no secret that these societal messages reinforce different relational qualities and skills for men and women. For example, males engage in larger, structured group activities that are inclined to place more emphasis on the importance of power and dominance within interpersonal interactions (Bergman, 1991; Sandstrom & Cillessen, 2010). On the other hand, females are socialized in circles consisting of smaller, more connected groups which may place more value on intimacy, belonging, and relational orientation (Miller, 1991; Sandstrom & Cillessen). In short, the development of these rigid gender roles has been shown to have a negative impact on the psychological health of men and women (Miller & Stiver, 1997)

In addition to the impact of prescribed gender roles, race, ethnicity, and culture are also profound influences on human development as well. Identity formation is complex, even when race and ethnicity are not considered, but for minorities, or those of mixed heritage, this process can be even more complicated due to multiple identifications (Phinney, 2010). Although race and ethnicity are constructs often used interchangeably, each term embodies unique characteristics. The term race has fundamental roots in describing visible, biological features of an individual (e.g., skin color, genetic features) and, more recently, has been viewed as a sociopolitical construct. The concept of ethnicity encompasses shared cultural values and traditions, and speaks to the awareness and appreciation for one's sense of identity as it relates to these cultural beliefs and practices (Day-Vines, Wood, Grothaus, Craigen, Holman, Dotson-Blake, & Douglass, 2007). Suffice it to say, these separate, yet related, terms are valuable when considering identity development. Because of the limited body of research that exists examining the contributions these constructs provide in the realm of human development, it remains important to conduct additional research exploring the contribution of factors such as gender conformity and ethnic identity development on the manifestations of relational aggression and the potential implications for psychological distress.

Statement of the Problem

Historically, the research examining relational aggression among females has focused on child and younger adolescent populations, with more recent efforts concentrating on this phenomenon within older adolescent and young adult populations and with males. Although the literature suggests these types of relationships and

experiences exist for females, it is also apparent that males who suffer from group exclusion and relational aggression also experience distress (Swearer, Turner, & Givens, 2008). In other words, what appears as a “gender dichotomy” (p. 612) in the aggression literature may well be oversimplified (Swearer, 2008). Gender role identity and the degree to which an individual identifies with traditional male and female characteristics may have some influence on these findings. Therefore, examining gender role adherence, rather than biological gender, may be more relevant when attempting to understand relational aggression (Kolbert, Field, Crothers, & Schreiber, 2010) and the psychological effects on men and women. Few studies have assessed the relationship between gender conformity and relational aggression, presenting a limitation within the existing body of research. Additionally, the majority of studies researching aspects of relational aggression have been comprised of predominantly White, suburban children. Given the growing concern about relational aggression within the African-American urban community, and the propensity for those more subtle aggressive behaviors to escalate into physical forms of aggression (Farrell, Erwin, Allison, Meye, Sullivan, Camou et al., 2007; Talbott, Celinska, Simpson, & Coe, 2002), an exploration into what role, if any, ethnic identity may play in the development or manifestation of relational aggression seems warranted.

Relational aggression has been associated with psychological distress, including depression (Gomes, Baker, & Servonsky, 2009), loneliness (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), and peer difficulties (Loudin, Loukas, & Robinson, 2003). As a result, scholars (Lento-Zwolinski, 2007; Nelson, Springer, Nelson, & Bean, 2008; Storch, Bagner, Geffken, & Baumeister, 2004; Storch, Brassard, & Masia-Warner, 2003b; Werner & Crick, 1999)

have expressed the need for continued research in the field of relational aggression to further elucidate its impact on psychological distress, not only in young adults (e.g., undergraduate college students), but also with more diverse populations (i.e., ethnic/racial identity, SES, etc.) (Farrell et al., 2007; Talbott et al., 2002; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009). Thus, the proposed study is designed to shed new light on this particular area. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationships among gender role conformity, ethnic identity, and experiences of relational aggression as they contribute to psychological distress.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) (Jordan, 1997; Miller, 1986) is a process model that is somewhat unique and provides a useful framework through which gender and cultural influences on patterns of relating can be better understood. RCT posits that a person's sense of self develops and continues to evolve through meaningful connections in relationships with people (Miller & Stiver, 1997). The meaningful connections that impact the growth of a person are characterized by four distinguishable constructs: (a) mutual engagement, defined as mutual involvement, commitment, compassion and empathy in relationships; (b) authenticity, defined as increased ability to be one's true self in relationships, with the awareness of the potential impact on the other person and respectful acknowledgment and encouragement of the expression of different voices; (c) empowerment, defined as the personal experience of strength and encouragement that emerges from the relationship and inspires movement and action; and (d) the ability to process through differences and/or conflicts in a way that is effective and fosters mutual engagement (Miller & Stiver, 1997). The lack of such qualities in relational interactions contributes greatly to the absence of interpersonal connection, contributing to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and psychological distress (Jordan, 1997).

Among the results of these disconnections in relationships are the internalization of negative feelings and the development of growth-inhibiting relational images (templates for relational style and interactions) (Miller & Stiver). These

relational images are complex and provide meaning for future relationships (Walker, 2002). As a function of individuals being different in many ways, disconnection is inevitable. Immediate consequences of disconnection may be sadness, upset, or confusion. However, the long-term consequences of chronic, serious disconnections have much larger implications for functioning (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Those individuals who experience repeated instances of disconnection in relationships learn to self-silence and withhold aspects of themselves, resulting in only superficial relational engagement (Miller & Stiver). Miller and Stiver refer to this dynamic as the central relational paradox, characterized by the struggle to maintain a personal sense of safety while yearning for the experiences of mutuality and authenticity. While Walker (2004) adds that engaging in these strategies is often an unconscious process, the resulting relational void is a key contributor to psychological distress.

Another vital piece of RCT is the awareness and acknowledgment of the importance that contextual factors and societal messages related to power and culture have on identity development (i.e., social, ethnic, gender) for individuals. This emphasis is a positive progression from the initial development of the theory based mainly on the experiences of White, middle class women (Enns, 2004). There has been some research looking at how RCT and other relational theories play out in differing cultures, including for those women who identify as African American. Many of the main tenants of this theory hold true for African-American women, but may look a little different in application. Turner (1987) discussed how the “self in relation” (p. 2) occurs through efforts for achieving a balanced sense of self, and this balance includes pride in ethnicity as well as a connection with family (especially between mother and

daughter) and the African-American community. These connections help with not only the differentiation process of the self, but also with instilling more awareness, resourcefulness, inner strength, positive image, and self-confidence in order to be better equipped to handle situations that could potentially cause distress (such as racism, discrimination, living in a world and trying to fit in where the majority societal norms are not necessarily those of the minority, etc). One other key point outlined by Turner (1987) in regard to this concept of self-in-relation was the unique developmental process and socialization of many African-American women to integrate roles traditionally considered male (e.g., independent, high-achieving, and self-reliant) in order that they learn and maintain the ability to take care of themselves as well as others. As can clearly be seen, this concept of identity development is one that should not only include gender but also ethnic identity, especially given the connected nature of the two.

Walker (2002) expressed that how people present in relationships is the direct result of being “raced, engendered, sexualized, and situated” (p. 2) according to several sociocultural agendas. These experiences are not limited to gender, however. Although RCT was initially developed to describe and contrast the psychological growth of women, the research has continued to expand, validating the importance of its application with males (Bergman, 1995; Cochran, 2006; Frey, Beesley, & Miller, 2006; Frey, Beesley, & Newman, 2005; Frey, Tobin, & Beesley, 2004). This is important in light of the fact that many of the traditional Western theories overlook the importance of the influence of people and relationships on male development. For example, Bergman (1995) described these traditional Western theories as “quite

superficial and fairly irrelevant to the deeper, more whole levels” (p. 3), and offered a relational perspective of male psychological development. He indicated that from an early age, males are socialized to seek value in competition and comparison with others at the expense of experiencing the principal desire for connections involving mutuality, authenticity, and empowerment. Therefore, the attempt to maintain connection with other men through conflict and aggression may negatively shape identity development for males by limiting ways of interacting and affective coping strategies (Bergman, 1995; Cochran, 2006). Although males may hold more power and privilege in patriarchal society overall, the messages of appropriate ways of behaving and interacting in relationship (with women as well as other men) are oppressive to some, and lead to concomitant psychological distress.

Thus, RCT informs the current study in several ways. Our current culture is one of disconnection (Walker, 2002), and mutuality is an experience that is not pervasive in society. Walker spoke of the consequences of cultural non-mutuality, expressing how this influences individual inauthenticity of the self, as well as with others. It is this creation of negative relational images that makes it difficult to develop new, healthier images and possibilities for growth-enhancing action in relationships.

Relational Aggression and Psychological Distress

Relational aggression is considered a group process (Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003) and has been associated with depression, loneliness, hostility, social difficulties, and social anxiety (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Gros, Gros, & Simms, 2010; Lento-Zwolinski, 2007; Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001; Storch, Phil, Nock, Masia-Warner, & Barlas, 2003a). Despite the debate among scholars as to

terminology, some researchers (e.g., Archer & Coyne, 2005) advocate for the inclusion and maintenance of the term relational aggression within this literature domain. To wit, Gomes (2007) delineates themes that exist in the literature exploring aspects related to relational aggression including: (a) the sense of a power imbalance within the relationship, e.g., if the interpersonal dynamic was shared (power-with rather than power-over) between the victim and the aggressor; (b) the desire and intent to negatively manipulate the relationship in order to suit individual wants/needs of the perpetrator; (c) the lack of empathy from the aggressor, and the good feeling received from exerting control and power over another's feelings and relationships; and (d) the unsuspecting nature of relational aggression, meaning that people are often unaware of its existence due to the somewhat subtle nature of some behaviors.

Relational Aggression and Gender. Obviously, relational aggression creates distance in relationships (Crick et al., 2002). Initial studies examining relational aggression and psychological distress suggest that females struggle more with this relational paradox than males (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick, 1996). However, more recently, research has shown mixed findings related to gender differences in relational types of aggression (Basow et al., 2007; Crick et al., 1999; Underwood, 2003). In fact, several studies report no or weak gender differences within younger or older populations (Richardson & Green, 1999; Rose, Swenson, & Waller, 2004; Rys & Bear, 1997; Walker, Richardson, & Green, 2000). Despite the mixed gender findings subsumed within the larger body of literature, studies have consistently shown that relational aggression contributes uniquely to future psychological and social maladjustment for those who experience it – males and females alike (Crick, 1996;

Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001).

Consistent with this assertion, Kistner, Counts-Allan, Dunkel, Drew, David-Ferdon, and Lopez (2010) examined the gender differences in relational and overt aggression in 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders. Using scores obtained from peer nominations, 3rd grade boys received more peer nominations for relational aggression than girls, and these remained steady through 5th grade. Nominations for the girls' use of relational aggression increased as girls went into 4th and 5th grades. Interestingly, the increase in girls' connection and intimacy were predictive of increases in use of relational aggression (Kistner et al.). Also, Grotpeter and Crick (1996) characterized relationships of relationally aggressive females as containing higher levels of intimacy, jealousy, and exclusivity. Additionally, a study that examined the relationship between the use of relational aggression and negative self-representations in young adolescent females showed that those negative self-images were highly predictive of relational aggression (Moretti et al., 2001).

To further illustrate, a qualitative study exploring early adolescents' perceptions of relational aggression, specifically perceptions of behavioral acceptability and justification, yielded interesting results (Goldstein & Tisak, 2010). For example, gossip was considered more hurtful and unacceptable when compared to beliefs about the actual exclusion of peers from the circle of friends. Upon further examination, this finding would seem to be consistent with adolescent development in that it illustrates the fact that adolescents often focus on their current situation without considering the potential longer-term impact. Coyne and colleagues (2008) examined early adolescent

perceptions of indirect forms of relational aggression through use of video with boy-on-boy aggression and girl-on-girl aggression. Indirect forms of relational aggression focused on relational manipulation and harmful intent in more subtle ways. The behaviors in the videos were identical, and the only visible difference was gender. Authors hypothesized that the girl-on-girl relational aggression would be viewed as more acceptable by peers; however, results indicated the opposite. Peers that viewed the boys engaging in relational aggression believed the aggressor was more justified in his actions. Something noteworthy is the fact that the participants who viewed the boys' interactions did not have empathy for the victim, and did not consider the relational aggression more normal than those who viewed the girls engaging in relational aggression. Thus, the myth that relational aggression may be perceived as common and hurtful in only female circles speaks to the importance of studying relational aggression in male peer groups as well (Coyne et al.).

Another article assessing the harmfulness of aggression showed that the participants (ages 11-15) perceived direct and indirect forms of relational aggression as the most harmful type of aggression (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006). Overall, there were no gender differences in the amount of aggression reported; however, girls reported more gossiping and back-biting, and boys indicated more physical aggression (i.e., hitting).

While the literature examining relational aggression in older adolescent and young adult populations is increasing, it is still quite limited. Werner and Crick (1999) studied relational aggression among females on a college campus and found significant correlations among several indicators of maladaptive interpersonal conflict resolve.

Also, several studies have shown that relational aggression among females increases as females become older, despite the recognition and potential increase in interpersonal awareness and savvy (Crick, 1995; Crick et al., 1996).

A longitudinal study examining the effects of experiences of relational aggression and perceived popularity among high school students yielded significant results related to distress and adjustment issues for both males and females (Sandstrom & Cillessen, 2010). Specifically, males who reported experiencing higher levels of relational aggression and perceived themselves to be less popular while in high school also indicated higher levels of depression and overall psychological distress as young adults. Results for females were slightly different, as experiences of higher levels of relational aggression in high school females were associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms, but higher levels of experienced victimization in the workplace as young adults. Several hypotheses can be gleaned from these findings, as they appear to speak to many of the broader, more covert messages perpetuated within society. For example, do the characteristics that contribute to male popularity also help portray a more socially acceptable picture of what a “man” really is (e.g., dominance, assertiveness, prestige, etc.), and, in turn, act as a shield from aggressive behaviors (Sandstrom & Cillessen). Also, if a male does not possess those personality traits or conform to traditional Western male norms, is he considered effeminate, and thus an easier target for victimization and aggression? Perhaps messages such as those mentioned above contribute to how males may choose to handle experiences of relational aggression and the resulting depression and distress. As for females, Sandstrom and Cillessen suggest that those who continue to experience relational

aggression in the workplace as they enter young adulthood may do so in order to maintain status and popularity with others, no matter the setting.

Nelson, Springer, Nelson, and Bean (2008) discuss the importance of normative perceptions and beliefs related to aggression in emerging adulthood, a unique developmental period characterized by the increased focus on relationships. After examining these beliefs in an undergraduate student population, the authors describe female aggression as more relational and non-verbal. In contrast, aggression associated with males was more direct and physical in nature. A finding of note in this study was the predominance of females engaging in relational aggression against men. More recently, Linder, Werner, and Lyle (2010) conducted a study with undergraduate students exploring the relationship among normative beliefs about relational aggression, justification of aggression, and hostile attributions of intent. To illustrate, the women and men who held more positive beliefs about the acceptability of relational aggression reported engaging in higher levels of these types of behaviors. Basow et al. (2007) conducted a similar study examining the gendered perceptions of different types of aggression with college students. Results yielded several relevant points. As predicted by the authors, women and men viewed physical aggression as more harmful when the aggressor was a man, and the target was a woman. Of particular interest was the finding that relational aggression was viewed as less acceptable and more harmful to females regardless of the gender of the aggressor, but men and women reported experiencing similar amounts of this type of aggression). These results, among others, serve to reemphasize the need for continued research on relational aggression in older populations.

Relational Aggression, Gender, and African Americans. In 2003, Xie, Farmer, and Cairns conducted a study investigating different forms of aggression (social aggression, direct relational aggression, physical aggression, and verbal aggression) with inner-city African-American 1st, 4th, and 7th grade boys and girls. Social aggression was operationalized as non-confrontational actions (gossiping, isolation, exclusion, and stealing romantic partners) employed to damage connections and personal relationships. Direct relational aggressive behaviors were defined as those actions employed to damage an interpersonal relationship through confrontational strategies, typically involving the relationship between two people. Verbal aggression was defined as hostile behaviors such as yelling, name calling, and threats. Higher levels of physical aggression and lower levels of direct relational aggression were reported in males. No gender differences were observed in any of the aggressive behaviors for grades 1 and 4, except with social aggression.

Another study examined the relationship between experiences of relational aggression and psychosocial symptoms in urban African-American 7th grade students (Williams et al., 2009). Victimization rates were much higher when compared to other studies (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Crick & Grotpeter, 1996), suggesting that there were some unique contributing factors such as race, urban living environment, and perhaps socioeconomic status. Further, those who experienced relational aggression also suffered from psychosocial health issues, specifically internalizing behaviors; however, this finding was only significant for the males in the study (Williams et al.). This type of research is very limited. However, these results provide supporting evidence once

again for the need to study relational aggression not only in minority populations, but potentially with a variety of ages and also males.

The Parenting Connection. Because initial relationships (parent-child) serve as templates for how to relate to others (Miller & Stiver, 1997), it seems important to acknowledge the body of literature that exists examining different aspects of parent-child interactions related to experiences with relational aggression. The literature is somewhat limited in teasing out the specific relationships among parenting, parent-child interaction, and relational aggression (Brown, Arnold, Doobs, & Doctoroff, 2006); however, a study examining the relationship between parenting styles and 12th graders' use of relational aggression with peers conducted by Soenens and Vansteenkiste (2008) yielded interesting results. That is, parental psychological control (defined as parenting characterized by intrusiveness and manipulative strategies such as guilt induction, withdrawal, and shaming to get the adolescent to be compliant to the parents' wants) was a positive predictor of the child engaging in similar relationally aggressive ways. This style of parenting was also a positive predictor of loneliness for the high-schoolers, and a negative predictor of friendship quality. No gender differences were found for engaging in relationally aggressive behaviors or the reported experiences of loneliness.

Another study exploring the connection between parent-child interactions and relational aggression took a slightly different approach, as these authors (Casas, Wiegel, Crick, Ostrov, Woods, & Jansen et al., 2006) looked specifically at the parental attachment styles of young children (ages 2-6). Results indicated a strong correlation between attachment and relational aggression. Insecure attachment for the preschool

girls and their mothers was positively correlated with relationally aggressive behaviors, even at this young age. Also, there was a significant association between preschool boys' insecure attachment with fathers and engagement in relationally aggressive behaviors.

Yet another study examined parent and child perceptions of relational aggression, and is somewhat unique in that: (a) strategies for coping with being a victim of relational aggression were examined, and (b) the sample consisted of low-income, urban, predominantly African-American families (children ages 9-11) (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009). Results from this study were enlightening; namely, 60% of the boys reported experiences of relational aggression as occurring frequently, while only 28% of the boys' parents perceived this as happening sometimes. In contrast, 55% of the girls reported experiencing relational aggression frequently, while only 44% of the girls' parents believed this was occurring in their daughters close friendships. There was additional discordance among children and parents' perceptions of harmfulness of relational aggression, with parents of the boys' not perceiving ANY relational aggressive behaviors as harmful, while the boys rated "friendship broken up on purpose" (p. 533) and "telling secrets" (p. 533) as being significantly harmful to them. Interestingly, this study showed that most of the children (male and female) employed avoidance and denial strategies to cope with relational aggression the majority of the time, and when they did seek support, parents were last on the list. Again, in contrast, the majority of the parents believed that their child would seek them out for support first (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009).

Although each of the above-mentioned articles speaks to the influence of parent-child interactions slightly differently, the main point is that this dynamic impacts (a) the way a child interacts with his/her peers and how relationally aggressive behaviors are potentially maintained through younger and older adolescence, (b) the lack of awareness and/or understanding of the stress associated relational aggression, and (c) the maladaptive ways in which children learn to cope with being victims of this type of aggression. In addition, these studies help clarify how early the aggressor and victim behaviors begin as well as how these behaviors serve as predictors of future behavior and coping.

Gender Role Conformity and Psychological Distress

As noted earlier, a substantial amount of research exists examining relational aggression and gender differences in aggressive behavior; however, some scholars believe that the emphasis on gender effects rather than adherence to gender roles in predicting aggression is somewhat misplaced (Reidy, Sloan, & Zeichner, 2008; Richardson & Hammock, 2006). Biological distinctions between males and females do influence gender role development, but other expectations rooted in societal, community, and family values are arguably more influential (Cross & Madson, 1997; Rose & Rudolph, 2006; Skidmore, Linsenmeir, & Bailey, 2006). In 1991, Miller proposed that Western sociocultural influences shape the gender role development of men and women, and while these messages may gel well with some, others experience role conflict and concomitant psychological distress. To illustrate, research highlights the tendency of males to engage in larger group activities that place more value on the importance of power and dominance within interpersonal interactions (Bergman, 1991;

Sandstrom & Cillessen, 2010). On the other hand, females tend to be socialized in smaller, more connected peer circles which are more relational in nature and place more emphasis on intimacy and belonging (Miller, 1991; Sandstrom & Cillessen 2010).

These sociocultural influences appear to emanate from patriarchal cultures and have historically viewed relational “female” qualities as weaknesses (Miller, 1991). This is a very powerful message, and undoubtedly contributes to the way individuals view themselves (Cross & Madson, 1997). For females, conformity to feminine cultural norms influences women’s lives across differing realms, including relationships and mental health (Philpot, Brooks, Lusteran, & Nutt, 2003; Worell & Johnson, 2004). Nevertheless, in a society “that construes power hierarchically, prescriptive feminine norms serve to constrain and disempower women” (Parent & Moradi, 2010, p. 105), it remains important to assess specific norms while also examining them in the context of how society construes the meaning of femininity. As for men, Pollack (2006) suggests that males are locked into certain roles that continue to be enforced by cultural shaming or the code of boys/men which states that any male who shows any form of vulnerability is considered feminine, which, in turn, implies that he is gay, less than, or flawed. Some scholars (e.g., Swearer, Turner, & Givens, 2008) suggest that this type of perceived weakness in males increases the risk of being relationally aggressed against. To illustrate, Mahalik, Locke, Ludlow, Diemer, Scott, Gottfried, & Freitas, (2003) conducted a study in which high levels of conformity to male norms were positively and significantly correlated with psychological distress and aggression. Further, higher levels of gender conformity were significantly, and negatively, correlated with attitudes towards psychological help-seeking.

Studies have also been conducted (Frey et al, 2004; Stokes & Levin, 1986) in which the quality and health of male and female relationships were examined, and gender was significantly correlated with preference for differing relational domains. Specifically, men preferred community/group relationships and women preferred dyadic peer relationships (Stokes & Levin, 1986) or both dyadic and community relationships (Frey et al., 2004). This information provides a rationale for thinking about and exploring how gender socialization influences the way in which men and women navigate relationships. Additionally, these findings speak to the importance of the quality of relationships and relational health for both genders.

Suffice it to say, scholars are generally in agreement with the fact that gender roles are heavily socialized (Richardson & Hammock, 2006) and, in Western society, tend to be associated with power (Eagly, 1983). Campbell and Muncer (1994) argue that male and female social roles result in different social representations of aggression, stating that females may more likely view aggression as anger or loss of control rather than an attempt to gain control over others as some males would. Therefore, a person's social role is also likely to influence which behaviors are deemed more appropriate ways of expressing aggression. This fact may influence ideas of acceptability, but there is ample evidence that the effects of aggression, specifically relational aggression, are harmful to both genders (Campbell, Muncer, & Coyle, 1992). To illustrate, a study by Swearer et al. (2008) examined the effects of high school males' perceptions of experiences with bullying, specifically verbal taunting and harassment, related to gender conformity (i.e., "They say I'm gay"). Results from this research indicate that males bullied for gender nonconformity reported higher levels of "verbal bullying" as

well as distress, anxiety, and depression. Further, these males endorsed more negative perceptions of the environment at school. Along a similar line, Walker, Richardson, and Green (2000) examined how gender versus gender role conformity influenced experiences with the broader construct of indirect aggression in an adult population. They found that gender role, specifically masculinity, was strongly associated with reports of indirect aggression. Particularly, individuals who reported engaging in these behaviors characterized themselves as being assertive, competitive, and oriented to “getting things done” (p. 152). Results also showed that indirect aggression was used much more frequently than direct means of aggressing.

Yet another study examining gender role conformity and relational aggression took a slightly different approach. Specifically, Reidy, Sloan, and Zeichner (2008) looked at the relationship between feminine gender role conformity and direct peer physical aggression. Results indicated that females reported more physical aggression towards other females who did not conform to typical female gender norms. Also, self-endorsement of more masculine traits in the female aggressors was positively correlated with self-reports of physical aggression. Femininity was unrelated to physically aggressive behaviors, and negatively correlated with self-reports of aggression.

There have also been discussions about how sexual orientation may relate to gender conformity as well as to psychological distress. Although some studies have shown that gender nonconformity in childhood is linked to adult homosexuality, there has been no causal connection established between the two, and the relationship between these constructs remains largely unclear (Skidmore, Linsenmeier, & Bailey,

2006). Evidence suggests, however, that this relationship does not exist for all lesbians or gay men (Bailey & Zucker, 1995) and that a large number of gay men defeminize as they continue in adulthood (Taywaditep, 2001). For example, Skidmore and colleagues (2006) conducted a fascinating study examining the relationships among gender nonconformity and psychological distress in lesbians and gay men using self-report measures of childhood and adult gender nonconformity, as well as observer ratings of current behavior. In this study, gender nonconformity was related to psychological distress, but only for gay men. Also, contrary to the authors' expectations, lesbians and gay men reported more positive attitudes towards gender conformity than nonconformity. Several possible explanations were offered for this, including (a) they used "masculine and feminine endpoints on a bipolar scale....implying that a person must be closer to one than the other on a given trait" (p. 693), and (b) participants may have suppressed certain aspects of self, intentionally or unintentionally. These explanations speak directly to the complex nature of gender role socialization and conformity. The idea that a person's sexual orientation may dictate the need for them to fall on one end or the other of the gender conformity continuum is a misperception that, unfortunately, continues to pervade society as a whole. In addition, the speculation by researchers that participants possibly self-silenced, intentionally or not, indicates the amount of potential power cultural and societal messages have on individuals.

In summary, the literature that exists on gender role conformity and psychological well-being is limited and mixed, and the research examining the interrelationships among gender role conformity, relational aggression, and

psychological distress is sparse indeed. It is, however, interesting to note that more research appears to have been conducted on the relationship between men's gender conformity and psychological distress compared to women. Perhaps this is because some believe that the socialization process is harsher for men (Long, 1989). In any case, further investigation of this dynamic among females is warranted.

Ethnic Identity Development, Gender Role Conformity, Relational Aggression, Psychological Distress

With the passage of time, the racial and ethnic composition in the United States continues to evolve (Phinney, 1996). Erickson (1964) spoke of an achieved identity being desirable for healthy development, stating that: "True identity depends on the support which the young receive from the collective sense of identity which social groups assign to [them]: [their] class, [their] nationality, [their] culture" (p. 93). Erickson identifies how cultural messages influence the concept of identity and self, beginning fairly early in life. Considering the complexity and fluidity of identity development, it becomes important to consider how race and ethnicity influence this process on a continuum. Vines and her colleagues (2007), as well as Phinney (1996), suggested that race and ethnicity play crucial roles in the presenting issues of clients in mental health agencies, further indicating the potential impact these variables have on psychological distress.

Additionally, different facets of ethnicity (cultural beliefs, values, and behaviors) may contribute to a person's psychological well-being, distress, or relational style. These facets help differentiate ethnic groups, the individual's personal sense of ethnic identity within their ethnic group, and situations and events associated with

minority status (i.e., discrimination, oppression, powerlessness) (Phinney). Therefore, it is important to consider current experiences typically associated with minority status, and also the intergenerational impact and influence of relational images created and maintained by experiences of discrimination (Walker, 2002). Walker warned that as cultural norms become more indistinct, the ambivalence related to the use of older relational templates is likely to worsen. Miller (1991) declared that:

We all live in a world in which some people, or groups of people, hold power over others based on differences in age, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or other factors. When power inequities-whether real or assumed – are present, disconnections can readily occur. Furthermore, the experience of growing up and living within such a ‘power-over’ framework influences all of our actions, even in the most personal situations and even when there is no power differential present. (p. 12)

It seems virtually impossible to dismiss the power in these words, specifically for those living in a world where membership in a group considered different and/or less than based on various characteristics, including ethnicity, may contribute to relational disconnection and, in turn, psychological distress.

Therefore, working from the assumption that ethnicity serves as a powerful and meaningful component of one’s central identity, it remains important to further examine its link with psychological health. There is research that supports the positive relationship between an achieved ethnic identity, higher levels of self-acceptance, and lower psychological distress (Phinney, 1989). In addition, research has demonstrated that ethnicity is salient in instances where an individual’s group membership is easily

identifiable due to skin color (Deaux, 1992). To further illustrate, a study examining racial identity and overall psychological distress among young Black men (mean age 20) provided evidence of the unique contributions of racial identity to the esteem and distress of Black men (Mahalik, Pierre, & Wan, 2006). The majority of this sample ($n = 124$) self-identified as heterosexual men. The construct of racial identity for Mahalik et al.'s study included attitudes and beliefs about group membership, which is consistent with the current conceptualization of ethnic identity. Results indicated a positive correlation between higher levels of internalized beliefs about racial identity/group membership and self-esteem. Furthermore, this study examined the influence of gender role conformity on racial identity and psychological distress. Not only was psychological distress positively correlated with gender role conformity, but a pattern existed for those Black men who identified less with their racial group. Specifically, those with diminished attitudes about their racial group and higher levels of value for attributes related to "White standards of merit" (p. 102) also tended to endorse the mainstream cultural standards of what it means to be a man. This relationship among variables is noteworthy, and suggests that Black men's identity construction can very well be influenced by racial group preference as well as the dominant culture's code for boys/men behavior (Mahalik et al., 2006). Mahalik and colleagues thus proposed that future research examine gender role conformity and racial identification simultaneously in an attempt to better understand how they contribute to experiences of distress.

In a similar vein, a qualitative study examining the roles race and gender socialization play in African-American families was conducted by Hill in 2002. The

operationalization of racial identity in this study appeared to be primarily based on skin tone, but alluded to the cultural messages by which many Black families operate. Also, a social class variable that encompassed socioeconomic status as well as education was introduced. Parents' responses yielded several themes illustrating the importance of socializing girls and boys equally through messages and modeling from parents, and the activities parents' allowed their children to engage in. One parent said: "...when we grew up, boys washed dishes, boys cooked; girls washed dishes, girls cooked. My mother taught us pretty equally to do everything, just in case you were on your own you wouldn't have to depend on somebody (p. 497)."

Another parent commented:

...work is work, and anybody can do it. I plan to have him help with anything that needs to be done. I wouldn't care if he did feminine things, like taking dance lessons. He wanted to take dance lessons a long time ago...and he loves to brush and fix hair...but I tell him I'll love him regardless of what he does; be happy with his life, I won't have a problem with it. (p. 498)

Despite the overall tendency for parents in the study to support equal socialization for their children, there were some class-based differences related to the levels of support. Those considered middle-class on the basis of education alone expressed more hesitance regarding equal socialization, seemingly with more emphasis being placed on girls to be more independent, survivors, and strong fighters. Hill points out that this mentality for middle-class African Americans has been supported by literature showing that Black people abandon certain traditions as they progress in the world with differing norms, and consider embracing the more traditional gender role norms consistent with

their new status. Those considered less educated (high school diploma or less) wanted equality for the girls, but struggled (especially the Black fathers) with accepting the idea of the boys engaging in feminine activities. The implications of this study are remarkable on a number of levels. One of the most interesting perspectives discussed in the article was the notion of gaining status (education, money) along with respect, and the minority individual feeling the need to forsake certain values and traditions central to ethnic identity in the hope of being considered worthy or equal. This finding speaks to the fact that ethnic identity is strongly associated with an individual's journey in society, and for minority group members, aspects of that journey are characterized by struggles with recognition, acceptance (Day-Vines, 2007; Phinney, 1996, Phinney 2010), and disconnections (Miller & Stiver, 1997; Walker, 1999; Walker 2002).

Despite evidence demonstrating the importance of the role of ethnic identity in human development, this construct continues to be overlooked in much of the research (Ong, Fuller-Rowell, & Phinney 2010; Phinney, 2010). Unfortunately, this holds true in the relational aggression literature as well. Of the few studies that have included race as a variable of interest when examining relational aggression, Ousterman, Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, and Kaukiainen (1994), Storch et al. (2003), and Waasdorp and Bradshaw (2009) found higher rates of both victimization and perpetration in minority samples (Hispanic and African American) when compared to Caucasian children and adolescents. Of note here is the stigma associated with being an African-American youth (Sawyer et al., 2008) as well as the cultural emphasis on what it means to be a man in today's society, e.g., machismo and devaluing the importance of relationships (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009). Because of society's sex-based messages and beliefs,

if males experience difficulties within relationships and feel shame or guilt related to these difficulties, the probability of feeling unsafe to talk about these things increases greatly (Waasdorp & Bradshaw). As a result, minority males may also experience increased feelings of distress and isolation.

As to the research on relational aggression and minority females, Gomes (2009) examined the connection between experiences of relational aggression and depression among African-American female college students. There was a significant, positive correlation with experiences of relational aggression and depression. Gomes suggested that the prolonged experience of relational aggression may contribute to women's depression, or women's depression may make them more vulnerable to be relationally aggressed against. Similarly, Dahlen et al. (2013) examined relational aggression in college students (mixed sample, but majority women). The focus of this article was on mood as a predictor of being the aggressor. The authors reported conducting "one of the first studies to examine race and relational aggression among college students" (p. 150), demonstrating a clear need for additional research examining ethnic identity and relational aggression among college students of color.

To summarize, there is a significant gap in the literature addressing how ethnic identity, gender role conformity, and experiences of relational aggression contribute to psychological distress in young adults. Very few articles on relational aggression include ethnic identity as an important, contributing variable, and the dearth of literature that does is limited to elementary and middle school students. Also, as mentioned before, much of the research on relational aggression has focused on White, female children and adolescents, and the aggression research that does include boys and

young men tends to use gender as a categorical variable, rather than addressing adherence to gender role norms. Thus, the present study is designed to provide additional insight as it examines the relationships among gender role conformity, ethnic identity, relational aggression, and psychological distress among African-American undergraduate men and women.

Research Questions

Given the exploratory nature of this study, the following research questions are proposed:

1. Do African-American college students who report experiences of relational aggression also report higher levels of psychological distress?
2. Do higher levels of gender role conformity predict greater psychological distress for African-American college students?
3. Does increased identification with the ethnic minority group predict lower psychological distress for African-American college students?
4. Does the experience of relational aggression predict significant additional variance in psychological distress over and above gender role conformity and ethnic identity development for African-American college students?

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Participants

One hundred sixty-one undergraduate students completed the survey. One hundred and twenty participants (75%) were women, and the remaining 25% of participants were male ($n = 41$). Participation in this study was offered by professors as extra credit to all students in the interest of fairness. Nine students who completed the survey identified themselves as Caucasian and/or Hispanic. Because the focus of this study was on those who identified as African American (including African American as a part of reported bi-racial status), only those participants were included in the analysis, leaving 152 usable data sets for analysis.

The sample was largely composed of those who identified as African American ($n = 121$, 79.6%). The remaining sample identified themselves as bi-racial (to include African American), $n = 31$, 20.4%. One hundred and eleven females (73%) and 41 men (27%) participated in the survey. Eighty-six percent of participants ($n = 130$) fell within the 18-25 year-old category. The remaining 14% ($n = 22$) reported ages within the range of 26-52. Participants were current students attending college to attain their bachelor's degree in various majors. The status/classification breakdown was as follows: Freshman ($n = 25$, 16.4%); Sophomore ($n = 27$, 17.8%); Junior ($n = 54$, 35.5%); Senior ($n = 43$, 28.3%). Only 1 person reported being a 5th year senior. All participants self-identified their group.

The socio-economic breakdown of the sample revealed that the majority of the reported family income was less than \$25,000 (28.9%; $n = 44$). The next most

frequently endorsed levels were \$25,000 to \$35,000 and over \$85,000 (17.8%; $n = 27$; 17.8%, $n = 27$, respectively). The remaining sample included 10.5% ($n = 16$) making \$36,000 to \$45,000; 9.9% ($n = 15$) making \$46,000 to \$55,000; 10.5% ($n = 16$) making \$56,000 to \$65,000; 2.6% ($n = 4$) making \$66,000 to \$75, 000; and 3% ($n = 2$) making between \$76,000 and \$85,000 per year. All participants included their family income.

Finally, the majority of participants reported growing up in a “medium” sized city, population 200,000-500,000 (30.7%, $n = 46$). The remaining sample included 29.3% ($n = 44$) growing up in “very small” cities, with populations less than 100,000; 28% ($n = 42$) growing up in “small” cities, populations between 100,000 – 200,000; and 12% ($n = 18$) growing up in “large” cities with populations of 500,000 or more. Two participants did not include this information.

Instruments

Demographics Questionnaire. Information obtained from undergraduate students included: age, biological gender, current year in college, current major, ethnicity, type of community in which student was raised (i.e., suburban, urban, rural), and socioeconomic status.

Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory – 46 (CMNI-46). The CMNI-46 (Parent & Moradi, 2009) is a brief, self-report measure of masculine philosophies adapted from the CMNI (Mahalik, Locke, Ludlow, Diemer, Scott, Gottfried, & Freitas, 2003). This 46-item questionnaire assesses the degree to which men conform, or not, to the different norms considered masculine throughout dominant U.S. culture. The response format is a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. Nine subscales measure individual components of masculinity:

Emotional Control, Disdain for Homosexuals, Playboy, Power Over Women, Risk-Taking, Self-Reliance, Violence, Winning, and Work Primacy. Example questions include: “If I could, I would frequently change sexual partners,” “I believe that violence is never justified,” “I bring up my feelings when talking to others,” “I take risks,” “I am willing to get into a physical fight if necessary,” and “It would be awful if people thought I was gay.” Obtaining scores from each subscale is one way to score this measure. Another way to score is by adding up the CMNI total for participants, with higher total scores reflecting greater conformity to norms. Parent and Moradi (2010) report good internal consistency with the CMNI-46 subscale scores (.89 to .98) as well as with the total score (.96). Cronbach’s alpha for the CMNI-46 in this study was .92. Also, despite the shorter length of the CMNI-46, there were high correlations (>.90) between this measure and the original CMNI form scores, suggesting that the construct, convergent, and discriminant validity evidence for the original lengthier version likely applies to the abbreviated version as well. For the purposes of this study, the total CMNI score will be used.

Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory – 45 (CFNI-45). The CFNI-45 (Parent & Moradi, 2010) is a brief, self-report measure of feminine philosophies adapted by from the CFNI (Mahalik, Morray, Coonerty-Femiano, Ludlow, Slatery, & Smiler, 2005). This 45-question measure assesses the degree to which women conform, or not, to various feminine norms in the dominant U.S. culture. The response format is a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. There are eight individual subscales designed to measure distinct components of femininity: Having Nice Relationships, Involvement With Children, Thinness, Sexual

Fidelity, Modesty, Involvement in Romantic Relationships, domestic, and Investment In Appearance. Example questions include: “It is important to keep your living space clean,” “I tell everyone about my accomplishments,” “I find children annoying,” “I regularly wear make-up,” “When I succeed, I tell my friends about it,” “I would feel guilty if I had a one night stand,” and “I always try to make people feel special.” Obtaining subscale scores is one way to measure these attitudes and beliefs; obtaining the CFNI total score is another way, with a higher total score suggesting greater conformity to traditional feminine norms. Parent and Moradi (2010) report good internal consistency (.72 to .92) with the CFNI-45 subscale scores as well as with the total score (.87). Cronbach’s alpha for the CFNI-45 for this study was .72. Also, despite the shorter length of the CFNI-45, the reliability and validity information is comparable to the original (Parent & Moradi, 2010). For the purposes of this study, the total CFNI score will be used.

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R). The MEIM-R (Phinney & Ong, 2007) is a 6-question self-report measure with two subscales: Exploration and Commitment, both of which are considered important aspects of ethnic identity development. The revised MEIM was created as a more concise way of exploring central attributes of group identity as well as an individual’s strength and security with this ethnic identity (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale with answers ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*, with higher scores indicating greater achievement of ethnic identity. Each subscale has three questions. Example questions include: “I have spent time exploring my ethnic group history and traditions” and “I understand what ethnic group

membership means to me.” The measure is scored by adding up totals for each subscale, or combining subscale scores in order to utilize the full scale score. Subscales were proven to have good reliability (Exploration subscale = .76, Commitment subscale = .78), and full scale reliability was found to be .81 (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Cronbach’s alpha for the total MEIM-R was .92. Construct, convergent, and discriminant validity for the revised MEIM have been shown to be commensurate with the original version (Phinney & Ong).

Indirect Aggression Scale - Target (IAS-T). The IAS-T (Forrest, Eatough, & Shevlin, 2005) is a 35-item, self-report measure developed to examine behaviors adults may experience within current, interpersonal relationships. As mentioned previously, relational aggression is considered to be a *type* of indirect aggression. Items identified on this indirect aggression questionnaire reflect definitional constructs of relational aggression as examined by this study. Examples of items that fit this criteria include, “turned other people against me,” “made other people talk to me,” “used private in-jokes to exclude me,” “withheld information from me that the rest of the group is let in on,” “intentionally embarrasses me around other,” etc. Also, this instrument was normed using current college students and college graduates of a university (Forrest et al., 2005), whereas many relational aggression measurements were normed on children and adolescents. The response format is a 5 point Likert-type scale ranging from *never* to *regularly*, with higher scores indicating more experiences with indirect aggression. There are three subscales – Social Exclusionary, Malicious Humor, and Guilt Induction. Reported alphas for the subscales and total scale score range from .81 to .89

(Forrest et al., 2005). The total IAS-T score was used in this study and the Cronbach's alpha was .96.

Outcome Questionnaire 45 (OQ-45). Subjective psychological distress will be measured by the OQ-45 (Lambert, Okiishi, Finch, & Johnson, 1994). This self-report measure consists of 45 items looking at a range of symptoms related to depression, anxiety, stress, and levels of discomfort experienced within the past week. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *almost always*. The range of total scores is 0 – 180, with higher scores indicating higher levels of total psychological distress. There are three subscales that measure Symptoms of Distress, Interpersonal Difficulties, and Social Role Functioning. Example questions include: “I tire quickly,” “I feel worthless,” “I get along well with others,” “I enjoy my spare time,” and “I feel loved and wanted.” A previous study conducted by Frey et al. (2004) reported that these subscales were moderately to highly correlated ($r = .62$ and above). Thus, the total OQ-45 score was used to assess psychological distress and the Cronbach's alpha for this study was .95.

Procedure

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), undergraduate students were recruited from two large universities. Participants were recruited in undergraduate classrooms in which the instructor gave permission. A recruitment statement was scripted and presented to each classroom by the appointed person of contact. Included in the script was the Survey Monkey link for students to use for completion of the survey. Upon completion of the survey, participants were allowed to enter information for extra credit and/or an entry into the raffle for a chance to win one

of four \$40 Best Buy gift cards. If participants opted “yes,” they were re-directed to a separate database to enter this information. Therefore, there were no links between completed instrument packets and other information offered by participants. The decision whether or not to participate did not result in penalty or loss of benefits.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Preliminary and Descriptive Analyses

Preliminary analysis was conducted to ensure there was no violation of assumptions of normality, linearity, and multicollinearity. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the variables of interest are shown in Tables 1 and 2. Bivariate correlations between Psychological Distress (OQ-45) and the continuous demographic variables revealed no significant correlations. Bivariate correlations among the predictor variables (MEIM-R, CFNI, IAS-T) and criterion variable (OQ-45) revealed that, for women, Ethnic Identity Development (MEIM-R) was not significantly correlated with Psychological Distress (OQ-45) ($r = -.17, p = .30$). In contrast, Gender Role Conformity (CFNI) and experiences of Relational Aggression (IAS-T) were significantly positively correlated with Psychological Distress ($r = .68, p = .002$; $r = .54, p = .001$, respectively).

Significant correlations emerged for the men as well. To illustrate, Ethnic Identity Development was significantly negatively correlated with Psychological Distress ($r = -.50, p = .04$), and experiences of Relational Aggression were significantly correlated with Psychological Distress ($r = .48, p = .02$).

Primary Analyses

Results from two hierarchical regression analyses (one for women, one for men) are presented in detail in Tables 3 and 4. For women, 69% of the variance in Psychological Distress was explained by the full model $F(4,61) = 9.72, p < .008$. Gender Role Conformity scores were entered in Block 1 and accounted for significant

variance, $R^2 = .46$, $F(2,63) = 13.80$, $p < .002$. Ethnic Identity Development scores were entered in the second step but did not contribute significant additional variance to the model, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $\Delta F(3,62) = .55$, $p = .47$. Finally, Relational Aggression experiences were entered in the last step and accounted for an additional 21% of the variance in Psychological Distress scores ($\Delta R^2 = .21$, $\Delta F(4,61) = 9.72$, $p < .008$).

For males, 36% of the variance in Psychological Distress was explained by the full model $F(1,19) = 4.08$, $p = .08$. Gender Role Conformity scores were entered in Block 1 but did not account for significant variance, $R^2 = .003$, $F(1,19) = .003$, $p = .87$. Ethnic Identity Development scores were entered in the second step but again did not contribute significant additional variance to the model, $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $\Delta F(2,18) = 2.99$, $p = .60$. Finally, Relational Aggression scores were entered in the last step $\Delta R^2 = .33$, $\Delta F(1,19) = 4.08$, $p = .08$.

In order to ascertain how gender role conformity, ethnic identity development, and experiences of relational aggression impacted psychological distress for women and men, the final step of each of the regression models was examined. For women, the final model revealed that adherence to traditional gender roles and experiences of relational aggression were significant predictors of psychological distress. Beta weights reveal that the CFNI ($\beta = .60$, $p < .001$) and the IAS-T ($\beta = .47$, $p < .008$) were, indeed, the greatest individual contributions to the model. MEIM-R scores were not a significant predictor of psychological distress for female African Americans participants.

For men, the final model was not significant (see Table 4) despite preliminary correlations showing a significant negative relationship between Ethnic Identity

Development and Psychological Distress and a significant positive relationship between Relational Aggression experiences and Psychological Distress.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Relational aggression has been a phenomenon of interest for several years among researchers, and although much of the research published has focused on young adolescent Caucasian females, future research implications typically include the need for inclusion of contextual factors such as ethnicity, age, and gender. This project sought to include these variables as well as to extend the scope of the existing literature base by examining the relationships among ethnic identity, gender role conformity, and experiences of relational aggression and their impact on psychological distress among undergraduate African-American men and women.

There were a number of significant correlations among the variables of interest. To illustrate, for African-American undergraduate women, greater adherence to traditional gender roles and more experiences of relational aggression were significantly related to higher levels of psychological distress. For African-American men, the pattern differed. Specifically, greater reported ethnic identity development was significantly related to lower levels of psychological distress, whereas, consistent with results for African-American women, more experiences of relational aggression were significantly related to higher levels of psychological distress.

Results from the regression analyses for men and women differed, too. To wit, relational aggression was a significant predictor of psychological distress for females, and it did provide additional variance above and beyond that of gender role conformity and ethnic identity development. For males, preliminary bivariate correlations revealed that ethnic identity development and experiences of relational aggression were

significantly related to psychological distress; however, neither variable emerged as a significant predictor of the criterion variable.

Although not much of the relational aggression literature has targeted African Americans or college students, the research that does exist is consistent in identifying a relationship between experiences of relational aggression and distress. Much of the emphasis in the literature focuses on how important and meaningful relationships are for functioning and well-being. It may, however, be even more important for African Americans when thinking about how the cultural norms regarding connections with friends, family and the community help shape the self (Turner, 1987).

While previous research has indicated that greater adherence to traditional gender role norms can lead to psychological distress among males and females from the majority white culture, this study suggests that the same is true for African-American females, but not African-American males. This may be because the gender norms for females, in general, are evolving more quickly than for men. As for African-American men, it would appear that traditional male norms may be more ingrained. Chae (2002) suggested that African-Americans are socialized to act more from a “bicultural orientation” (p.19), meaning that they attempt to operate with ethnic pride and act in a way that’s pleasing to the majority. However, within that cultural context, males and females are still socialized differently. Spencer et al. (1995) discussed how some child-rearing for African-American males typically has more of an emphasis on strength, aggression, and dominance as opposed to females who are taught to value relationships more.

Additionally, it seems important to consider how African-American females define “traditional” female roles. For example, Walker (1987) and Phinney (2010) talk about how from an early age, more emphasis is put on being self-reliant, independent, and able to take care of yourself as well as taking care of others. There is also increased emphasis on being proud, and perhaps more verbal, about your achievements and ability to succeed as an African-American woman in today’s world. Again, this is in direct contrast to what has been typically viewed as traditional female behavior. Thus, if African-American women are attempting to operate within a set of norms dictated more so by overall society, the potential for psychological distress would seem likely.

Interestingly, increased identification with the ethnic minority group was significantly correlated with lower psychological distress among the males in this study, but not the females. Again, there is limited research on how these two variables are related, especially among African Americans, but this is directly in line with results gathered from a study conducted on African-American males by Mahalik et al. in 2006. In that study, Mahalik et al. found a strong correlation among self-esteem and ethnic identity development, and ethnic identity development and psychological distress.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is certainly not without limitations. For example, only Phinney’s ethnic identity development measure has been used extensively with African Americans, whereas the gender role conformity and relational aggression measures have not. Additionally, two of the more obvious limitations were the correlational nature of the study and the limited sample size, especially for the male participants. Despite valiant efforts to recruit minority students for this study, this was difficult and

some of those who did complete the survey did not complete all survey measures limiting their use in the data analyses. Pallant (2006) discussed how difficult multiple regression analyses can be if the sample size is small. Yet, despite the small numbers, there were some statistically significant findings. Future research should include a larger overall sample of African Americans and one with more men in order to better observe potential gender differences. Another limitation is related to the female gender role conformity scale (CFNI). One item was inadvertently omitted when the measure was transferred to the online survey system. Reliability for the measure remained in the acceptable range, but this omission is still a limitation of the study. Additional limitations include generalizability and utilization of self-report. Finally, answers were gathered by use of an online survey only. Although this could potentially be considered another limitation, a study by Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, and John (2004) found that electronic data was of similar quality as data obtained from more traditional ways of collecting data (pen-and-paper) in that it was not contaminated by repeat responders and results were consistent with traditional methods. Nevertheless, it is recommended that data for future research be collected using mixed methods (e.g., internet surveys and traditional collection).

Other suggestions for future research follow:

1. Future research on relational aggression could target a specific emotion, such as anxiety or depression, versus a measure for overall distress in order to present more specific guidance for ideas on how, for instance, college campuses and counseling centers could effectively deal with college students' psychological distress.

2. Future research could incorporate the socioeconomic status variable more directly and examine the unique impact of its contribution to the model.
3. Given the relational influence of parents and the potential impact on identity development and ways of interacting with others, future research should incorporate a qualitative component to gather more in-depth information about the nature of these relationships and their impact on psychological distress.
4. Considering sexual orientation is part of one's identity, future research should include this variable and examine its impact, if any, on gender conformity and psychological distress.

Implications for Counseling Psychology

This study suggests that relational aggression is also a concern within the African-American college population and that efforts at targeting this should be focused and inclusive of both women and men. Given that some literature has revealed connections among adherence to traditional gender role norms, ethnic identity development, and relational aggression as they impact psychological distress, it behooves counseling training programs to educate students on the potential negative influences of these variables on client psychological well being. Facilitating clients in developing more self-awareness of how societal and cultural norms influence identity development and relational health could enhance the development of a stronger working alliance and, in turn, improve therapy outcomes. Likewise, this emphasis on multicultural competency training would better assist university counseling centers in

providing more accountability in the areas of individual, group therapy, and outreach with students of color.

In summary, because cultural sensitivity and competency have been identified as integral to evidence-based practice with clients, especially those of minority status, it is important that therapists have a general knowledge and understanding of relevant client contextual factors (e.g., gender role socialization, cultural influences, relational experiences), given their impact on values and beliefs and coping and relational skills. Ultimately, this integrative knowledge and understanding of clients' intersectional identities may help therapists better conceptualize client issues and promote greater client insight.

Table 1*Means, Standard Deviations, Alphas, and Intercorrelations for Predictor and Criterion**Variables for Women*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
1. CFNI	84	120.17	8.91	(.72)	-.04	.15	.68**
2. MEIM-R	104	21.88	4.81	-.04	(.92)	.15	-.17
3. IAS-T	88	61.93	19.43	.15	.15	(.96)	.54**
4. OQ-45	88	21.88	4.81	.68**	-.17	.54**	(.95)

Note: Cronbach's alphas are placed on diagonal.

** $p < .01$

Table 2*Means, Standard Deviations, Alphas, and Intercorrelations for Predictor and Criterion**Variables for Men*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
1. CMNI	30	112.66	15.59	(.92)	.16	.35	.05
2. MEIM-R	38	23.07	4.86	-.04	(.92)	.03	-.50*
3. IAS-T	35	61.82	20.48	.35	.03	(.96)	.48*
4. OQ-45	35	23.08	4.86	.05	-.50*	.48*	(.95)

Note: Cronbach's alphas are placed on diagonal.

* $p < .05$

Table 3*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Psychological**Distress in Women*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>ΔR²</i>
Step 1					
Gender Role Conformity (CFNI)	1.58	.39	.60	.46**	
Step 2					
Ethnic Identity Development (MEIM-R)	-.94	.72	-.20	.48	.02
Step 3					
Relational Aggression (IAS-T)	.56	.18	.47	.69**	.21**

** $p < .01$

Table 4

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Psychological Distress in Men.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>ΔR²</i>
Step 1					
Gender Role Conformity (CMNI)	-.19	.45	-.12	.003	
Step 2					
Ethnic Identity Development (MEIM-R)	-1.05	1.38	-.22	.04	.03
Step 3					
Relational Aggression (IAS-T)	.72	.36	.61	.36	.33

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APPENDIX A**Demographics Questionnaire – Information about You**

In order to successfully complete my study, please answer these questions to the best of your abilities. The information you provide will not be used to identify you in any way.

- 1) What is your age? _____
- 2) What year are you currently in at your university?
 - _____ 1) Freshman
 - _____ 2) Sophomore
 - _____ 3) Junior
 - _____ 4) Senior
 - _____ 5) Other
- 3) Currently, what is your major? _____
- 4) What ethnicity do you consider yourself?
 - _____ 1) African-American
 - _____ 2) Multi-ethnic
 - _____ 3) Other: Please specify _____
- 5) What is your family's yearly income?
 - _____ 1) Less than \$25,000
 - _____ 2) \$25,000 - \$35,000
 - _____ 3) \$36,000 - \$45,000
 - _____ 4) \$46,000 - \$55,000
 - _____ 5) \$56,000 - \$65,000
 - _____ 3) \$66,000 - \$75,000
 - _____ 4) \$76,000 - \$85,000
 - _____ 5) Over \$85,000
- 6) In what type of area did you grow up?
 - _____ 1) Very small city (population under 100,000)
 - _____ 2) Small city (population = 100,000-200,000)
 - _____ 3) Medium city (population = 200,000 – 500,000)
 - _____ 4) Large city (population = 500,000+)
- 7) What is your biological gender? _____

APPENDIX B

CMNI - 46

The following pages contain a series of statements about how people might think, feel or behave. The statements are designed to measure attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors associated with both traditional and non-traditional masculine gender roles.

Thinking about your own actions, feelings and beliefs, please indicate how much **you personally agree or disagree with each statement** by circling SD for "Strongly Disagree", D for "Disagree", A for "Agree", or SA for "Strongly agree" to the right of the statement. There are no right or wrong responses to the statements. You should give the responses that most accurately describe your personal actions, feelings and beliefs. It is best if you respond with your first impression when answering.

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. In general, I will do anything to win | SD D A SA |
| 2. If I could, I would frequently change sexual partners | SD D A SA |
| 3. I hate asking for help | SD D A SA |
| 4. I believe that violence is never justified | SD D A SA |
| 5. Being thought of as gay is not a bad thing | SD D A SA |
| 6. In general, I do not like risky situations | SD D A SA |
| 7. Winning is not my first priority | SD D A SA |
| 8. I enjoy taking risks | SD D A SA |
| 9. I am disgusted by any kind of violence | SD D A SA |
| 10. I ask for help when I need it | SD D A SA |
| 11. My work is the most important part of my life | SD D A SA |
| 12. I would only have sex if I was in a committed relationship | SD D A SA |
| 13. I bring up my feelings when talking to others | SD D A SA |
| 14. I would be furious if someone thought I was gay | SD D A SA |
| 15. I don't mind losing | SD D A SA |
| 16. I take risks | SD D A SA |
| 17. It would not bother me at all if someone thought I was gay | SD D A SA |
| 18. I never share my feelings | SD D A SA |
| 19. Sometimes violent action is necessary | SD D A SA |
| 20. In general, I control the women in my life | SD D A SA |

21. I would feel good if I had many sexual partners	SD D A SA
22. It is important for me to win	SD D A SA
23. I don't like giving all my attention to work	SD D A SA
24. It would be awful if people thought I was gay	SD D A SA
25. I like to talk about my feelings	SD D A SA
26. I never ask for help	SD D A SA
27. More often than not, losing does not bother me	SD D A SA
28. I frequently put myself in risky situations	SD D A SA
29. Women should be subservient to men	SD D A SA
30. I am willing to get into a physical fight if necessary	SD D A SA
31. I feel good when work is my first priority	SD D A SA
32. I tend to keep my feelings to myself	SD D A SA
33. Winning is not important to me	SD D A SA
34. Violence is almost never justified	SD D A SA
35. I am happiest when I'm risking danger	SD D A SA
36. It would be enjoyable to date more than one person at a time	SD D A SA
37. I would feel uncomfortable if someone thought I was gay	SD D A SA
38. I am not ashamed to ask for help	SD D A SA
39. Work comes first	SD D A SA
40. I tend to share my feelings	SD D A SA
41. No matter what the situation I would never act violently	SD D A SA
42. Things tend to be better when men are in charge	SD D A SA
43. It bothers me when I have to ask for help	SD D A SA
44. I love it when men are in charge of women	SD D A SA
45. I hate it when people ask me to talk about my feelings	SD D A SA
46. I try to avoid being perceived as gay	SD D A SA

APPENDIX C

CFNI - 45

The following pages contain a series of statements about how people might think, feel or behave. The statements are designed to measure attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors associated with both traditional and non-traditional feminine gender roles.

Thinking about your own actions, feelings and beliefs, please indicate how much **you personally agree or disagree with each statement** by circling SD for "Strongly Disagree", D for "Disagree", A for "Agree", or SA for "Strongly agree" to the right of the statement. There are no right or wrong responses to the statements. You should give the responses that most accurately describe your personal actions, feelings and beliefs. It is best if you respond with your first impression when answering.

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. I would be happier if I was thinner | SD D A SA |
| 2. It is important to keep your living space clean | SD D A SA |
| 3. I spend more than 30 minutes a day doing my hair and make-up | SD D A SA |
| 4. I tell everyone about my accomplishments | SD D A SA |
| 5. I clean my home on a regular basis | SD D A SA |
| 6. I feel attractive without makeup | SD D A SA |
| 7. I believe that my friendships should be maintained at all costs | SD D A SA |
| 8. I find children annoying | SD D A SA |
| 9. I would feel guilty if I had a one-night stand | SD D A SA |
| 10. When I succeed, I tell my friends about it | SD D A SA |
| 11. Having a romantic relationship is essential in life | SD D A SA |
| 12. I enjoy spending time making my living space look nice | SD D A SA |
| 13. Being nice to others is extremely important | SD D A SA |
| 14. I regularly wear makeup | SD D A SA |
| 15. I don't go out of my way to keep in touch with friends | SD D A SA |
| 16. Most people enjoy children more than I do | SD D A SA |
| 17. I would like to lose a few pounds | SD D A SA |
| 18. It is not necessary to be in a committed relationship to have sex | SD D A SA |
| 19. I hate telling people about my accomplishments | SD D A SA |
| 20. I get ready in the morning without looking in the mirror very much | SD D A SA |

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 21. I would feel burdened if I had to maintain a lot of friendships | SD D A SA |
| 22. I would feel comfortable having casual sex | SD D A SA |
| 23. I make it a point to get together with my friends regularly | SD D A SA |
| 24. I always downplay my achievements | SD D A SA |
| 25. Being in a romantic relationship is important | SD D A SA |
| 26. I don't care if my living space looks messy | SD D A SA |
| 27. I never wear make-up | SD D A SA |
| 28. I always try to make people feel special | SD D A SA |
| 29. I am not afraid to tell people about my achievements | SD D A SA |
| 30. My life plans do not rely on my having a romantic relationship | SD D A SA |
| 31. I am always trying to lose weight | SD D A SA |
| 32. I would only have sex with the person I love | SD D A SA |
| 33. When I have a romantic relationship, I enjoy focusing my energies on it | SD D A SA |
| 34. There is no point to cleaning because things will get dirty again | SD D A SA |
| 35. I am not afraid to hurt people's feelings to get what I want | SD D A SA |
| 36. Taking care of children is extremely fulfilling | SD D A SA |
| 37. I would be perfectly happy with myself even if I gained weight | SD D A SA |
| 38. If I were single, my life would be complete without a partner | SD D A SA |
| 39. I rarely go out of my way to act nice | SD D A SA |
| 40. I actively avoid children | SD D A SA |
| 41. I am terrified of gaining weight | SD D A SA |
| 42. I would only have sex if I was in a committed relationship like marriage | SD D A SA |
| 43. I like being around children | SD D A SA |
| 44. I don't feel guilty if I lose contact with a friend | SD D A SA |
| 45. I would be ashamed if someone thought I was mean | SD D A SA |

APPENDIX D**IAS-T**

Instructions: Below are statements about behaviors you might experience within current relationships. Think about your experiences and for each statement, circle the appropriate response. Responses should be for NON-ROMANTIC relationships only.

1. Turned other people against me

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

2. Played a nasty practical joke on me

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

3. Gained my confidence and then disclosed my secrets

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

4. Made fun of me in public

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

5. Excluded by a group

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

6. Called me names

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

7. Intentionally ignored by other person

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

8. Made other people not talk to me

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

9. Purposefully left me out of activities

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

10. Put undue pressure on me

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

11. Made me feel that I don't fit in

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

12. Used private in-jokes to exclude me

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

13. Gave me "dirty" looks

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

14. Used my feelings to coerce me

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

15. Made me feel inferior to them by their behavior/words

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

16. Spread rumors about me

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

17. Done something to try and make me look stupid

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

18. Used emotional blackmail on me

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

19. Used sarcasm to insult me

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

20. Used their relationship with me to try and get me to change a decision

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

21. Criticized me in public

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

22. Intentionally embarrassed me around others

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

23. Withheld information from me that the rest of the group is let in on

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

24. Made negative comments about my physical appearance

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

25. Used sarcasm to insult me

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

26. Pretended to be hurt and/or angry with me to make me feel bad about myself

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

27. Belittled me

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

28. Accused me of something while making it appear to be said in fun

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

29. Stopped talking to me

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

30. Took or damaged something that belonged to me

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

31. Omitted me from conversations on purpose

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

32. Talked about me behind my back

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

33. Tried to influence me by making me feel guilty

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

34. Snubbed (acted coldly to) me in public

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Regularly

35. Been “bitchy” towards me

1 - Never 2 - Once or Twice 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 – Regularly

APPENDIX E**MEIM-R**

Please complete the following questions. There is no right or wrong answer, so please answer honestly.

1) I have spent time exploring my ethnic group history and traditions

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 – Neither Disagree or Agree 4 - Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

2) I have a strong sense of belonging to my ethnic group

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 – Neither Disagree or Agree 4 - Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

3) I understand what ethnic group membership means to me

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 – Neither Disagree or Agree 4 - Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

4) I have done things to help me understand my ethnic group better

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 – Neither Disagree or Agree 4 - Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

5) I have talked to others as a way to learn more about my ethnic group

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 – Neither Disagree or Agree 4 - Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

6) I feel a strong attachment towards my ethnic group.

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 – Neither Disagree or Agree 4 - Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

APPENDIX F

Outcome Questionnaire (OQ™-45.2)

<p>Below is a list of problems and complaints that people sometimes have. Please read each one carefully. After you have done so, please put an “X” under the category to the right that best describes HOW MUCH DISCOMFORT THAT PROBLEM HAS CAUSED YOU DURING THE PAST WEEK INCLUDING TODAY. Mark only one space for each problem and do not skip any items.</p>	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost Always
1. I get along well with others.					
2. I tire quickly					
3. I feel no interest in things.					
4. I feel stressed at work/school.					
5. I blame myself for things.					
6. I feel irritated.					
7. I feel unhappy in my marriage/significant relationship.					
8. I have thoughts of ending my life.					
9. I feel weak.					
10. I feel fearful.					
11. After heavy drinking, I need a drink the next morning to get going. (If you do not drink, mark “never”)					
12. I find my work/school satisfying.					
13. I am a happy person.					
14. I work/study too much.					
15. I feel worthless.					

16. I am concerned about family troubles.					
17. I have an unfulfilling sex life.					
18. I feel lonely.					
19. I have frequent arguments.					
20. I feel loved and wanted.					
21. I enjoy my spare time.					
22. I have difficulty concentrating.					
23. I feel hopeless about the future.					
24. I like myself.					
25. Disturbing thoughts come into my mind that I cannot get rid of.					
26. I feel annoyed by people who criticize my drinking (or drug use) (If not applicable, mark "never")					
27. I have an upset stomach.					
28. I am not working/studying as well as I used to.					
29. My heart pounds too much.					
30. I have trouble getting along with friends and close acquaintances.					
31. I am satisfied with my life.					
32. I have trouble at work/school because of drinking (or drug use). (If not applicable, mark "never")					
33. I feel that something bad is going to happen.					
34. I have sore muscles.					
35. I feel afraid of open spaces, of driving, or being on buses, subways, and so forth.					
36. I feel nervous.					

37. I feel my love relationships are full and complete.					
38. I feel that I am not doing well at work/school.					
39. I have too many disagreements at work/school.					
40. I feel something is wrong with my mind.					
41. I have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.					
42. I feel blue.					
43. I am satisfied with my relationships with others.					
44. I feel angry enough at work/school to do something I might regret.					
45. I have headaches.					

Lambert and Burlingame, 1996

APPENDIX G

THE IMPACT OF GENDER ROLE CONFORMITY, ETHNIC IDENTITY, AND
RELATIONAL AGGRESSION ON PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG
AFRICAN-AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATES

A DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

JENNIFER B. GILLESPIE

Norman, Oklahoma

2011

Chapter One

Introduction

Overview

The phenomenon of human aggression and its consequences have been a focus in research literature for centuries (Storch, Bagner, Geffken, & Baumeister, 2004; Werner & Crick, 1999). Generally defined, aggression is a social phenomenon that occurs between two or more people, and inflicts harm in some way. A plausible explanation exists for the etiology of aggression – physical, indirect, relational, and otherwise – and holds truth across genders. Specifically, Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, and Kaukiainen (1992) proposed three different developmental stages of social intelligence, each having some overlap. Because age governs the advancement of language and reasoning skills, younger children who have yet to develop verbal and emotional coping skills naturally resort to more physical means of expression. The coping options for expression of aggression expand once verbal skills develop more fully. In other words, once an individual's social intelligence reaches a level where s/he is able to recognize and manipulate social relations, more subtle types of aggression may be utilized. Growth in social intelligence does not automatically mean that an individual will choose to manipulate relationships in such a way, as research has also shown that those with social intelligence and higher levels of empathy tend to do well with resolving conflict rather than initiating it (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 2000).

Historically, males have been viewed as more aggressive than females (Bjorkqvist, 1994). Buss (1961) claimed that aggression was typically “a male

phenomenon” and asserted that there was no use in exploring “female aggression” because it happened so infrequently. However, the aggression literature and research domain continues to grow, providing insight to diffuse the “myth” about females being non-aggressive (Bjorkqvist, 2001). Much of the focus of psychological research has been on physical aggression (i.e., hitting, fighting) (Basow, Cahill, Phelan, Longshore, & McGillicuddy-Delisi, 2007) to maintain dominance (Lento-Zwolinski, 2007). While research exists examining aggression among females, the quality and expression of the aggression appears somewhat different (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Basow et al., 2007; Bjorkqvist, 1994; Loudin, Loukas, & Robinson, 2003; Werner & Crick, 1999). More recently, aggression research has focused on less physical manifestations, such as indirect, social, and relational types of aggression (Bjorkqvist, 1994; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Galen & Underwood, 1997).

It should be noted that a debate exists in the literature regarding the above-mentioned terms. Some researchers (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Bjorkqvist, 2001) argue that these three terms are very similar, while others (Basow et al., 2007; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) argue for the value in clearly distinguishing these terms. These scholars, along with Werner & Crick (1999), conceptualize relational aggression as a TYPE of indirect aggression in which the goal is to damage peer relationships via a number of harmful behaviors including social exclusion and withholding feelings of acceptance. Also, they assert that relational aggression takes place within well-established or connected friendships, and tends to involve several behaviors intended to manipulate and/or sever friendships. These aggressive behaviors can range from giving someone the “silent treatment” to spreading rumors in order to damage social status,

allowing for the possibility of more hurt to be meted out by others in the peer circle. Additionally, Merrell, Buchanan, and Tran (2006) propose that relational aggression is not indirect by nature, and can involve direct aggression (name calling). Social aggression is a broader term that includes behaviors that manipulate relationships, such as exclusion and rumor-spreading, as well as negative body language, such as rolling of the eyes and adverse facial expressions and gestures (Galen & Underwood, 1997), public confrontation, and physical violence (Xie, Swift, Cairns, & Cairns, 2002). Furthermore, social aggression typically occurs between acquaintances rather than close friends (Xie et al., 2002). Bjorkqvist (1994) coined the term indirect aggression in his research with aggression among older adults in the workplace, and these behaviors include criticizing and interrupting, and rumor-spreading. While there is some overlap among conceptualization of these different terminologies, there are also clear differences. To that end, the construct of relational aggression is deemed a better fit for the variables of interest in this study and will be utilized accordingly.

Humans are interdependent beings (Jordan, 1997). Often times, traditional Western theories of development overlook this crucial reality, ultimately downplaying the importance of the role healthy relationships play in identity development (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Also, these traditional theories of human development are largely based on what some believe to be normal development for males (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Conceptually, this “healthy” development includes a process of differentiation, and emphasizes individuation and autonomy (Jordan, 1997). Relational theorists, however, began to question these established notions, initially because women’s development was being explored and compared to men’s using such theories, if at all (Jordan, 1997;

Miller, 1991). As relational theory has evolved, its emphasis has been on necessary concepts and processes for healthy human development, for women and men. More specifically, relational perspectives view relationships as central to identity development, posit that psychological growth occurs as a process of collaboration rather than differentiation, and assert that healthy relationships are characterized by experiences of connection, mutuality, and empathy (Genero, Miller, Surrey, & Baldwin, 1992; Jordan, 1991b; Walker, 2004).

Walker (2004) defined connection as an experience with others involving warmth, interpersonal congruence, and the “respectful negotiation of difference” which, in turn, influences growth and perhaps the development of additional depth or dimensions within the relationship. Walker is clear to make the distinction between the preceding definition of connection and aspects commonly associated with this term (e.g., a relationship in which people connect because of similar personalities and interests, or because one person can help the other achieve something), as it lacks the inclusion of the *active process* necessary in relationships and the essential quality of respect that must occur within this process for development and growth.

Mutuality is a concept that has been considered an important contributor in relationships regarded as positive (Fehr, 1996; Genero et al., 1992; Jordan, 1991a) and has been defined as a process in which people interact and gradually develop a distinctive way of relating (Fehr). This way of relating is more personal, as the emphasis on cultured norms is minimized, and there is an investment present in cultivating and maintaining that relationship (Fehr). Empathy is considered a

somewhat complex emotion, as its foundational base is respect (Walker, 2004), and it requires an individual's ability to access personal emotions while joining with another in his or her experiences and maintaining cognitive awareness of the sources of these sets of emotions (Walker, 2002).

In general, characteristics considered positive and healthy in relationships according to relational theorists are traits that tend to be associated with females rather than characteristics associated with men (Jordan, 1997). Why is this so? Long (1989) discussed the crucial need for social scientists to be aware of the effects of gender-role conditioning on mental health. During developmental periods, motivational differences and cultural expectations exist based on gender (Sandstrom & Cillessen, 2010). In other words, powerful Western socio-cultural messages still exist that have significant impact on the way men and women develop (Miller, 1991). Thus, it is no secret that these societal messages reinforce different relational qualities and skills for men and women. For example, males engage in larger, structured group activities that are inclined to place more emphasis on the importance of power and dominance within interpersonal interactions (Bergman, 1991; Sandstrom & Cillessen, 2010). On the other hand, females are socialized in circles consisting of smaller, more connected groups which may place more value on intimacy, belonging, and relational orientation (Miller, 1991; Sandstrom & Cillessen). The implications for the development of these rigid roles in men and women have meaningful implications that should be openly recognized and discussed, especially since patriarchal cultures have historically viewed relational "female" qualities as weaknesses (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

Socialization and identity are not limited to gender; race, ethnicity, and culture play major roles in this development as well. Identity formation is complex, even when race and ethnicity are not considered, but for minorities, or those of mixed heritage, this process can be even more complicated due to multiple identifications (Phinney, 2010). Although race and ethnicity are constructs often used interchangeably, each term embodies unique characteristics. The term race has fundamental roots in describing visible, biological features of an individual (e.g., skin color, genetic features), and, more recently, has been viewed as a sociopolitical construct. The concept of ethnicity describes groups who share cultural values and traditions, and speaks to the awareness and appreciation for one's sense of identity as it relates to these cultural beliefs and practices (Day-Vines, Wood, Grothaus, Craigen, Holman, Dotson-Blake, & Douglass, 2007). These separate, yet related, terms are valuable when considering identity development. Because of the limited body of research that exists examining the contributions these constructs provide in the realm of human development, it remains important to conduct additional research exploring the contribution of factors such as gender conformity and ethnic identity development on the manifestations of relational aggression and potential implications for psychological distress.

Statement of the Problem

Regardless of the debate over terminology, non-physical aggression is a serious problem in today's society with meaningful implications for the interpersonal functioning of males and females of all ages. For the purposes of this study, the term relational aggression will be used because of the emphasis on this type of aggression taking place in well-established and connected peer relationships, versus aggressive

interactions with acquaintances, strangers, or fellow employees, in which the dynamic typically is not as personal or attached. Relational aggression can potentially impact an individual's development and social and psychological adjustment (Werner & Crick, 1999). Consistent with relational theory, it is through healthy, meaningful relationships that the sense of self evolves. When those relational needs are not met, psychological distress can, and usually does, occur (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick & Nelson, 2002).

To date, many studies have examined relational aggression among female, younger adolescent populations, with more recent efforts concentrating on this phenomenon within older adolescent and young adult populations and with males. Although the literature suggests these types of relationships and experiences exist for females, it is also apparent that males who suffer from group exclusion and relational aggression also experience distress (Swearer, Turner, & Givens, 2008). In other words, what appears as a "gender dichotomy" in the aggression literature is not so clear-cut, and perhaps oversimplified (Swearer, 2008). Gender role identity and the degree to which an individual prescribes to traditional male and female characteristics may have some influence on these findings. Therefore, examining gender role adherence, rather than biological gender, may be more relevant when attempting to understand relational aggression (Kolbert, Field, Crothers, & Schreiber, 2010) and the psychological effects on those who experience it. Few studies have assessed the relationship between gender conformity and relational aggression, presenting a limitation within the existing body of research. Another significant limitation worth mentioning is the fact that the majority of studies researching aspects of relational aggression have been comprised of predominantly White, suburban children. There is a concern about relational aggression

within the African-American urban community, and the potential process of how these subtle aggressive behaviors may escalate into more retaliatory physical forms of aggression (Farrell, Erwin, Allison, Meye, Sullivan, Camou et al., 2007; Talbott, Celinska, Simpson, & Coe, 2002). Even fewer studies exist within this body of research that include diverse samples and/or examine what role, if any, ethnic identity may play in the development or manifestation of relational aggression.

Relational aggression has been associated with several varying symptoms of psychological distress, including depression (Gomes, Baker, & Servonsky, 2009), loneliness (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), and peer difficulties (Loudin, Loukas, & Robinson, 2003). Scholars (Lento-Zwolinski, 2007; Nelson, Springer, Nelson, & Bean, 2008; Storch, Bagner, Geffken, & Baumeister, 2004; Storch, Brassard, & Masia-Warner, 2003b; Werner & Crick, 1999) have expressed the need for continued research in the field of relational aggression to further an understanding of its impact on psychological distress not only in young adults (e.g., undergraduate college students), but also with more diverse populations (i.e., ethnic/racial identity, SES, etc.) (Farrell et al., 2007; Talbott et al., 2002; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009). Thus the proposed study is designed to shed new light on this particular area. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationships among gender role conformity, ethnic identity, and experiences of relational aggression as they contribute to psychological stress.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) (Jordan, 1997; Miller, 1986) is a process model that is somewhat unique and provides a useful framework through which gender and cultural influences on patterns of relating can be better understood. RCT posits that a person's sense of self develops and continues to evolve through meaningful connections in relationships with people (Miller & Stiver, 1997). The meaningful connections that impact the growth of a person are characterized by four distinguishable constructs: (a) mutual engagement, defined as mutual involvement, commitment, compassion and empathy in relationships; (b) authenticity, defined as increased ability to be one's true self in relationships, with the awareness of the potential impact on the other person and respectful acknowledgment and encouragement of the expression of different voices; (c) empowerment, defined as the personal experience of strength and encouragement that emerges from the relationship and inspires movement and action; and (d) the ability to process through differences and/or conflicts in a way that is effective and fosters mutual engagement (Miller & Stiver, 1997). The lack of such qualities in relational interactions contributes greatly to the absence of interpersonal connection, contributing to feelings of loneliness and isolation (Jordan, 1997). Among the results of these disconnections in relationships are the internalization of negative feelings and the development of growth-inhibiting

relational images (templates for relational style and interactions) (Miller & Stiver).

Miller & Stiver said:

To talk of participating in others' psychological development, then, is to talk about a form of activity that is essential to human life. In general, our society has assigned this fundamental activity – and distinctive knowledge it entails – to women. It is significant that this knowledge had been long ignored in our psychological theories and demeaned in our larger culture, yet it is from this perspective that a new vision of psychological and emotional health for all people may be glimpsed. (p. 17)

The relational images that individuals bring into relational experiences are complex and provide meaning for future relationships (Walker, 2002). As a function of individuals being different in many ways, disconnection is inevitable. Immediate consequences of disconnection may be sadness, upset, or confusion. However, the long-term consequences of chronic, serious disconnections have much larger implications for functioning (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Those individuals who experience repeated instances of disconnection in relationships learn to silence their voices and hide pieces of themselves, ultimately keeping them distant in relationships despite the semblance of safety, connection, and acceptance (Miller & Stiver). Miller & Stiver refer to situations such as these as central relational paradoxes because of the struggle to maintain a personal sense of safety while yearning for the experiences of mutuality and authenticity. Walker (2004) adds that engaging in these strategies is often an unconscious process. When discussed on a conscious level, individuals may

even indicate how unfulfilling current relationships are as a result of unhealthy interpersonal functioning (Miller & Stiver), further illustrating the intricate nature of this paradox.

Another vital piece of RCT is the awareness and acknowledgment of the importance that contextual factors and societal messages related to power and culture have in identity development (i.e., social, ethnic, gender) for individuals. This emphasis is a positive progression from the initial development of the theory based mainly on the experiences of White, middle class women (Enns, 2004). Walker (2002) expressed that how people present in relationships is the direct result of being “raced, engendered, sexualized, and situated” (p. 2) according to several socio-cultural agendas. These experiences are not limited to gender, however. Although RCT was initially developed to describe and contrast the psychological growth of women, the research has continued to expand, validating the importance of its application with males (Bergman, 1995; Cochran, 2006; Frey, Beesley, & Miller, 2006; Frey, Beesley, & Newman, 2005; Frey, Tobin, & Beesley, 2004). Many of the traditional Western theories overlook the importance of the influence of people and relationships on male development. Furthermore, Bergman (1995) described these traditional Western theories as “quite superficial and fairly irrelevant to the deeper, more whole levels” (p. 3), and offered a relational perspective of male psychological development. He indicated that from an early age, males are socialized to seek value in competition and comparison with others at the expense of experiencing the “primary desire” for connections involving mutuality, authenticity, and empowerment. Rather, the idea of maintaining connection with men through conflict and aggression shapes identity

development for males by limiting ways of interacting and affective coping strategies (Bergman, 1995; Cochran, 2006). Although males may hold more power and privilege in patriarchic society overall, the messages of appropriate ways of behaving and interacting in relationship (with women as well as other men) are oppressive to some, and lead to concomitant psychological distress.

Thus, RCT informs the current study in several ways. Our current culture is one of disconnection (Walker, 2002), and mutuality is an experience that is not pervasive in society. Walker spoke of the consequences of cultural non-mutuality, expressing how this influences individual inauthenticity of the self, as well as with others. It is this creation of negative relational images that makes it difficult to develop new, healthier images and possibilities for growth-enhancing action in relationships.

Peer Relational Aggression and Psychological Distress

Relational aggression is considered a group process (Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003) and has been associated with depression, loneliness, hostility, social difficulties, and social anxiety (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Gros, Gros, & Simms, 2010; Lento-Zwolinski, 2007; Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001; Storch, Phil, Nock, Masia-Warner, & Barlas, 2003a). Despite the terminology debate that exists, several scholars advocate for the inclusion and maintenance of the term relational aggression within the aggression literature, as a subset within this concept offers a unique and meaningful difference from social aggression, specifically relational manipulation (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Gomes (2007) spoke of themes that exist in the literature exploring aspects related to relational aggression including: (a) the

sense of a power imbalance within the relationship, e.g., if the interpersonal dynamic was shared (“power-with” rather than “power-over”) between the victim and the aggressor, then the aggressor would not feel empowered to behave in such a way; (b) the desire and intent to negatively manipulate the relationship in order to suit individual wants/needs of the perpetrator; (c) the lack of empathy from the aggressor, and the good feeling received from exerting control and power over another’s feelings and relationships; and (d) the unsuspecting nature of relational aggression, meaning that people are often unaware of its existence due to its possible subtleness unless they are enmeshed in that culture.

Parenting Influences. The idea of relational aggression being unsuspecting, as Gomes (2007) termed it, is an interesting point to think about, and perhaps speaks directly to the influence of Westernized culture on people’s (parents and children) perceptions of the acceptability of behaviors characterized as relationally aggressive. It seems important to acknowledge the body of literature that exists examining different aspects of parent-child interactions related to experiences with relational aggression. The literature is somewhat limited in teasing out the specific relationships among parenting, parent-child interaction, and relational aggression (Brown, Arnold, Doobs, & Doctoroff, 2006), but these initial relationships are important as they potentially serve as templates of interacting (Miller & Stiver, 1997). For example, a study examining the relationship between parenting styles and 12th graders’ use of relational aggression with peers conducted by Soenens and Vansteenkiste (2008) yielded interesting results. That is, parental psychological control (defined as parenting characterized by intrusiveness and manipulative strategies such as guilt induction, withdrawal, and shaming to get the

adolescent to be compliant to the parents' wants) was a positive predictor of the child engaging in similar relationally aggressive ways. This style of parenting was also a positive predictor of loneliness for the high-schoolers, and a negative predictor of friendship quality. No gender differences were found for engaging in relationally aggressive behaviors or the reported experiences of loneliness.

Another study exploring the connection between parent/child interactions and relational aggression took a slightly different turn, as these authors (Casas, Wiegel, Crick, Ostrov, Woods, & Jansen et al., 2006) looked specifically at the parental attachment styles of young children (ages 2-6). Results indicated a strong correlation between attachment and relational aggression. Insecure attachment for the preschool girls and their mothers was positively correlated with relationally aggressive behaviors, even at this young age. Also, there was a significant association between preschool boys' insecure attachment with fathers and engagement in relationally aggressive behaviors. Yet another study examined parent and child perceptions of relational aggression, and is somewhat unique in that: (a) strategies for coping with being a victim of relational aggression were examined, and (b) the sample consisted of low-income, urban, predominantly African-American families (children ages 9-11) (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009). Results from this study were enlightening; namely, 60% of the boys reported experiences of relational aggression as occurring frequently, while only 28% of the boys' parents perceived this as happening sometimes. In contrast, 55% of the girls reported experiencing relational aggression frequently, while only 44% of the girls' parents believed this was occurring in their daughters close friendships. There was additional discordance among children and parents' perceptions

of harmfulness of relational aggression, with parents of the boys' not perceiving ANY relational aggressive behaviors as harmful, while the boys rated "friendship broken up on purpose" and "telling secrets" as being significantly harmful to them. One of the last remarkable outcomes of this study showed that most of the children (male and female) employed avoidance and denial strategies to cope the majority of the time, and when they did seek support, parents were last on the list. In contrast, the majority of the parents believed that their child would seek them out for support first (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009).

Although each of the above-mentioned articles speaks to the influence of parent-child interaction slightly differently, the main point is that this dynamic impacts (a) the way a child interacts with his/her peers and how relationally aggressive behaviors are potentially maintained through younger and older adolescence, (b) the lack of awareness and/or understanding of the stress associated relational aggression, and (c) the maladaptive ways in which children learn to cope with being victims of this type of aggression. In addition, these studies help clarify how early the aggressor and victim behaviors begin as well as how these behaviors serve as predictors of future behavior and coping.

Relational Aggression and Gender. As discussed previously, general interactions with caregivers, as well as with other friends and family, influence perceptions of aggression and are apparent contributors to engagement in and acceptance of certain behaviors (Coyne, Archer, Eslea, & Liechty, 2008; Linder, Crick, & Collins, 2002). To further illustrate, a qualitative study exploring early adolescents'

perceptions of relational aggression, specifically perceptions of behavioral acceptability and justification, yielded interesting results (Goldstein & Tisak, 2010). For example, gossip was considered more hurtful and unacceptable when compared to beliefs about the actual exclusion of peers from the circle of friends. Upon further examination, this finding would seem to be consistent with adolescent development in that it illustrates the fact that adolescents often focus on their situation in the short run without considering the potential longer-term impact. Coyne and colleagues (2008) examined early adolescent perceptions of indirect forms of relational aggression through use of video with boy-on-boy aggression and girl-on-girl aggression. Indirect forms of relational aggression focused on relational manipulation and harmful intent in more subtle ways. The behaviors in the videos were identical, and the only visible difference was gender. Authors hypothesized that the girl-on-girl relational aggression would be viewed as more acceptable by peers; however, results indicated the opposite. Peers that viewed the boys engaging in relational aggression believed the aggressor was more justified in his actions. Something noteworthy is the fact that the participants who viewed the boys' interactions did not have empathy for the victim, and did not consider the relational aggression more normal than those who viewed the girls engaging in relational aggression. The myth that relational aggression may be perceived as common and hurtful in only female circles speaks to the importance of studying relational aggression in male peer groups as well (Coyne et al.).

Nelson, Springer, Nelson, and Bean (2008) discuss the importance of normative perceptions and beliefs related to aggression in emerging adulthood, a unique developmental period characterized by the increased focus on relationships. After

examining these beliefs in an undergraduate student population, the authors describe female aggression as more relational and non-verbal. In contrast, aggression associated with males was more direct and physical in nature. A finding of note in this study was the predominance of females engaging in relational aggression against men. More recently, Linder, Werner, and Lyle (2010) conducted a study with undergraduate students exploring the relationship among normative beliefs about relational aggression, justification of aggression, and hostile attributions of intent. To illustrate, the women and men who held more positive beliefs about the acceptability of relational aggression reported engaging in higher levels of these types of behaviors. Basow, Cahill, Phelan, Longshore, and McGillicuddy-DeLisi (2007) conducted a similar study examining the gendered perceptions of different types of aggression with college students. Results yielded several relevant points. As predicted by the authors, women and men viewed physical aggression as more harmful when the aggressor was a man, and the target was a woman. Of particular interest was the finding that relational aggression was viewed as less acceptable and more harmful to females regardless of the gender of the aggressor, but men and women reported experiencing similar amounts of this type of aggression (Basow et al.).

A recent article assessing the harmfulness of aggression showed that the participants (ages 11-15) perceived direct and indirect forms relational aggression as the most harmful type of aggression (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006). Overall, there were no gender differences in the amount of aggression reported; however, girls reported more gossiping and back-biting, and the boys indicated more physical aggression (i.e., hitting). In 2010, Kistner, Counts-Allan, Dunkel, Drew, David-Ferdon,

and Lopez examined the gender differences in relational and overt aggression in 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders. Using scores obtained from peer nominations, 3rd grade boys received more peer nominations for relational aggression than the girls, and these remained steady through 5th grade. Nominations for the girls' use of relational aggression increased as girls went into 4th and 5th grades. Interestingly, the increase in girls' connection and intimacy were predictive of increases in use of relational aggression (Kistner et al.). Also, Grotper and Crick (1996) characterized relationships of relationally aggressive females as containing higher levels of intimacy, jealousy, and exclusivity. Additionally, a study that examined the relationship between the use of relational aggression and negative self-representations in young adolescent females showed that those negative self-images were highly predictive of relational aggression (Moretti et al., 2001).

In 2003, Xie, Farmer, and Cairns conducted a study investigating different forms of aggression (social aggression, direct relational aggression, physical aggression, and verbal aggression) with inner-city African-American 1st, 4th, and 7th grade boys and girls. Social aggression was operationalized as non-confrontational actions (gossiping, isolation, exclusion, and stealing romantic partners) employed to damage connections and personal relationships. Direct relational aggressive behaviors were defined as those actions employed to damage an interpersonal relationship through confrontational strategies, typically involving the relationship between two people. Verbal aggression was defined as hostile behaviors such as yelling, name calling, and threats. Higher levels of physical aggression and lower levels of direct

relational aggression were reported in males. No gender differences were observed in any of the aggressive behaviors for grades 1 and 4, except with social aggression.

Obviously, relational aggression creates distance in relationships (Crick et al., 2002) despite the paradoxical fear of yearning for healthy relationships characterized by connection, acceptance, and empathy (Jordan, 1997; Miller, 1991). Initial studies examining relational aggression and psychological distress suggest that females struggle more with this relational paradox than males (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick, 1996). However, more recently, research has shown mixed findings related to gender differences in relational types of aggression (Basow et al., 2004; Crick et al., 1999; Underwood, 2003). Several studies report no or weak gender differences within the younger or older populations (Richardson & Green, 1999; Rys & Bear, 1997; Rose, Swenson, & Waller, 2004; Walker, Richardson, & Green, 2000). Despite the mixed gender findings subsumed within the larger body of literature, studies have consistently shown that relational aggression contributes uniquely to future psychological and social maladjustment for those who experience it – males and females alike (Crick, 1996; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001).

The Empathy Connection. One variable consistently identified as impacting perceptions of and engagement in relationally aggressive behaviors is empathy (Coyne et al., 2008). More specifically, Gomes (2007) reported the lack of empathy as being a consistent theme throughout the relational aggression literature. For instance, Kaukianen, Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, Osterman, Almivalli, Rothberg et al. (1999) studied

the relationship between empathy and relational aggression with 10, 12, and 14-year-old males and females. Empathy was significantly negatively correlated with higher levels of engagement in relational aggression among the 10-year-old and 14-year-old male and female participants. Also, Loudin, Loukas, and Robinson (2003) explored contributions of social anxiety and empathy to relational aggression in college students. They also examined the relationship between gender and empathy. Overall results showed that male and female students who were anxious about negative peer evaluation and possessed less skill in perspective taking were more likely to engage in relationally aggressive behaviors. In this sample of college males indicated greater use of relational aggression than did their female peers. Also, lower levels of empathy were associated with higher levels of relational aggression for the males only. Thus, it appears that empathy is a variable that plays a distinctive role in the manifestation and experience of relational aggression.

Relational Aggression and Older Adolescents and Young Adults. As alluded to previously, the literature examining relational aggression in older adolescent and young adult populations is becoming more of an interest for researchers, but is still somewhat limited. Werner and Crick (1999) studied relational aggression among females on a college campus and found that a significant correlation with several indicators of maladaptive interpersonal conflict resolve. Also, several studies have shown that females increases as females become older, despite the recognition and potential increase in interpersonal awareness and savvy (Crick, 1995; Crick et al., 1996). A longitudinal study examining the effects of experiences of relational aggression and perceived popularity among high school students yielded significant

results related to distress and adjustment issues for both males and females (Sandstrom & Cillessen, 2010). Specifically, males who reported experiencing higher levels of relational aggression and perceived themselves to be “less popular” while in high school, also indicated higher levels of depression and overall psychological distress as young adults. Results for females were slightly different, as higher levels of relational aggression in high school females were associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms, but higher levels of experienced victimization in the workplace as young adults. Several hypotheses can be gleaned from these findings, as they appear to speak to many of the broader, more covert messages perpetuated within society. For example, do the characteristics that contribute to male popularity also help portray a more socially acceptable picture of what a “man” really is (e.g., dominance, assertiveness, prestige, etc.), and, in turn, act as a shield from aggressive behaviors (Sandstrom & Cillessen). Also, if a male does not possess those personality traits or conform to traditional Western male norms, is he considered effeminate, and thus an easier target for victimization and aggression? Perhaps it’s the messages such as those mentioned above that contribute to how males may choose to handle experiences of relational aggression and the resulting depression and distress. As for females, Sandstrom and Cillessen suggest that those who continue to experience relational aggression in the workplace as they enter young adulthood may do so in order to maintain status and popularity with others, no matter the setting. Similar results were also found when exploring the extent and reasons for females’ use of relational aggression, but with girls in elementary school settings (Rose et al., 2004). These

results, among others, serve to reemphasize need for continued research on relational aggression in older populations.

Gender Role Conformity, Relational Aggression, and Psychological Distress

As alluded to previously, a substantial amount of research exists examining relational aggression and gender differences in aggressive behavior; however, some scholars believe that the emphasis on gender effects rather than adherence to gender roles in predicting aggression is somewhat misplaced (Reidy, Sloan, & Zeichner, 2008; Richardson & Hammock, 2006). Biological distinctions between males and females do influence gender role development, but other expectations rooted in societal, community, and family values are arguably more influential (Cross & Madson, 1997; Rose & Rudolph, 2006; Skidmore, Linsenmeir, & Bailey, 2006). In 1991, Miller proposed that Western socio-cultural influences shape the gender role development of men and women, and while these messages may gel well with some, others experience role conflict and concomitant psychological distress. To illustrate, research highlights the tendency of males to engage in larger group activities that place more value on the importance of power and dominance within interpersonal interactions (Bergman, 1991; Sandstrom & Cillessen, 2010). On the other hand, females tend to be socialized in smaller, more connected peer circles which are more relational in nature and place more emphasis on intimacy and belonging (Miller, 1991; Sandstrom & Cillessen 2010).

These sociocultural influences appear to emanate from patriarchal cultures and have historically viewed relational “female” qualities as weaknesses (Miller, 1991). This is a very powerful message, and undoubtedly contributes to the way individuals

view themselves (Cross & Madson, 1997). For females, conformity to feminine cultural norms influences women's lives across differing realms, including relationships and mental health (Philpot, Brooks, Lusteran, & Nutt, 2003; Worell & Johnson, 2004). Nevertheless, in a society "that construes power hierarchically, prescriptive feminine norms serve to constrain and disempower women" (Parent & Moradi, 2010, p. 105), it remains important to assess specific norms while also examining them in the context of how society construes the meaning of femininity. As for men, Pollack (2006) suggests that males are locked into certain roles that continue to be enforced by cultural shaming or the "Boy Code", which states that any male who shows any form of vulnerability is considered feminine, which, in turn, implies that he is gay, less than, or flawed. Some scholars (e.g., Swearer, Turner, & Givens, 2008) suggest that this type of perceived weakness in males increases the risk of being relationally aggressed against. To illustrate, Mahalik, Locke, Ludlow, Diemer, Scott, Gottfried, & Freitas, (2003) conducted a study in which high levels of conformity to male norms were positively and significantly correlated with psychological distress and aggression. Further, higher levels of gender conformity were significantly, and negatively, correlated with attitudes towards psychological help-seeking.

Studies have also been conducted (Frey et al, 2004; Stokes & Levin, 1986) in which the quality and health of male and female relationships were examined, and gender was highly correlated with preference for differing relational domains. Specifically, men preferred community/group relationships and women preferred dyadic peer relationships (Stokes & Levin, 1986) or both dyadic and community relationships (Frey et al., 2004). This information provides a rationale for thinking

about and exploring how gender socialization influences the way in which men and women navigate relationships. Additionally, these findings speak to the importance of the quality of relationships and relational health for both genders.

Suffice it to say, scholars are generally in agreement with the fact that gender roles are heavily socialized (Richardson & Hammock, 2006) and, in Western society, tend to be associated with power (Eagly, 1983). Campbell & Muncer (1994) argue that male and female social roles result in different social representations of aggression, stating that females may more likely view aggression as anger or loss of control rather than an attempt to gain control over others as some males would. Therefore, a person's social role is also likely to influence what behaviors are deemed more appropriate ways of expressing aggression. This fact may influence ideas of acceptability, but there is ample evidence that the effects of aggression, specifically relational aggression, are harmful for both genders (Campbell, Muncer, & Coyle, 1992). To illustrate, a study by Swearer et al. (2008) examined the effects of high school males' perceptions of experiences with bullying, specifically verbal taunting and harassment, related to gender conformity (i.e., "They say I'm gay"). Results from this research indicate that males bullied for gender nonconformity reported higher levels of "verbal bullying" as well as distress, anxiety, and depression. Further, these males endorsed more negative perceptions of the environment at school. Along a similar line, Walker, Richardson, and Green (2000) examined how gender versus gender role conformity influenced experiences with the broader construct of indirect aggression in an adult population. They found that gender role, specifically masculinity, was strongly associated with reports of indirect aggression. Particularly, individuals who reported engaging in these

behaviors characterized themselves as being assertive, competitive, and oriented to “getting things done” (p. 152). Results also showed that indirect aggression was used much more frequently than direct means of aggressing.

Yet another study examining gender role conformity and relational aggression took a slightly different approach. Specifically, Reidy, Sloan, and Zeichner (2008) looked at how masculine and feminine gender role conformity played out, but only in females and only with direct peer physical aggression. Results indicated that females reported more physical aggression towards other females who did not conform to typical female gender norms. Also, self-endorsement of more masculine traits in the female aggressors was positively correlated with self-reports of physical aggression. Femininity was unrelated to physically aggressive behaviors, and negatively correlated with self-reports of aggression.

There have also been discussions about how sexual orientation may relate to gender conformity, thus contributing to psychological distress. Although some studies have shown that gender nonconformity in childhood is linked to adult homosexuality, there has been no causal connection established between the two, and the relationship between these constructs remains largely unclear (Skidmore, Linsenmeier, & Bailey, 2006). Evidence suggests, however, that this relationship does not exist for all lesbians or gay men (Bailey & Zucker, 1995) and that a large number of gay men defeminize as they continue in adulthood (Taywaditep, 2001). Skidmore and colleagues (2005) conducted a fascinating study examining the relationships among gender nonconformity and psychological distress in lesbians and gay men using self-report

measures of childhood and adult gender nonconformity, as well as observer ratings of current behavior. In this study, gender nonconformity was related to psychological distress, but only for gay men. Also, contrary to the authors' expectations, lesbians and gay men reported more positive attitudes towards gender conformity than nonconformity. Several possible explanations were offered for this, including (a) they used "masculine and feminine endpoints on a bipolar scale....implying that a person must be closer to one than the other on a given trait" (p. 693), and (b) participants may have suppressed certain aspects of self, intentionally or unintentionally. These explanations speak directly to the complex nature of socialization and conformity. The idea that a person's sexual orientation may dictate "the need" for them to fall on one end or the other of the gender conformity continuum is a misperception that seems to hold truth in society as a whole. In addition, the speculation of research participants possibly silencing parts of self, intentionally or not, indicates the amount of potential power cultural and societal messages have on individuals.

In summary, the literature that exists on gender role conformity and psychological well-being is limited and mixed, and the research examining the interrelationships among gender role conformity, relational aggression, and psychological distress is sparse indeed. It is, however, interesting to note how that more research appears to have been conducted on the relationship between men's gender conformity and psychological distress compared to women. Perhaps this is because some believe that the socialization process is harsher for men (Long, 1989). Despite the apparent need for male gender conformity studies, there remains an even

greater need for studying this dynamic in female populations, especially as it relates to experiences of relational aggression.

Ethnic Identity, Gender Role Conformity, Relational Aggression, and Psychological Distress

With the passage of time, the racial and ethnic composition in the United States continues to evolve (Phinney, 1996). Erickson (1964) spoke of an achieved identity being desirable for healthy development, stating that: “True identity depends on the support which the young receive from the collective sense of identity which social groups assign to [them]: [their] class, [their] nationality, [their] culture” (p. 93). Erickson identifies how cultural messages influence the concept of identity and self, beginning fairly early in life. Considering the complexity and fluidity of identity development, it becomes important to consider how race and ethnicity influence this process on a continuum. Vines and her colleagues (2007), as well as Phinney (1996), suggested that race and ethnicity play crucial roles in the presenting issues of clients in mental health agencies, further indicating the potential impact these variables potentially have on psychological distress.

As previously mentioned, race and ethnicity are terms that, at times, are used interchangeably despite differences within the constructs. For the purposes of this study, the term ethnicity will be utilized, as this construct conceptually incorporates characteristics of how the term race has been discussed. Phinney (1996) spoke of the psychological importance race provides in terms of understanding how an individual is viewed, and responded to, largely on the basis of visible features such as skin color and

body features. With respect to the implications of such responses to visible differences, and reflecting on how great an impact (positive and/or negative) this has for people and evolving identities, these racial aspects are incorporated into the aspects of ethnicity that are also considered psychologically important (Phinney). Thus ethnic identity appears to be a multidimensional construct that has been defined as central to one's sense of membership and feelings associated with membership in a particular ethnic group (Phinney, 1990; Phinney; 1996), and is different for each member within that group. Phinney (1996) also notes that individuals tend to maintain a level of ethnic identity strength despite the number of direct cultural experiences they have.

Additionally, different facets of ethnicity (cultural beliefs, values, and behaviors) may contribute to a person's psychological well-being, distress, or relational style. These facets help differentiate ethnic groups, the individual's personal sense of ethnic identity within their ethnic group, and situations and events associated with minority status (i.e., discrimination, oppression, powerlessness) (Phinney). Therefore, it is important to consider current experiences typically associated with minority status, and also the intergenerational impact and influence of relational images created and maintained by experiences of discrimination (Walker, 2002). Walker warned that as cultural norms become more indistinct, the ambivalences that are maintained due to older relational templates are likely to worsen. Miller (1991) declared that:

We all live in a world in which some people, or groups of people, hold power over others based on differences in age, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or other factors. When power inequities-whether real or assumed – are present, disconnections can readily occur. Furthermore, the experience of growing up

and living within such a 'power-over' framework influences all of our actions, even in the most personal situations and even when there is no power differential present. (p. 12)

It seems virtually impossible to dismiss the power in these words, specifically for those living in a world where membership in a group considered different and/or less than based on various characteristics, including ethnicity, may contribute to relational disconnection and, in turn, psychological distress.

Therefore, working from the assumption that ethnicity serves as a powerful and meaningful component of one's central identity, it remains important to further examine its link with psychological health. There is research that supports the positive relationship between those with an achieved ethnic identity, higher levels of self-acceptance, and lower psychological distress (Phinney, 1989). In addition, research has demonstrated that ethnicity is salient in instances where an individual's group membership is easily identifiable due to skin color (Deaux, 1992). To further illustrate, a study examining racial identity and overall psychological distress among young Black men (mean age 20) provided evidence of the unique contributions of racial identity to the esteem and distress of Black men (Mahalik, Pierre, & Wan, 2006). The majority of this sample ($n = 124$) self-identified as heterosexual men. The construct of racial identity for Mahalik et al.'s study included attitudes and beliefs about group membership, which is consistent with the current conceptualization of ethnic identity. Results indicated a positive correlation between higher levels of internalized beliefs about racial identity/group membership and self-esteem. Furthermore, this study

examined the influence of gender role conformity on racial identity and psychological distress. Not only was psychological distress positively correlated with gender role conformity, but a pattern existed for those Black men who identified less with their racial group. Specifically, those with diminished attitudes about their racial group and higher levels of value for attributes related to “White standards of merit” also tended to endorse the mainstream cultural standards of what it means to be a man. This relationship among variables is noteworthy, and suggests that Black men’s identity construction can very well be influenced by racial group preference as well as the dominant culture’s “man code” (Mahalik et al., 2006). Mahalik and colleagues thus proposed that future research examine gender role conformity and racial identification simultaneously in attempt to better understand how they contribute to experiences of distress.

In a similar vein, a qualitative study examining the roles race and gender socialization play in African-American families was conducted by Hill in 2002. The operationalization of racial identity in this study appeared to be primarily based on skin tone, but eluded to the cultural messages by which many Black families operate. Also, a social class variable that encompassed socioeconomic status as well as education was introduced. Parents’ responses yielded several themes illustrating the importance of socializing girls and boys equally through messages and modeling from parents, and the activities parents’ allowed their children to engage in. One parent said: “....when we grew up, boys washed dishes, boys cooked; girls washed dishes, girls cooked. My mother taught us pretty equally to do everything, just in case you were on your own you wouldn’t have to depend on somebody” (p. 497).

Another parent commented:

...work is work, and anybody can do it. I plan to have him help with anything that needs to be done. I wouldn't care if he did feminine things, like taking dance lesson. He wanted to take dance lessons a long time ago....and he loves to brush and fix hair....but I tell him I'll love him regardless of what he does; be happy with his life, I won't have a problem with it. (p. 498)

Despite the overall tendency for parents in the study to support equal socialization for their children, there were some class-based differences related to the levels of support. Those considered "middle-class" on the basis of education alone expressed more hesitance regarding equal socialization, seemingly with more emphasis being placed on girls to be more independent, survivors, and strong fighters "for the respect of Black people." Hill points out that this mentality for "middle-class" African Americans has been supported by literature showing that Black people abandon certain traditions as they "move up in the world," and consider embracing the more traditional gender role norms consistent with their new, "respectable" status. Those considered less educated (high school diploma or less) wanted equality for the girls, but struggled (especially the Black fathers) with accepting the idea of the boys engaging in feminine activities. The implications of this study are remarkable on a number of levels. One of the most interesting perspectives discussed in the article was the notion of gaining "status" (education, money, the "American-dream") along with respect, and the minority feeling the need to forsake certain values and traditions central to ethnic identity in the hope of being considered worthy or equal. This finding speaks to the fact that ethnic identity is

strongly associated with an individual's journey in society, and for minority group members, aspects of that journey are characterized by struggles with recognition, acceptance (Day-Vines, 2007; Phinney, 1996, Phinney 2010), and disconnections (Miller & Stiver, 1997; Walker, 1999; Walker 2002).

Despite evidence demonstrating the importance of the role of ethnic identity in human development, this construct continues to be overlooked in much of the research (Ong, Fuller-Rowell, & Phinney 2010; Phinney, 2010). Unfortunately, this holds true in the relational aggression literature as well. Of the few studies that have included race as a variable of interest when examining relational aggression, Ousterman, Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, and Kaukiainen (1994), Storch et al. (2003), and Waasdorp & Bradshaw (2009) found higher rates of both victimization and perpetration in minority samples (Hispanic and African-American) when compared to Caucasian children and adolescents. Of note here is the stigma associated with being an African-American youth (Sawyer et al., 2008) as well as the cultural emphasis on what it means to be a man in today's society, e.g., machismo and devaluing the importance of relationships (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009). Because of society's sex-based messages and beliefs, if males experience difficulties within relationships and feel shame or guilt related to these difficulties, the probability of feeling unsafe to talk about these things increases greatly (Waasdorp & Bradshaw). As a result, males may also experience increased feelings of distress and isolation.

Another study examined the relationship between experiences of relational aggression and psychosocial symptoms in urban African-American 7th grade students

(Williams et al., 2009). Victimization rates were much higher when compared to other studies (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Crick & Bigbee, 1998), suggesting that there were some unique contributing factors such as race, urban living environment, and perhaps socioeconomic status. Further, those who experienced relational aggression also suffered from psychosocial health issues, specifically internalizing behaviors; however, this finding was only significant for the males in the study (Williams). These results provide supporting evidence once again for the need to study relational aggression not only in minority populations, but also with males.

More recently, Gomes (2009) examined the connection with experiences of relational aggression and depression with African-American female college students. There was a significant, positive correlation with experiences of relational aggression and depression. Gomes indicated that the prolonged experience of relational aggression may contribute to women's depression, or women's depression may make them more vulnerable to be relationally aggressed against. To date, this is the only article concentrating on the psychological effects of relational aggression on African-American college women. Furthermore, there appear to be no articles examining ethnic identity among Black women, and no research looking at relational aggression within the Black male college population.

To summarize, there is a significant gap in the literature addressing how gender role conformity, ethnic identity, and experiences of relational aggression contribute to psychological distress in young adults. As mentioned before, much of the research on relational aggression has focused on White, female children and adolescents. Most of

the relational aggression research that does include boys and young men tends to use gender as a categorical variable, rather than addressing individual adherence to gender role norms. Additionally, very few relational aggression articles include ethnic identity as an important, contributing variable, and the dearth of literature that does is limited to elementary and middle school students. Thus, the present study is designed to provide additional insight as it examines the relationships among gender role conformity, ethnic identity, relational aggression, and psychological distress among African-American undergraduate men and women. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the following research questions are proposed:

1. Do men and women who report experiences of relational aggression also report higher levels of psychological distress?
2. Do higher levels of gender role conformity predict greater psychological distress for men and women?
3. Does increased identification with the ethnic minority group predict lower psychological distress?
4. Does the experience of relational aggression predict significant additional variance in psychological distress over and above gender role conformity and ethnic identity?

Chapter Three

Methods

Participants

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), undergraduate students will be recruited at a mid-size Southern public, historically Black college/university (HBCU). Participants will be recruited in undergraduate classrooms in which the instructor gives permission. To participate in this study, an individual must identify as African American, or multiethnic, with African American being one of the identified ethnicities. Participant privacy will be protected via anonymous questionnaires with no link to identifying information. It is estimated that approximately 250 undergraduate students will participate.

Instruments

Demographics Questionnaire. Information obtained from undergraduate students will include: age, biological gender, sexual orientation, current year in college, current major, ethnicity, type of community in which student was raised (i.e., suburban, urban, rural), and socioeconomic status.

Indirect Aggression Scale - Target (IAS-T). The IAS-T (Forrest, Eatough, & Shevlin, 2005) is a 35 item, self-report measure developed to examine behaviors adults may experience within current, interpersonal relationships. As mentioned previously, relational aggression is considered to be a *type* of indirect aggression. Items identified on this indirect aggression questionnaire reflect definitional constructs of relational aggression as examined by this study. Examples of items that fit this criteria include,

“turned other people against me,” “made other people talk to me,” “used private in-jokes to exclude me,” “withheld information from me that the rest of the group is let in on,” “intentionally embarrasses me around other,” etc. Also, this instrument was normed using current college students and college graduates of a university (Forrest, et al., 2005), whereas many relational aggression measurements were normed on children and adolescents. The response format is a 5 point Likert scale ranging from *never* to *regularly*, with higher scores indicating more experiences with indirect aggression. There are three subscales – Social Exclusionary, Malicious Humor, and Guilt Induction. Reported alphas for the subscales and total scale score range from .81 to .89 (Forrest et al., 2005), maintaining moderate internal consistency. The total IAS-T score will be used in this study.

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R). The MEIM-R (Phinney & Ong, 2007) is a 6-question self-report measure with two subscales: exploration and commitment, both of which are considered important aspects of ethnic identity development. The revised MEIM was created to be a more concise way of exploring central attributes of group identity as well as an individual’s strength and security with this ethnic identity (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale with answers ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*, with higher scores indicating greater achievement of ethnic identity. Each subscale has three questions. Example questions include: “I have spent time exploring my ethnic group history and traditions” and “I understand what ethnic group membership means to me.” The measure is scored by adding up totals for each subscale, or combining subscale scores in order to utilize the full scale score. Subscales

were proven to have good reliability (exploration subscale = .76, commitment subscale = .78), and full scale reliability was found to be .81 (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Construct, convergent, and discriminant validity for the revised MEIM have been shown to be commensurate with the original version (Phinney & Ong).

Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory – 46 (CMNI-46). The CMNI-46 (Parent & Moradi, 2009) is a brief, self-report measure of masculine philosophies adapted from the CMNI (Mahalik, Locke, Ludlow, Diemer, Scott, Gottfried, & Freitas, 2003). This 46-item questionnaire assesses the degree to which men conform, or not, to the different norms considered masculine throughout dominant U.S. culture. The response format is a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. Nine subscales measure individual components of masculinity: emotional control, disdain for homosexuals, playboy, power over women, risk-taking, self-reliance, violence, winning, and work primacy. Example questions include: “If I could, I would frequently change sexual partners,” “I believe that violence is never justified,” “I bring up my feelings when talking to others,” “I take risks,” “I am willing to get into a physical fight if necessary,” and “It would be awful if people thought I was gay.” Obtaining scores from each subscale is one way to score this measure. Another way to score is by adding up the CMNI total for participants, with higher total scores reflecting greater conformity to norms. Parent and Moradi (2010) report good internal consistency with the CMNI-46 subscale scores (.89 to .98) as well as with the total score (.96). Also, despite the shorter length of the CMNI-46, there were high correlations (>.90) between this measure and the original CMNI form scores, suggesting that the construct, convergent, and discriminant validity evidence for the

original lengthier version likely applies to the abbreviated version as well. For the purposes of this study, the total CMNI score will be used.

Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory – 45 (CFNI-45). The CFNI-45 (Parent & Moradi, 2010) is a brief, self-report measure of feminine philosophies adapted by from the CFNI (Mahalik, Morray, Coonerty-Femiano, Ludlow, Slatery, & Smiler, 2005). This 45-question measure assesses the degree to which women conform, or not, to various feminine norms in the dominant U.S. culture. The response format is a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. There are eight individual subscales designed to measure distinct components of femininity: having nice relationships, involvement with children, thinness, sexual fidelity, modesty, involvement in romantic relationships, domestic, and investment in appearance. Example questions include: “It is important to keep your living space clean,” “I tell everyone about my accomplishments,” “I find children annoying,” “I regularly wear make-up,” “When I succeed, I tell my friends about it,” “I would feel guilty if I had a one night stand,” and “I always try to make people feel special.” Obtaining subscale scores is one way to measure these attitudes and beliefs; obtaining the CFNI total score is another way, with a higher total score suggesting greater conformity to traditional feminine norms. Parent and Moradi (2010) report good internal consistency (.72 to .92) with the CFNI-45 subscale scores as well as with the total score (.87). Also, despite the shorter length of the CFNI-45, the reliability and validity information is comparable to the original (Parent & Moradi, 2010). For the purposes of this study, the total CFNI score will be used.

Outcome Questionnaire 45 (OQ-45). Subjective psychological distress will be measured by the OQ-45 (Lambert, Okiishi, Finch, & Johnson, 1994). This self-report measure consists of 45 items looking at a range of symptoms related to depression, anxiety, stress, and levels of discomfort experienced within the past week. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *almost always*. The range of total scores is 0 – 180, with higher scores indicating higher levels of total psychological distress. There are three subscales that measure symptoms of distress, interpersonal difficulties, and social role functioning. Example questions include: “I tire quickly,” “I feel worthless,” “I get along well with others,” “I enjoy my spare time,” and “I feel loved and wanted.” A previous study conducted by Frey, Tobin, and Beesley (2004) reported that these subscales were moderately to highly correlated ($r = .62$ and above). Thus, total scores will be used to assess psychological distress in order to avoid potential problems with multicollinearity.

Procedures

Utilizing SurveyMonkey software, the demographic questionnaire, CMNI-46, CFNI-45, IAS-T, and the OQ-45 will be formatted online to allow participants to access the survey at any time. Participants will be provided the survey link in undergraduate classes. Participation in the research study will be strictly voluntary. An individual’s decision to participate, or not, will not result in penalty or loss of benefits. Subjects’ responses will remain anonymous, and there will be no link from completed instruments to identified participants. Upon completion of the survey, participants will have the option of entering contact information for a chance to win one of four \$40 Walmart gift cards. Students interested in entering the gift card raffle or obtaining

course credit will provide their information on a form separate from their survey responses.

Data Analysis

Primary analyses will consist of two hierarchical regressions. In this type of analysis, predictor variables are put into the equation in a specific order, and according to a theoretical rationale. Specifically, within both regression models, relevant demographic variables will be entered in the first block, Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory (CFNI-45) or Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CFMI-46) scores and Multiethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R) scores in the second block, and scores on the Indirect Aggression-Target (IAS-T) scale in the last block.