

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF AGGRESSION AND  
YOUNG ADULT FEMALES

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE  
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

BY

SHARON A. PUGH, B.S., M.S.

DENTON, TX

DECEMBER 2009

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY  
DENTON, TEXAS

October 9, 2009

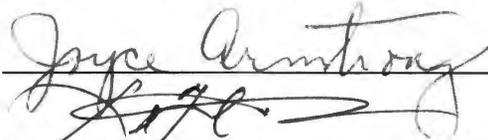
To the Dean of the Graduate School:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Sharon Pugh entitled "A Phenomenological Study of Aggression and Young Adult Females." I have examined this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Family Studies.



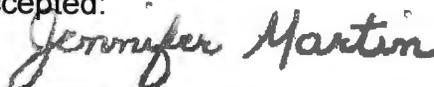
\_\_\_\_\_  
Lillian Chenoweth, Ph.D., Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:



\_\_\_\_\_  
Department Chair

Accepted:



\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean of Graduate School

## DEDICATION

To my family of origin, (Joe, Shirley, Kimberly, Joseph, and Jason)  
Thank you for your unwavering love and support throughout the years and  
for always having the ability to see the best in me.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank Jesus Christ for being a constant presence in my life and for blessing me with supportive friends and family members. I am exceedingly grateful to my committee chair, Dr. Lillian Chenoweth, for navigating me through this process, and teaching me valuable lessons along the way. Her encouragement, expertise, and mentoring have made it possible to finish this dissertation. I am also greatly indebted to Dr. Mary Bold for encouraging me to become a better student and professional who persistent encouragement stretched me to accomplish more. I am also thankful for my committee members Dr. Joyce Armstrong and Dr. Larry LeFlore, for their encouragement, helpful comments, and expertise. In addition, I want to thank Ianthe Forde' for her unwavering support and friendship.

I also want to express appreciation to the 15 participants who participated in this study. I would like to express thanks to my extended family, friends, colleagues, classmates, teachers and professors who have been supportive and patient throughout my educational journey.

## ABSTRACT

SHARON A. PUGH

### A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF AGGRESSION AND YOUNG ADULT FEMALES

DECEMBER 2009

The purpose of this qualitative study was to obtain through retrospective reporting an understanding of young adult females' individual experiences with displaying aggression and their views regarding the effect their aggression had on their individual families. The theoretical foundation for this study was family systems theory. To provide an understanding of this phenomenon, the review of literature focuses on three main areas: (a) aggression, (b) bullying, and (c) public policy.

The research was designed using a phenomenological research approach in order to capture the women's rich meanings. The participants were women between the ages of 18-24 in the southern region of the United States including Texas and Florida. Participants were recruited by word of mouth using snowball sampling. Two of the participants were included in the pilot study to assess the interview format, questions, and quality of audio recording prior to the study.

Also all 15 participants completed a demographic questionnaire and a face-to-face semi-structured interview. Interviews lasted approximately 30

minutes. Verbatim transcripts were read multiple times and categorized using a color coding system.

Six themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews: 1) using aggression as a shield of protection, 2) aggression as a way to express self, 3) occurrences of aggression among inner circle – family, friends, and significant others, 4) childhood experiences with parents/caregivers –inadequate and poor role modeling—personal lost, 5) witnessing abuse in family of origin, and 6) relationship with family of origin.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	3
Statement of the Purpose .....	4
Research Questions .....	5
Definition of Terms.....	5
Delimitations .....	6
Rationale for the Study .....	7
Summary.....	8
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	9
Theoretical Framework .....	9
Aggression.....	12
Types of Aggression .....	12
Indirect Aggression .....	13
Relational Aggression .....	14
Social Aggression .....	16
Aggression and Gender .....	17
Aggressive Behavior .....	19
Aggression and Adolescence.....	22
Aggression and Girls.....	22
Aggression and Television Viewing .....	24
Overt Aggression Versus Social Aggression.....	25
Family of Origin and Aggression .....	25
Terms of Aggression.....	26
Bullying .....	27

Pubic Policy .....	29
Summary.....	31
<b>III. METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>33</b>
Conceptual Framework.....	34
Research Questions .....	36
Participants .....	36
Pilot Study.....	37
Interview Procedure.....	37
Protection of Participants.....	39
The Researcher’s Role .....	39
Data Collection.....	40
Analysis and Interpretation.....	42
Trustworthiness.....	43
Summary.....	45
<b>IV. RESULTS.....</b>	<b>46</b>
Pilot Study.....	47
Sample Description.....	47
Method of Analysis.....	50
Findings .....	52
Research Question 1 .....	55
Research Question 2 .....	56
Research Question 3 .....	57
Theme One: Aggression as a Way to Express Self .....	57
Theme Two: Using aggression as a Shield of Protection.....	59
Theme Three: Occurrences of Aggression among Inner Circle, Family, Friends, Significant Others .....	60
Theme Four: Childhood Experiences with Parents/Caregivers, Inadequate and Poor Role Modeling—Personal Loss .....	61
Theme Five: Witnessing Abuse in Family of Origin.....	64
Theme Six: Relationship with Family of Origin.....	65
Systems Perspective .....	67
Unspoken Themes.....	68
Body Language.....	68
Emotions and Emotional Abuse .....	68
Summary.....	69

V. DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	71
Discussion of Findings .....	71
Findings Related to the Research Questions.....	72
Research Question 1 .....	72
Research Question 2 .....	74
Research Question 3 .....	75
Review of Data Analysis .....	76
Theme One: Using Aggression as a Shield of Protection .....	77
Theme Two: Aggression as a Way to Express Individual Self .....	77
Theme Three: Occurrences of Aggression among Inner Circle, Family, Friends, Significant Others .....	78
Theme Four: Childhood Experiences with Parents/Caregivers, Inadequate and Poor Role Modeling—Personal Loss .....	80
Theme Five: Witnessing Abuse in Family of Origin.....	81
Theme Six: Relationship with Family of Origin.....	82
Conclusions .....	82
Implications.....	82
Limitations.....	87
Recommendations for Future Research .....	88
REFERENCES .....	90
APPENDIXES	
Questions.....	122
Demographic/Background Data Sheet.....	125
Consent Form .....	128
List of Resources for Participants .....	132
Interview Protocol .....	134

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Demographic Information on Participants .....	48
2. Family Data on Participants .....	49
3. Themes .....	54

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the past, female aggression has been largely overlooked in scholarly literature because aggression has been viewed predominantly as a male behavior problem. Aggression has been seen primarily as a problem visible in males, with few females showing extreme levels. Research has consistently suggested that males are the perpetrators and instigators, and females are the victims of violence (Hong, 2000; Livingston, Hequembourg, Testa, & VanZile-Tamsen, 2007; Sorenson, Upchurch, & Haikang, 1996). Within the last decade, research has emerged that suggests females are no longer exclusively being victimized at the hands of males, but rather they are engaging in aggressive behavior against males, as well (Crawley & Martin, 2006; Tutty, Babins-Wagner & Rothery, 2006).

Males and females express anger differently (Buntaine & Costenbader, 1997; Cox, Stabb, & Hulgus, 2000). Males tend to use explicit, physical aggression while females use more hidden forms of aggression such as gossiping, name calling, and rumor spreading (Basow, Cahill, Phelan, Longshore, & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2007). The ways that women exhibit aggression have been overlooked historically because there is no apparent physical threat to individuals. Passive aggression by women is difficult to detect

and even harder to track because there are no distinct indicators that stereotypical aggression is being used (Crowley, 2001). In Western societies, hurting the feelings of another individual is not seen as causing actual harm to someone, but for women this type of aggression is used often (Burton, Hafetz, & Henninger, 2007). In general, society views violence as behavior that encompasses acts of physical aggression, but violence and aggression can occur in various forms (Weaver, Borkowski, & Whitman, 2008). Those forms may include bullying, use of weapons, criminal violence, verbal threats, and assaults.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation (2007), 26% of individuals arrested for assault are females. In addition, an estimated 29% of violent female offenders are juveniles. Childhood aggression is the strongest risk factor for adjustment difficulties such as peer rejection, delinquency, and criminal activities (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Vitaro, Brendgen, & Tremblay, 2002; Weaver, Borkowski, & Whitman, 2008). Aggression has been consistently linked in the literature to negative individual and interpersonal outcomes in children and adults. Research shows that social, relational, and indirect aggression are associated with social maladjustment such as peer rejection and internalizing and externalizing problems (Crick, 1995; Crick, 1997; Murray-Close, Ostrov, & Crick, 2007).

Early engagement in violence is the best predictor of later violent behavior. Research indicates that children who are the victims of abuse are more likely to abuse their spouses (Straus, 1991). Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz

(1980) found individuals who reported receiving the most corporal punishment as teenagers had spouse-abuse rates four times higher than those who reported no hitting during their adolescence. The findings of this study implied that violence and aggression are intergenerationally transmitted (Straus et al., 1980).

Aggressive behavior can also occur among friends, and peers as well as family members (Temcheff et al., 2008).

### Statement of the Problem

Females have become increasingly more involved in violent crimes since the early 1980s, according to the US Department of Justice. The Violent Crime Index, which includes serious offenses such as murder, aggravated assault, and robbery notes similar trends. Garrido and Morales (2007) asserted that there is a steady increase in number of females who have committed a serious violent offense. There is a link between violent crimes and aggression. Siegfried (2007) found that being victimized increases the likelihood of committing later offenses and engaging in aggressive and violent behavior. McCabe, Luccini, Hough, Yeh and Hazen (2005) asserted that exposure to different types of violence such as child maltreatment, community violence and partner violence lead to later behavior problems in younger adults.

The female offender has specific demographic characteristics. She is likely to have been sexually, physically or verbally abused, come from a single-parent household and lack adequate social and work related skills. Nearly 9 in 10 women in state prisons had experienced physical or sexual abuse in the past;

one-third of imprisoned women have been abused by an intimate partner in the past and one-fourth reported prior abuse by a family member (Women in Prison Project, 2008). Research pertaining to the effect of young adult females' aggression on families is minimal. The current study is designed to address this deficit in research. How females' aggression influences families is of interest to professionals and families because preventive measures might be implemented to reduce aggression in females. Less attention has been given to the phenomena of female aggression, and little research has been conducted that proposes possible functional explanations as to why females engage in aggression and how aggressive behavior affects the family of origin.

Research on females' aggression has the potential to benefit many professionals. Programs and curricula could be created to reduce the number of aggressive females. Also females who are at a higher risk could be identified and taught productive ways to channel aggression and anger. In addition, empirical research in this area has the potential to influence public policy.

#### Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of young adult females' individual experiences with displaying aggression and their views regarding the effect their aggression had on their families. The study sought to give participants a voice by understanding the meaning young adult females placed on their own aggression and the impact it has had on their families. This study provided a medium through which these

females discussed their views. This qualitative study aimed to explore how aggression of young adult women influenced family relationships, as related by individuals who are now adults.

### Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the meanings young adult females ascribe to their acts of aggression and/or aggressive behavior?
2. How do the meanings that young adult females ascribe to their experiences with aggression contribute to and affect their family of origin relationships?
3. How do the meanings young adult females ascribe to their experiences with aggression influence perspectives on family and peer relationships?

### Definitions of Terms

Aggression: a forceful action or procedure that is unprovoked. Any form of behavior that is intended to harm or injure some person, oneself, or an object.

Family of origin: the family in which one grew up.

Indirect aggression: focuses on social manipulation; occurs in a manner where the target is not immediately confronted (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Examples include gossiping, ignoring or avoiding peers, social exclusion, and spreading rumors.

Peer relationships: a group of individuals who are similar to each other in abilities, age, background, and social status.

Perspectives: an individual point of view or the choice of context for opinions, beliefs and experiences.

Relational aggression: requiring verbal skills, children are more likely to use as they develop language skills (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006); harms other through injury or manipulation of a relationship, often in a covert manner (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995); encompasses all acts intended to manipulate feelings of inclusion or threaten relationships. Examples include threatening to stop talking to a friend, spreading rumors or gossip, and isolating a peer from his or her group of friends.

Social Aggression: being directed toward damaging another's self esteem, social status, or both; may take such direct forms as verbal rejection, negative facial expression or body movement (Galen & Underwood, 1997).

Violence: behavior by an individual against another individual that intentionally threatens, attempts, or actually inflicts physical harm (Reiss & Roth, 1993).

Young adult women: female between the ages of 18-24.

#### Delimitations

The following delimitations defined participation in this study:

1. Participants were at least 18-24 years of age and have engaged in at least two self-identified acts of aggression during high school.
2. Participants volunteered to be interviewed.

## Rationale for the Study

Research on the outcome of female aggression in families is minimal. Aggression has been historically examined as a problem visible in boys' behavior, with fewer girls showing high levels. Within the last decade emerging research suggests that women are engaging in aggressive behavior as well. Although considerable research has been dedicated to the study of aggression and violence, there are fewer empirical studies available regarding the daily, lived experiences of women who engage in aggression (Underwood, 2003). This study will provide valuable insight into how females' aggressive behaviors develop and persist. The more researchers learn about aggression, the better professionals can identify the similarities and differences between males' and females' aggression and their respective preventive and intervention needs. There is an urgent need to intervene with aggressive females in order to minimize the intergenerational cycle of aggressive behavior and disrupted relationships (Dixon, Hamilton-Giachritsis, & Browne, 2005). As these females may eventually become mothers, efforts to support aggressive girls' positive development will have immediate and long term significance. This study has the potential to benefit teachers, counselors, family life educators, case workers, and advocates. Also public policy holds promise for the development of effective prevention programs. For example, changing current practices and implementing better training with the most updated research may decrease aggression in females. Much of the concern raised about aggression, bullying and violence are

followed by a desire to enact policies to minimize aggression. This concern is reflected in initiatives to end aggression in public schools. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and others place violence prevention as a top priority (Junger et al., 2007). Studying this phenomenon can provide insight and result in the development of trainings, programs, curriculums, and informative seminars.

### Summary

There is little research on young adult females' aggression and how it affects families. Historically, aggression has been primarily seen as a male behavior problem. The purpose of the study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of young adult females' individual experiences with aggression regarding the impact aggression has had on their families. Currently there exists a limited amount of scholarly studies on female aggression. The current study aimed to address this deficit. The findings from this study may be useful to professionals, counselors and educators. Three research questions guided the study by examining females' aggression and how it influences families and peer relationships.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to obtain through retrospective reporting an understanding of young adult females' individual experiences with displaying aggression and their views regarding the effect their aggression had on their individual families and peers. To provide an understanding to this phenomenon, the review of literature focuses on four main areas: (a) theoretical framework, (b) aggression, (c) bullying, and (d) public policy.

#### Theoretical Framework

Family System Theory provides an interpretive model which can be applied to females' aggression. Few researchers have applied systems theory to females' aggression. However, examination of both the theory and phenomenon suggests this theory may provide an understanding of females' aggression. In general, systems theory views family members as interconnected, with members influencing each other in predictable and recurring ways (Henry, Robinson, Neal, & Huey, 2006). The theory also focuses on family behavior instead of individual behavior by considering interaction and communication patterns, as well as adaptation to stress in the context of the whole as opposed to a single person in isolation. The theory is based on three main assumptions: (a) all the parts of a system are interrelated and connected, (b) a system is best understood when

examined as a whole, and (c) all systems affect themselves through environmental feedback.

Von Bertalanffy (1968) promoted the notion that a system is greater than the sum of its parts, which means any system must be understood in its entirety. Jo Ann Allen (1998) asserted that one of the core assumptions of systems theory is that each family is unique, due to unlimited variations in personal characteristics and ideological styles. Thus, a systemic view of the family acknowledges the uniqueness of any single family but assumes that the family may be described if considered as a whole unit. For example, parents who permit aggression from children occasionally and punish it at other times are likely to have highly aggressive children (Conger, Neppel, Kim, & Scaramella, 2000). Systems theory may explain the development of violence and how the family serves as a training ground for violence. The family may also provide opportunities for imitation that can be applied in later life in parental or conjugal roles. The family can also encourage and reinforce violence behavior in children by directly rewarding aggressive behavior (Patterson, Cobb, & Ray, 1973). In dysfunctional abusive families, researchers have found significantly more negative interactions than positive ones (Patterson, Chamberlain, & Reid, 1982). For example, Fagan (2005) asserted that females may self medicate (use drugs, overeat or drink alcoholic beverages) for different reasons than males, including as a reaction of aggression and violence. Also females are more likely to become depressed when they are a victim of aggression and violence (Fagan).

Local, state, and national data indicate increases in the number of females entering the juvenile justice system. According to the US Department of Justice, over 80% of women incarcerated for crimes have experienced some type of abuse such as physical, verbal/emotional or sexual. Studies show that boys and girls are impacted differently when they observe interparental violence. Studies find that observing interparental violence is associated with current partner abuse for males, but not for females (Gelles & Straus, 1979; O'Keefe, 1998). Other studies show that females as well as males are more likely to become violent in their partner relationships if they have witnessed interparental violence (Avakame, 1998; Heyman & Slep, 2002; Moretti, Obsuth, Odgers, & Reebye, 2006).

Boundary is another term prevalent in systems theory. Boundaries determine what comes into or is excluded from the system. A system that is completely open does not block anything coming in or out of the system. However, a closed system allows nothing in or out. Boundaries that are too rigid or too lax can create problems for individual members as well as the family as a whole (Kretchmar & Jacobvitz, 2002; Sroufe & Ward, 1980). When girls engage in social aggression, the system is more likely to be closed allowing isolation and control to occur. Ideally, boundaries would fall in the middle of the spectrum, neither completely open nor completely closed.

## Aggression

In the early 1960s, many specialists considered aggression an intrinsically male phenomenon and claimed that aggression in females was so rare that studying it in detail was hardly worth the effort (Buss, 1961). The accumulation of knowledge from different fields, including ethology, psychology, and anthropology, resulted in a much broader understanding of aggression (Bjorkqvist, 1994).

Aggression is exhibited in a variety of forms (Herrenkohl & Herrenkohl, 2007). Vierikko, Pulkkinen, Kaprio and Rose (2006) asserted that aggression has proven to be a stable behavioral pattern from childhood through adolescence. As children increase in age, physical aggression may be replaced by indirect forms of aggression as a safer, more anonymous way to retaliate against peers (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992). Many of the early studies examining gender differences in aggression focused mostly on physical and/or physical and verbal aggression together (Buss, 1961).

### Types of Aggression

Aggressive behavior occurs throughout the lifespan as demonstrated by research into preschool children (Denham et al., 2002; O'Leary, 2005; Ostrov, Gentile, & Crick, 2006; Roseth, Pellegrini, Bohn, Ryzin, & Vance, 2007) school age children (Anooshian, 2006; Knutson, DeGarmo, & Reid, 2004), adolescents (Crothers, Field, & Kolbert, 2005; O'Donnell et al., 2006; Penney & Moretti, 2007;

Underwood, 2005), adults (Bjorkqvist & Osterman, 1992) and spanning all of the stages (Kokko & Pulkkinen, 2005).

Aggression is displayed in a variety of forms. Within the last two decades researchers have found that girls may be just as aggressive as boys when other forms of aggression are included, such as gossiping, spreading rumors, and social isolation (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Marsee, Weems, & Taylor, 2008; Talbott, Celinska, Simpson, & Coe, 2002; Xie, Farmer, & Cairns, 2003). These forms of aggression are commonly known by three different terms: indirect aggression (Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988), relational aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), and social aggression (Cairns, Cairns, Ferguson, Garipey, & Neckerman, 1989). All three terms have been used to describe similar types of aggression.

### *Indirect Aggression*

Arnold Buss (1961) was the first to coin the term indirect aggression. Buss stated indirect aggression could be verbal such as spreading rumors or physical by destroying someone's property. Historically, indirect aggression is viewed as a type of behavior in which the perpetrator attempts to inflict pain in a way that he or she makes it seem as though there is no intention to hurt at all (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992). In addition, indirect aggression focuses mostly on social manipulation and occurs in a way that the target person is not immediately confronted (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

Examples of indirect aggression include ignoring, avoiding peers, social exclusion, gossiping, and spreading rumors. Other researchers have described indirect aggression as any act of aggression that aims to hurt another person's feelings or status in a group which also includes actions such as talking behind someone's back, talking negatively about someone, excluding, shunning someone, and telling another person's secrets (Forrest, Eatough, & Shevlin, 2005; Miller & Vaillancourt, 2007; Osterman, Bjorkqvist, & Lagerspetz, 1999). Acher and Coyne (2005) viewed indirect aggression as a "behind-the-back" form of aggression. Bjorkqvist (1994) viewed it as a low-cost way of harming others.

### *Relational Aggression*

Relational aggression involves direct relational and indirect behavior intended to damage the victim's peer relationships (Xie, Farmer, & Cairns, 2003). Examples include making up stories to get someone in trouble, criticizing a person behind her back, starting nasty rumors, and maliciously excluding someone (Crick, 1996).

Crick and Grotpeter (1995) introduced the concept of relational aggression in a study of school age children. It was later defined as "behaviors that harm others through damage (or the threat of damage) to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship or group inclusion" (Crick et al., 1999). Because this type of aggression requires verbal skills, children are more likely to use relational aggression more as they develop language skills (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). Crick and Grotpeter found that relational aggression harms others through injury

or manipulation of a relationship, often in a covert manner. Examples of relational aggression include threatening to stop talking to a friend, spreading rumors, gossiping, or isolating a peer from his or her group of friends (Young et al., 2006).

Crick and Grotpeter (1995) asserted relational aggression as having more characteristics of girls, but not exclusively to girls. The researchers added that relational aggression is done with the intention of damaging another child's friendship or feelings of inclusion within a social group. Crick and Grotpeter also found that members of groups run by aggressive girls appeared to be caring and helpful toward each other. They also observed a higher level of intimacy and secret sharing in these groups. This closeness puts followers at risk because the aggressive child is privy to personal information that can be disclosed. They also noted a higher level of exclusivity in groups run by relational aggressive girls. In other words, the followers usually have fewer outside friends to turn to if they are rejected by the aggressive child; therefore, they continued to conform for fear of being isolated.

Grotpeter and Crick (1996) asserted that friendships of relationally aggressive children were characterized by relatively high levels of intimacy, exclusivity, jealousy, and relational aggression within the friendship context. However, the researchers found that overtly aggressive children were characterized by engaging together in aggressive acts toward those outside the friendship (Grotpeter & Crick).

## *Social Aggression*

Social aggression has been referred to as the use of non-confrontational behavior that employs the social community toward the intended effect (Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Cairns, Cairns, Ferguson, Garipey, & Neckerman, 1989). It has been defined by Underwood and colleagues (Galen & Underwood, 1997; Underwood, 2003) as including subtle confrontational behavior (e.g., rolling one's eyes and turning one's back), as well as direct relational and non-confrontational behavior. The addition of subtle confrontational acts may be critical, as these are among the more frequent and harmful type of aggression experienced by early adolescent girls (Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2007).

Social aggression was first used to describe "the manipulation of group acceptance through alienation, ostracism, or character defamation" (Cairns et al., 1989, p. 323). Galen and Underwood (1997, p. 589) expanded this definition by describing it as being "...directed toward damaging another's self-esteem, social status or both and may take such direct forms as verbal rejection, negative facial expression or body movement or more indirect forms such as slanderous rumors or social exclusion." Social aggression can be described as damaging another's self esteem, social status, or both and may take such direct forms as verbal rejection, negative facial expression, or body movement (Galen & Underwood, 1997). This form of aggression includes either indirect or direct forms and examples include behaviors such as eye-rolling and loud sighs. Similarly, social aggression is defined in terms of intended endpoints, which are to manipulate

group acceptance and damage others' social standing (Galen & Underwood, 1997). It also includes both overt and covert forms and some additional acts not included in the other two categories, such as giving a "dirty look."

Social aggression is pertinent to early adolescents. During this time, students usually spend extensive time with peers. Also friendships and peer interactions increase in importance during this stage of development (Harris, 1995). More specifically, prior studies have shown that during early adolescence interpersonal relationships intensify and friendships have increased self disclosure, which provides aggressors with more ammunition to use when friendships fail (Atkinson, Schneider, & Tardif, 2001; von Salisch, 2002). Relational and social aggression have been shown to be more hurtful to females and engaged in at more intense levels (Bjorkqvist & Osterman, 1992; Coyne et al., 2006; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Murray-Close et al., 2007).

Children who have high levels of social aggression are likely to show serious adjustment and relationship problems like jealousy and lack of trust that deteriorate over time (Crick, 1996; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Children in middle school and high school find social aggression more harmful than physical and verbal aggression (Galen & Underwood, 1997; Werner & Crick, 2004).

### *Aggression and Gender*

Compared to boys, school-age girls typically engage in fewer acts of physical aggression and more acts of relational, interpersonal, and social forms of aggression (e.g., acts that are intended to damage others' friendships or

feelings of acceptance in a peer group) (Bjorkvist, Lagerspertz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Crick, 1995). When aggression is parsed into physical, verbal, direct, and indirect components, the most consistent and substantial gender difference to emerge is that males engage in more physical and direct forms of aggression, while the differences are less reliable for verbal and indirect forms for all ages (Archer, 2006).

Generally speaking, gender differences in the expression and manifestation of aggression are important to recognize because diverse risk factors are likely related to different forms of aggression (Estell, Farmer, Pearl, Acker, & Rodkin, 2008). However, other studies suggest that girls and boys engage in comparable amounts of social and relational aggression, although boys consistently show higher levels of physical aggression than girls (Crick, 1997; Underwood, 2003).

In addition, Crick and Grotpeter (1995) also asserted that prior studies (Block, 1983; Eagly & Steffen, 1986) may have underestimated the amount of aggression in girls because forms of aggression relevant to girls' peer groups have not been assessed. Historically, researchers assumed boys were more aggressive than girls because boys tended to display more visible forms of aggression such as hitting, kicking, punching, or grabbing.

Most of the research on aggression has focused on the more overt, physical types of aggression characteristic of boys (Broidy et al., 2003; Giles & Heyman, 2005; Kokko, Tremblay, Lacourse, Nagin, & Vitaro, 2006; Kyung-Hye,

Baillargeon, Vermunt, Jeroen, & Hong-Xing, 2007). Aggressive behavior in the past two decades has been viewed as involving more than physical acts. For instance, in pre-schoolers, high socio-economic status children rate higher on social aggression than low SES children (Bonica et al., 2003). Social aggression appears to escalate during adolescence (Werner & Crick, 2004).

Even though many studies show that girls tend to use more indirect and relational types of aggression (Bjorkqvist, 1994; Crick, 1996; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick, Ostrov, & Werner, 2006), other studies have shown no gender differences in social aggression (Coyne et al., 2006; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Loukas et al., 2005). Yet some studies have shown that males are more relationally and socially aggressive than females (Loudin et al., 2003; Tomada & Schneider, 1997). These discrepancies can be attributed to different methodologies such as differences in raters (peers, teachers, parents, or self-reported measures) age of the participants, and operational or conceptual definitions. Crick and Grotpeter found that both boys and girls are aggressive but tend to exhibit distinct forms of the behavior such as relational aggression for girls and overt aggression for boys (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995).

### *Aggressive Behavior*

Prior research indicated that aggressive children have a higher risk for concurrent and long-term maladjustment such as peer rejection, dropping out of school, adolescent delinquency, depression, peer victimization, and adult criminality (Strohschein, 2005; Suchman & Luthar, 2000; Webster & Hackett,

2007). Evidence suggests that aggressive and violent behavior in children is linked to family and social factors, such as social and financial deprivation, harsh and inconsistent parenting, parents' marital problems, family violence, (whether between parents, by parents toward children or between siblings), poor parental mental health, physical and sexual abuse, alcoholism, drug dependency, or other substance misuse by parents or other family members (Dodge, 1980; Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2003). In addition, many aggressive and violent girls have poorly developed connections to their mothers (Pakaslahti, Spooft, Asplund-Peltola & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 1998). Aggressive behavior during childhood predicts later social adjustment problems (Crick, 1996). Crick's study of 245 children over one year time frame found that relational aggression is relatively stable over time and that it is predictive of future social maladjustment. The strongest predictor of future social-psychological adjustment problems and increases in these problems was the combination of relational and physical aggression (Crick, Ostrov, & Werner, 2006). However, parental behavior is an important determinant of adolescent aggressiveness (Bjorkqvist & Osterman, 1992). Adolescents who witness interparental violence are at increased risk for perpetrating aggressive acts (Moretti, Obsuth, Odgers, & Reebye, 2006). They are also at risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (Moretti, Obsuth, Odgers, & Reebye, 2006).

Knutson, DeGarmo, and Reid (2004) asserted that neglect and punitive discipline may be critical factors in determining the consequences of

disadvantage in the development of antisocial behavior. Children with elevated aggression may find it difficult to gain acceptance among peers and their antisocial problems can grow over time as a result of their rejection and lead to delinquency (Kerestes & Milanovic, 2006).

A study by Underwood et al. (2004) of 146 dyads of close friends did not show that girls consistently use more social exclusion than boys. The Underwood study consisted of children playing a board game with a same gender actor trained to be a difficult play partner. Underwood's overall findings indicated that gender differences in social exclusion are more subtle. Research conducted during the last decade, however, suggested that girls are just as likely as boys to be aggressive in their friendships but that they use their social intelligence rather than physical aggression when in conflict (Crothers, Field, & Kolbert, 2005).

Bjorkqvist and his colleagues (Bjorkqvist, 1994; Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1994; Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988) used a cross-sectional design to investigate the use of three forms of aggression (physical, direct verbal, and indirect) among 8, 11, 15, and 18 year olds. Physical aggression was exhibited first among both boys and girls, reflecting younger children's immature language abilities and poor impulse control. This was followed by direct verbal aggression (insults, threats, yelling, name calling) and finally by indirect aggression (lies, gossip, and revealing a peer's secrets to others).

### *Aggression and Adolescence*

Aceves and Cookston (2007) found that adolescents experienced the highest rate of violent victimization of any age group, and adolescence is a time period when the experience of violence first hand is not uncommon (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001; Howard et al., 2002). An estimated 70% of urban youth living in high crime and high levels of poverty have experienced some form of violent victimization (Zweig, 2003).

Victimization occurred primarily in three forms: exposure to domestic violence between parents or caregivers, abused as a child, or previous domestic violence victimization. Haynie, Petts, Maimom, and Piquero (2008) had a sample of 11,949 school age adolescents in the U.S. and found that exposure to violence is associated to greater risks of coming in contact with the criminal justice system, becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence, or running away from home. Research has consistently found that children and adolescents who experience violence are more likely to engage in antisocial behavior later in life (Eitle and Turner, 2002; Molnar et al., 2005; Weaver, Borkowski & Whitman, 2008).

### *Aggression and Girls*

The study by Crothers, Field, and Kolbert (2005) of 52 females found that female friendships are among the most important relationships that girls and women develop during their lifetimes. Crothers et al., completed individual interviews, using the Relational Aggression Scale and the Bem Sex-Role

Inventory with all participants. Gilligan (2003) proposed that women's morality and sense of self are based on connectedness and interdependence with others and that affiliation with and acceptance by other girls or women often become essential elements of identity. The process of establishing and maintaining friendships with other women is a crucial aspect of psychosocial development (Pipher, 2002), and as girls become adolescents, these relationships become more important, potentially assisting with adjustment and a sense of well-being.

Research conducted during the last decade suggests that girls are just as likely as boys to be aggressive in their friendships but that they use their social intelligence rather than physical aggression when in conflict. Girls, who tend to be more emotionally intimate in their friendships than boys, are able to use females' strong desire for connectedness as leverage against each other (Talbot, Celinska, Simpson, & Coe, 2002). Relationally aggressive behavior can deprive girls of opportunities to meet their needs for friendship and emotional intimacy, both of which are important for their emotional health (Crick, Casas, & Nelson, 2002).

Studies of social aggression demonstrate the importance of examining relational aggression when trying to understand children's adjustment difficulties (Crick et al., 1999). Specifically, studies in this vein have shown that relationally aggressive children are significantly more socially and emotionally maladjusted than their non-socially aggressive peers. Studies have found that, in middle childhood, relational aggression is associated with both concurrent and future

rejection and with internalizing and externalizing problems for both boys and girls (Crick, 1996; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Zalecki & Hinshaw, 2004). The lack of attention of aggression among girls and various forms of aggressive behavior has led to a lack of understanding of aggressive behavior. Nelson, Robinson, and Hart (2005) found that for some socially skilled preschoolers social aggression is associated with greater peer status.

### *Aggression and Television Viewing*

Indirect, relational, and social aggression occur not only on the playground and in the classroom, but also on television (Haridakis, 2006), although the research in this field is still in the early stages. Coyne, Archer, and Eslea (2004) found that these forms of aggression occur more frequently on television than do physical and verbal aggression. They are more likely to be enacted by attractive, female aggressors whose actions are portrayed as justified and rewarded. The researchers showed an indirect, direct, or no-aggression video to 199 children between the ages of 11-14. Other studies have revealed that viewing these forms of aggression on television can increase indirect aggression in real life (Coyne et al., 2004), and that indirectly aggressive girls view significantly more programs containing indirect aggression than other girls do (Coyne & Archer, 2005).

Individuals do not learn how to behave aggressively solely from watching aggression on television. They can learn aggressive behavior from a variety of sources, including parents, friends, and others in the environment (Haridakis, 2006).

### *Overt Aggression Versus Social Aggression*

The overlapping constructs of social aggression are distinct from overt aggression. Overt aggression involves harming others through face-to-face physical or verbal contact (Crick & Werner, 1998). Indirect aggression is the intentional harming of others through circuitous or non-confrontational methods which make it difficult to identify the perpetrator (Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist & Peltonen, 1988). Recent studies indicate that social aggression is empirically different from overt aggression.

First, social aggression perpetration and victimization have been shown to be associated with social and psychological adjustment beyond involvement in overt aggression (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Prinstein et al., 2001). Second, most victims are targets of either social or overt aggression and most perpetrators use one type of aggression mainly (Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). A perpetrator's use of overt aggression can have the intended negative effect with the participation of only two individuals—perpetrator and victim (Coie et al., 1988). However, with social aggression, at least three people must be involved for the negative result to occur—perpetrator, victim, and follower(s) (Xie, Swift, Cairns, & Cairns, 2002).

### *Family of Origin and Aggression*

Family dynamics have consistently been linked with aggressive and antisocial behavior (Dogan, Conger, & Kim, 2007; Hun-Soo & Hyun-Sil, 2007; Murray & Farrington, 2005). Parent-child relationships consisting of harsh and

inconsistent discipline, little positive parental involvement, and poor monitoring and supervision of the child's activities have been shown to be positively related to overt aggression, peer rejection, and antisocial behavior (Patterson et al., 1989; Pettit, 2004). In contrast, children who experience high levels of maternal affection have shown lower levels of overt aggression and disruptive behavior (Daniels, Dunn, Furstenberg, & Plomin, 1985). Moore and Pepler (2006) found that children from violent families were three times more likely to have serious clinical problems if their mothers reported frequent use of insults, compared to mothers who never used insults. The researchers also found that mothers' remarks to their children may be more influential than fathers and when the comments are disrespectful and derisive they may have quite adverse consequences including self blame and emotional insecurity. Aggression within the family is associated with more negative outcomes for both the marriage and the family (Taylor & Pittman, 2005).

### *Terms of Aggression*

These terms of indirect aggression, relational aggression, and social aggression are very similar, especially with the various types of behaviors involved. Many of the same acts are found in each type. Yet researchers using the three categories disagree over which term is more relevant and appropriate for describing these manipulative forms of behavior. Bjorkqvist (2001) asserted that indirect aggression is the same as relational aggression, which was renamed a decade later. However, Crick et al. (1999) maintained that the two terms are

distinct and involve different forms of behavior. The term social aggression is used less often, but is regarded as encompassing the other two terms (Underwood, 2003). Archer and Coyner (2005) favored the term indirect aggression because it was the original term and the term emphasis is on the form the aggression takes. Similarly, Underwood et al. (2001) argued in favor of using the term social aggression because it is a comprehensive term including behaviors defined in relational and indirect aggression while being the only term that specifically includes non-verbal behaviors.

### Bullying

Bullying, once considered a rite of passage and a part of development has been often overlooked and ignored by parents and school personnel (Baldry, 2003; Elias & Zins, 2003; Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2004; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). However, research has found bullying to be a serious problem (Chapell et al., 2006; Nickerson & Martens, 2008; Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2005). Bullying results in detrimental outcomes for victims and bullies (Arseneault et al., 2006; Carlyle & Steinman, 2007; Gruber, 2007). Bullying behavior is destructive to the social and emotional well-being of students in schools all over the world (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). Bullying has become a growing national concern of the community as a whole (Barboza et al., 2009; Zimmerman et al., 2005). An estimated 30% of children between sixth and tenth grade report being involved in bullying according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

A behavior is considered bullying when the behavior is intended to harm, is repetitive, and a difference of power such as physical or social exists between the bully and the victim (Olweus, 1993). Bullying behavior is a form of aggression that can be physical (hitting, pushing or kicking), verbal (name calling, provoking, making threats, spreading slander or social exclusion (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2004). It is also the recurrent exposure of abusive actions on one person by one or more individuals (Olweus, 1993), and is intended to disturb, harm, or incite fear (Nansel et al., 2001). Individuals who are bullied are more likely to report physical ill health, experience lowered self esteem, depression, have fewer friends and tend to avoid school on a regular basis (SaLuis, 2008; Townsend, Fisher, Chikobvu, Lombard, & King, 2008; Zaborskis & Vareikiene, 2007).

Bullying research started with Dan Olweus, in Europe during the late 1970s. Most research conducted on bullying within and outside of the United States has focused on bullying in elementary, middle and high school. Empirical research indicates that bullying and victimization are most common in elementary school and become less common by the end of high school (Nansel et al., 2001; Smith et al., 1999), with rates of bullied students decreasing from 14% of American 6th graders to 2% of the 12th graders (DeVoe & Kaffenberger, 2004). Chapell et al. (2004) explored bullying in college in a sample of 1,025 undergraduates, and found that bullying is common in college graduates from high school to college, with 18.5% of undergraduates reporting having been

bullied by a student once or twice, 5% having been bullied by students occasionally, and 1.1% very frequently. These findings are consistent with the growing empirical literature that has shown that adults bully adults in the workplace in the United States and other countries (Kim, 2008; Lee & Brotheridge, 2006; Smith, Singer, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003; Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007), including bullying of faculty in the academic workplace (Halbur, 2005; Lewis, 2004; Nelson & Lambert, 2001; Simpson & Cohen, 2004).

### Public Policy

Youth violence is the second leading cause of death for individuals between the ages of 10 and 24 according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Most of the current violence policy has focused on identifying and prosecuting individuals deemed to be serious and chronic offenders (Dodge, 2008). The dramatic growth in serious violence has been attributed to the availability of weapons, recruitment of adolescents into illegal drug markets, gangs and physical violence (Scott & Steinberg, 2008).

About 50-70% of American youth reported experiencing at least one type of direct or indirect victimization in their lifetime, including sexual assault, physical assault, severe physical abuse, witnessing community or family violence, emotional abuse, neglect, property crime and bullying (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005; Kilpatrick, Ruggiero, et al, 2003).

There are several public policies that aim to minimize or prevent violence. The Brandy Handgun Violence Act 1994 required a five-day waiting period and

background check for an unlicensed individual before a licensed gun importer, manufacturer or dealer could sell or deliver a handgun. One of the goals of this policy was to reduce the number of gun crimes and minimize the occurrence of offenders obtaining weapons. Also this policy allowed a new national instant background check system overseen by the FBI to replace the waiting period.

In addition the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 which is commonly referred as the Assault Weapon Ban restricted the manufacture, possession and importation of new semiautomatic assault weapons and large capacity ammunition feeding devices for the general public. This bill also prohibited juveniles from possessing or selling handguns and directed the attorney general to evaluate proposed and existing state juvenile gun laws. Both of these policies aim was to prevent violence by reducing gun deaths and injuries through education and legislative reform.

The U.S. Customs Agency developed zero-tolerance policies in the 1980s to target the booming drug trade (Henault, 2001). This policy was introduced to school systems during the Clinton Administration with the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1990. Congress passed this law to address the issue of school violence, requiring schools to institute a zero- tolerance policy for students who bring firearms on school campuses. GFSA requires a minimum one year expulsion for students who bring firearms to school. Zero tolerance policies means certain actions and behaviors will not be tolerated under any circumstances. These policies state exactly which actions were forbidden. For example, some schools

have zero tolerance policy when it comes to bullying. Any words, threats, or actions that are viewed as bullying will be severely punished.

The Violence Against Women Act 1998 was another public policy geared towards prevention. VAWA was designed to improve criminal justice responses to domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking and to increase the availability of services for victims of these crimes. Many of the components within the VAWA mandate that policy be developed with input from private and nonprofit service providers such as the national coalition against domestic violence. These service providers are to coordinate community education with health-care providers, clergy, schools, business and civic leaders. Under the VAWA policy the federal law takes a comprehensive approach to violence by combining tough penalties to prosecute offenders while implementing programs to aid victims of such violence. These policies address and try to understand what factors protect people or put them at risk for experiences or perpetrating violence. By identifying where prevention efforts need attention policymakers can focus on creating preventative measures.

### Summary

The theoretical framework of this study is based on systems theory, exploring how females' aggression affects families. The review of literature for this study reflects extensive information on young adult females' aggression, and bullying. In addition, while research has been conducted on the individual characteristics of aggressive young adult females, there is minimal research

exploring the female's perspective. This study aims to address such deficits and to explore aggressive females.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of young adult females' individual experiences with displaying aggression and their views regarding the effect their aggression had on their families. The study sought to give participants a voice by understanding the meaning young women placed on their own aggression and the impact it has had on their families. This study provided a medium through which these women could discuss their views. This qualitative study aimed to explore how aggression of females influences family relationships, as related by individuals who are now adults. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 24.

This qualitative study described young adult women's experiences with aggression and the influence aggression has had on their families. Data were collected from individual interviews. In order to gather detailed information, a phenomenological research methodology was used.

This study had the potential to elicit sensitive factors of a woman's behavior and for that reason addressing emotional safety was paramount. The researcher secured written consent from all participants. Participants were also informed that they can stop at any time and do not have to answer any question they were not comfortable with. In addition to protecting participants, the

researcher provided participants with a list of counselors available for free referrals; these considerations helped to transfer power from the researcher to the participants.

Interview questions were informed by family systems theory to gather information on women's aggression. A panel of experts (junior high school teacher, high school teacher, family advocate, and licensed counselor) reviewed questions and gave suggestions for revisions. Suggestions included removal of phrases that could reflect bias, and excess cuing. Initial questions were broad and encouraged the participants to discuss their experiences. Other questions addressed knowledge of aggression and violence, stressors, family outcomes, and developmental concerns. The last questions indicated the session was about to end (Appendix A).

The primary source for information about female aggression came from the individual interviews. The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and examined for recurring themes. The data were also analyzed and triangulated by having participants complete a brief survey (Appendix B). To ensure the individual interviews were conducted in a manner that did not cause embarrassment, harm, or invasion of privacy, a pilot study was conducted beforehand.

### Conceptual Framework

This study used a phenomenological research perspective as described by Patton (1990). In general, researchers utilizing a phenomenological paradigm

seek to examine, describe and elucidate the meaning of lived experiences of a phenomenon. (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990; Patton, 2002; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that utilizes small samples which allows the researcher to gather in-depth accounts of the individual participants' experiences. Phenomenology differs from other qualitative approaches because its focus is on describing specific phenomena as they are actually experienced, rather than building or testing theory (Groenewald, 2004). The primary purpose of phenomenological research is not to obtain factual data that are generalized as or descriptive of a norm. Rather, phenomenological research seeks thick data that foster an understanding of the meanings inherent in human experiences and actions. In this phenomenological study the researcher identified the central part of the individuals' experiences concerning aggression. The lived experience gives meaning to an individual's perception of a phenomenon and to the everyday experiences of life (Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). Phenomenological research seeks to describe rather than explain, and start from a perspective free from hypotheses, presumptions, or fixed ideas (Lester, 1999). However, humanist and feminist researchers refute the possibility of starting without biases and emphasize the importance of making clear how interpretations and meanings have been placed on findings (Olesen, 2003). In addition, humanist and feminist researchers favor making the researcher visible in the frame of the research as an interested and subjective actor rather than a detached and impartial observer (Olesen, 2003). The researcher bracketed her

own experiences in order to understand the participants in the study. Using qualitative methods can uncover the nature of a person's experience emphasizing the changes, processes, variability, and complexities of life.

### Research Questions

The following research questions directed the study:

1. What are the meanings young adult females ascribe to their acts of aggression and/or aggressive behavior?
2. How do the meanings that young adult females ascribe to their experiences of aggression contribute to and affect their family of origin relationships?
3. How do the meanings young adult females ascribe to their experiences with aggression influence perspectives on family and peer relationships?

### Participants

The participants were women between the ages of 18-24 in the southern region of the United States including Texas and Florida. Participants were recruited by word of mouth using snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was used for this study. The non-probability sampling techniques were used to locate participants who met the criteria. A total of 15 young adult females participated in individual interviews. A total of eight additional potential participants were contacted. When the researcher began to get the same information or could no longer extract new information from the data, saturation occurred. Data

saturation occurred when the researcher no longer see or hear new information (Flick, 2002). At that time, data collection was concluded; the researcher had interviewed enough participants to answer the research questions.

### Pilot Study

Pilot studies may be used for a variety of reasons. Teijlingen (2001) identified these reasons: assessing whether the sampling frame and techniques are effective, determining appropriate sampling methods and sizes, collecting preliminary data, and developing research questions and plans. The pilot study consisted of two participants from a local college to assess the interview format, questions, and quality of audio recording. Participants were asked to provide feedback on their experience of the interview. The researcher also inquired if there was something else the participants thought should have been asked or done differently in the interview. The pilot study allowed the researcher to ensure questions were appropriate and relevant. Ambiguous and confusing questions were eliminated from the study. Both individuals were included in the final study sample.

### Interview Procedure

Creating and maintaining rapport is a crucial element to interviewing participants (Farber, 2006; Rings, 2006). The researcher realized that connection, rapport, and trust in the researcher-participant relationship is vital and deliberate steps were taken to engage participants. Participants' responses were not explored, processed, or analyzed to diagnose, but rather to gain insight

on the phenomenon of aggression in young women. Participants were allowed to tell their stories, which were accepted in a non-derogatory, non-judgmental, non-blaming, and non-threatening manner.

Guiding questions were prepared for the interview (Appendix A). The length of the interview ranged from 30-45 minutes. All interviews started with greetings and small talk to establish rapport and put participants at ease. The researcher reminded participants that participation was voluntary and could end at any time. Each participant completed a demographic sheet (Appendix B) and signed the consent form (Appendix C). The semi-structured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions (Appendix A). Prompts were also used to clarify responses and guide the interview, if needed. Prompts utilized during the interview included: nodding, silence, and statements such as “what happened, how, how did you manage that, what else comes to mind, could you say more about that, and what else happened” (Appendix D). At the conclusion of the interview the researcher asked participants if they wanted to add anything else to the discussion. Detailed descriptive notes were made from the semi-structured interview following all interview sessions.

Interviews were conducted in a setting agreed upon by the participant and researcher such as library study rooms, college meeting rooms, and private areas at a local restaurant. The researcher also took handwritten notes during the interview in case the recording equipment failed.

## Protection of Participants

In order to ensure the protection of all participants, this study was designed in accordance with the Institutional Review Board standards and guidelines. A signed consent form was obtained from all participants, which outlined the purpose of the study, along with their rights as a participant of research (Appendix C). All participants were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without a penalty. Additionally, all participants were informed of the confidentiality agreement in regard to the information obtained through the interviews. The participants were also informed that all identifying information would be changed in order to protect their identity. All transcripts were locked in a secure location and will be destroyed after two years.

## The Researcher's Role

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2003). According to Creswell, the researcher makes “an interpretation of the data because the researcher filters the data through a personal lens” (p. 182). The researcher has a Master's degree in family studies and has worked with young adults for approximately 3 years. The researcher also has experience working with family members dealing with relationship violence. The researcher bracketed self in an effort not to contaminate the information. When bracketing is referred to in phenomenological studies, it usually relates to the researcher examining their prejudices in order to allow them to include the views of the respondents (Dowling, 2005). Working with

young adults has given the researcher insight and a starting point in this study. The researcher works for an agency with young adult families combating relationship violence. The researcher aimed to suspend preconceived views, biases and assumptions about aggression. This was accomplished by utilizing another researcher during the analysis process in order to bracket the researcher's experience and not compromise the study. The researcher also took notes and listened to each individual story.

### Data Collection

First, written consent was obtained prior to individual interviews. Also participants completed a demographic questionnaire. All interviews were conducted in person. The majority of discussions lasted approximately 30 minutes. Participants were also informed that they did not have to participate or continue in the study if at any time they changed their mind. Each participant was assigned a number to protect identity. The participant was identified on the tape by the assigned number. The tapes were stored in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed approximately two years later. The audiotapes allowed the researcher to listen to voice tones and to get better clarity in order to get an accurate description of the participants' experiences.

The participants were interviewed using semi-structured open-ended questions (Appendix B). During a semi-structured interview, the researcher usually asked a participant questions based on a prepared written list of questions and topics. The researcher also encouraged the participant to freely

express ideas and provide information that the participant thought was important. Semi-structured open-ended questions allowed for flexibility, where the researcher can obtain unexpected significant information as well as answers for prepared interview questions (Coe, Gibson, Spencer, & Stuttaford, 2008). Each interview followed a specific protocol:

1. Part 1 of Interview (approximately 2-3 minutes) Greetings/Small Talk:  
The purpose was to establish a rapport with the participant.
2. Part 2 of Interview (approximately 30 minutes) Personal Experience:  
The purpose was to put into context the participants' past aggressive experiences. The participants discussed their aggressive experiences (when, where, how long, what happen). Because of the topic the researcher was attuned to any possible emotional distress or uneasiness on the part of the participant during the interview. The participants were provided a list of resources they can access if they want to talk to a professional or want additional information (Appendix D).
3. Part 3 of Interview (approximately 30 minutes). The focus of the third phase of the interview was to explore the participant's aggressive experience in relation to her family of origin.

Throughout the interview, extra time was allowed for participants to share more information. Once the interview was over, the audiotapes were transcribed and the responses were coded, analyzed and classified by emergent themes and

patterns gathered from the females' experiences. In addition counseling and mental health resources were provided for all participants who needed them to process emotional or hostile feelings during the interview.

### Analysis and Interpretation

Phenomenological research generates a large quantity of interview notes and tape recordings (Lester, 1999). The researcher listened to all audiotapes and took notes before the tapes were transcribed. This allowed the researcher to listen closely to what was being said, identify key themes and issues. The transcripts were read multiple times before identifying themes. Identifying possible themes was done by the researcher. The themes were supported by excerpts from the interviews. The researcher allowed two colleagues to read and identify themes as well. Peer debriefing can enhance the credibility or validity of qualitative research (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The individuals who are peer debriefing help guide the researcher's consideration of methodological activities and provide feedback concerning the accuracy and completeness of the researcher's data collection and data analysis procedures (Spillett, 2003). After transcripts were made of the tapes, the researcher listened to the tapes again and reviewed the transcript to ensure accuracy. The researcher also paid attention to speech patterns, filler words and moments of silence. After transcription, participants' comments were coded by their assigned numbers into categories and themes by using different color markers, stars and check marks. Coding involves taking the text data and labeling those categories with a term

usually based in the language of the participant (Creswell, 2003). The themes were identified for each participant and clustered into a number of general themes that appear to be common to all the participants. In order to better identify themes and patterns the analysis was ongoing and inductive.

Interpretations by the investigator were compared to the two colleagues in order to look for similarities and differences. The differences in interpretation were clarified when possible by returning to the original text of the interview. The findings were validated by triangulating methods and comparing of findings with existing theory.

### Trustworthiness

To establish credibility and trustworthiness in a study, qualitative researchers often employ member checking, triangulation, thick description, peer reviews, and external audits (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For this study the researcher used methods that included triangulation, detailed descriptions, audit trail, and peer debriefing. Law (2002) suggested that establishing the trustworthiness of research “increases the readers’ confidence that the findings are worthy of attention” (p. 337). The concept of trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the findings are an authentic reflection of the personal or lived experiences of the phenomenon under investigation.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) asserted that the use of triangulation reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in

question. In essence it is an “alternative to validation which adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth” (p. 8). Two individuals conducted a peer debriefing by reviewing the data and asking pertinent questions about the study (Shenton, 2004). They helped the researcher by acting as a sounding board, and making appropriate suggestions. Suggestions included examining relationships between researcher and participants, as well as ways in which the data might be presented. Discussing the interpretations helped create a more adequate interpretation than either the researcher or reader could achieve separately. Thus, this study employed multiple ways to achieve triangulation of data.

In order to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research Lincoln and Guba (1985) presented an evaluation criterion comprising credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Credibility can be achieved by prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was achieved by providing information about the researcher, as the instrument, the research process and participants of the study. Thick descriptions allowed the researcher to describe in detail the participants' experiences. To ensure accuracy of the data collection and analysis the researcher took notes throughout the interview process. In addition, the researcher kept documentation of interview notes, transcripts and analysis procedures to ensure dependability. Lastly the researcher solicited two individuals who provided feedback on the researcher's interpretation of the

interview data. The feedback consisted of concurring with or verification of the researcher's findings.

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to obtain rich, thick descriptions of the lived experiences of young women aggression and the affect it had on their families of origin. The study included 15 young adult females, ages 18-24, from schools in the south region of the United States. Interviews were conducted to gather rich, thick descriptions and detailed information. Qualitative methodology was used to gather information and identify themes. Also, several methods were used to ensure rigor, trustworthiness, and credibility.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

Aggression has been historically examined as a problem visible in boys' behavior, with fewer girls showing high levels. Aggression is exhibited in a variety of forms (Herrenkohl & Herrenkohl, 2007). Vierikko, Pulkkinen, Kaprio, and Rose (2006) asserted that aggression has proven to be a stable behavioral pattern from childhood to adolescence. As children increase in age, physical aggression may be replaced by indirect forms of aggression as a safer, more anonymous way to retaliate against peers (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of young adult females' individual experiences with displaying aggression and their views regarding the effect their aggression had on their families. The study aimed to give participants a voice by understanding the meaning young adult females have placed on their own aggression and the impact it has had on their families. To fulfill this purpose, phenomenological qualitative analysis was used to discover patterns and uncover the dominant themes. The researcher interviewed 15 participants who volunteered for the study. The results of this phenomenological study are presented in this chapter. A description of the sample and pilot study are given and the findings of the study

are provided in response to the six major themes, unspoken themes and research questions. Lastly a summary of the findings is given.

### Pilot Study

The researcher conducted a pilot study with two participants to determine if the questions and interview format allowed the participants the freedom to give adequate descriptions of their experiences. Since there were minimal changes made in the interview process, both participants were included in the final study. The researcher clarified the term family composition by placing the meaning in parenthesis after neither pilot study participant knew what the term meant. In addition the researcher realized that a quiet location was needed for interviews, rather than a restaurant. The participant interviewed at the restaurant was very nervous; she did not feel comfortable talking about her experiences in that setting. Once the researcher and participant left the restaurant, the participant started talking about aggression. The researcher completed the interview in the participant's car. Also the interviews did not last as long as the researcher initially thought; the average length was approximately 30 minutes.

### Sample Description

The sample size (N=15) consisted of women only. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 24 with a mean of 20.53 years. The researcher conducted individual interviews with each participant. Each participant completed a data sheet with demographic information. Participants included seven African

Americans (43%), and eight Caucasian (57%). All of the participants had at least one sibling except one participant who was an only child.

The education level for participants ranged from college graduates to not completing high school (see Table 1). Most participants had pursued post secondary education (n=8); three participants were college graduates (n=3), one did not finish high school (n=1) and the remaining participants completed high school (n=2) except one who is currently in high school (Table 1). Family income for the participants ranged from \$18,000-150,000 annually (see Table 2).

The researcher conducted interviews in two states, Texas (n=10) and Florida (n=5). According to the data (Table 1 & Table 2) all of the participants come from a diverse economic, cultural, and educational background. Since this was a relatively small sample the results can not be generalized on the correlations between the women's demographic and biographical backgrounds and their use of aggression.

Table 1

*Demographic Information on Participants*

---

Age	Ethnicity	Number of Siblings
24	African American	2
24	Caucasian	1
24	Caucasian	1
24	Caucasian	3

---

Table 1 (continued). *Demographic Information on Participants*

24	African American	1
24	Caucasian	5
23	African American	1
22	African American	4
22	Caucasian	3
21	African American	1
21	Caucasian	5
20	Caucasian	4
20	African American	1
19	Caucasian	2
18	African American	0

Table 2

*Family Data on Participants*

Family Composition	Family Income (Annually)	Witnessed Violence (Between Parents)
Two-parent family	\$39,999-\$20,000	Yes
Two-parent family	\$100,000+	Yes
Two-parent family	\$99,999-\$70,000	No
Two-parent family	\$99,999-\$70,000	No

---

Table 2 (continued). *Demographic Information on Participants*

---

Two-parent family	\$39,999-\$20,000	Yes
Blended family	\$100,000+	Yes
Blended family	\$69,000-\$40,000	No
Single-parent family	\$19,999 and under	No
Single-parent family	\$39,999-\$20,000	Yes
Single-parent family	\$19,999 and under	No
Extended family	\$39,999-\$20,000	No
Extended family	\$69,000-\$40,000	No
Foster Family	Varied	Yes
Father/Live-in girlfriend	\$100,000+	Yes

---

#### Method of Analysis

Phenomenological research methods were used in order to grasp and capture the meanings of young adult women's aggression experiences. Every interview was conducted by the researcher in a setting mutually agreed upon by the researcher and participant. The average time for each interview was 30 minutes. Every interview was audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher.

The researcher listened to all audiotapes and took brief notes before the tapes were transcribed. This allowed the researcher to listen closely to what was being said and to identify key themes and issues. The researcher relied solely on

familiarize herself with the data. The audiotapes were then listened to a third time and transcribed verbatim onto paper. Overall, the transcripts were read four times in their entirety to identify consistencies and meaningful statements among the responses. The researcher categorized the participants' comments using a color coding system. When interviews were transcribed they were coded by hand in the right hand margin with stars, check marks or circles and keywords summing up what the participants were sharing.

The passages relevant to young women's aggression were identified and highlighted in a process referred to as initial coding (Charmaz, 2001) or open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) which is a form of coding researchers use to sort data into basic categories. In opening coding, everything is coded in order to find as many codes as possible without considerations of relevance (Glaser, 1978). Next the researcher re-examined the transcripts for purposes of focused coding, which is a more selective, analytical and conceptual form of coding relative to initial coding. In this phase of analysis the researcher closely examined accounts of the women's aggression in relation to their family of origin. Coding involved taking the text data and labeling those categories with a term usually based in the language of the participant (Creswell, 2003).

The researcher allowed two colleagues to read and identify themes to further strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings. The colleagues are doctoral students who had completed an advanced course of qualitative research methods and is in the process of writing a dissertation. Interpretations by the

researcher and colleagues were compared in order to look for similarities and differences. There was one difference between the researcher and the colleagues. The researcher and colleagues collaborated and discussed the difference; additionally the researcher re-listened to the audiotapes. Triangulation was included by having the same colleague review the transcripts for verification and to identify themes (Patton, 2002).

### Findings

To guide this study the researcher focused on the following three research questions:

- 1) What are the meanings young adult females ascribe to their acts of aggression and/or aggressive behavior?
- 2) How do the meanings that young adult females ascribe to their experiences of aggression contribute and affect their family of origin relationships?
- 3) How do the meanings young adult females ascribe to their experiences with aggression influence perspectives on family and peer relationships?

In qualitative studies interview questions direct the study. The interview questions for this study were:

1. How do you view aggression?
2. Have you ever used aggression or violence toward others? Tell me as much as you can remember about the most violent you have been against someone.

3. What do you make of your violence/aggression? Why do you think you use aggression?
4. Tell me about the family that raised you?
5. Did you ever witness any violence between your parents?
6. What other types of behavior have you been involved in that your parents or school might consider violent or aggressive?
  - a. When did these behavior(s) start?
  - b. How often do these behaviors occur?
7. How did your family of origin respond to your acts of aggression?
8. I see you have \_\_\_\_\_ brothers and sisters. What was it like growing up in that kind of family?
  - a. How did this influence the amount of supervision you got from your parents?
  - b. How did the size of your family influence your behavior?
9. Is there any history of criminal or violent behavior in your family?
  - a. How has this affected your behavior?
10. What are your personal experiences with aggression towards others?
11. How would you describe your displays of aggression?
12. How has aggression affected your relationship with family?
13. How has aggression affected your relationship with peers?

The findings of the study are reported as they relate to the three research questions. Six themes emerged from the data. Each theme is listed below

### 13. How has aggression affected your relationship with peers?

The findings of the study are reported as they relate to the three research questions. Six themes emerged from the data. Each theme is listed below followed by a description. The themes came from the interviews, which concur with the literature findings. Following this table research questions and supportive data are presented.

*Table 3*

#### Themes

Themes	Description
1. Aggression as a way to express self	Participants indicated their aggression occurred on a continuum ranging from angry words to physical contact with another individual.
2. Aggression as a shield of protection	Participants engaged in aggression as a way to stand up for themselves when they felt that their rights were being violated.
3. Aggression among inner circle	Respondents reported displaying aggression toward people the closest to them to retaliate for real or perceived wrongdoing.
4. Childhood experiences with parents/caregivers	Participants described memories of observing abuse, being abused or not having adequate parental involvement.

5. Witnessing abuse in family of origin

Participants described incidents of witnessing abuse among parents, being bullied, or being abused as a child.

6. Relationship with family of origin

Participants described their relationship with family members as distant or less than ideal.

---

*Research Question 1*

The first research question was “What are the meanings young adult females ascribe to their acts of aggression and/or aggressive behavior?” Twelve out of the fifteen participants viewed their acts of aggression as mild or “no big deal.” When asked about the reasons for their aggression, the women viewed their aggression and violence as a trait of their personality. Some indicated they have been aggressive their whole life in a variety of ways and when faced with a threatening situation their first response was to be a fighter. Additionally, while some of the women perceived themselves as assertive, dominant and aggressive as part of their personal characteristics, others indicated that they do not see themselves as “very aggressive.” They stated they are only aggressive in particular situations and that their aggression was often justified. The intensity and severity also varied among the participants. One participant reported throwing an empty soda can at a boyfriend during a disagreement while another participant recalled pushing a friend into a glass table.

I pushed her down. I know it ain't right. I can't remember what we were arguing about. I pushed her and she fell on my mom's glass table. She hurt her back, but she didn't need to go to the hospital or anything like that.

In addition, some of the participants' views on aggression were contradictory. For example one participant reported feeling guilty for her aggressive behavior but also described her behavior as a justifiable reaction to feeling provoked. Additionally several women indicated that their aggression was not "as bad" as someone else they know.

### *Research Question 2*

The second research question was "How do the meanings that young adult females ascribe to their experiences of aggression contribute and affect their family of origin relationships?" Furthermore, aggression was mostly used against others close to them, such as family, friends, and companions. Reasons for engaging in aggression ranged from rage to retaliation. When the researcher asked participants about their family of origin, few made positive comments. Therefore, aggression resulted in separation or caused strife among family members. For instance, one participant reported that her father choked her adult sister recently. Also, another participant reported witnessing her father physically abusing her mom over finances. Half of the participants indicated they witnessed abuse between parents, a parent and a sibling or with extended family members. The participants seemed somewhat disconnected from their families. Sometimes it appeared that they withdrew from their families; other times it appeared as if

their families withdrew from them. However, all of the women reported that they feel as if they still have some level of connection with one or more family members.

### *Research Question 3*

The third research question was “How do the meanings young adult females ascribe to their experiences with aggression influence perspectives on family and peer relationships?” Overall, aggression has not only affected the participants but influenced relationships among family members and peers. For example, a respondent said her sister talks to everyone in the family but her. Another participant reported she does not have any close female friends.

When the researcher asked participants about having relationships with peers, some participants had limited social support in the form of friends. For example, one participant said,

I don't feel like I fit in anywhere. I know a lot of people, but I don't have a lot of friends.

Furthermore, all of the participants described some sort of victimization in their past. Victimization occurred primarily in three forms: exposure to domestic violence between parents or caregivers, abused as a child, or previous domestic violence victimization.

### *Theme One: Aggression as a Way to Express Self*

Ten of the participants reported they view aggression as a way to express how they feel or as channel to vent their frustration. The participants' self

expression varied in frequency and severity. Aggression mostly occurred on a continuum ranging from angry words to physical contact with other individuals. Participants also reported using violence as a means for relieving personal frustrations. Some comments from the participants include:

I think when I am upset with someone I will bitch and say bad things then afterwards I just blow it off.

I'm very aggressive. I just am. I see it as a bad thing and see it as a good thing.

Other participants replied how they do not view themselves as violent but like to get even, seek revenge or hurt others.

I don't think I've been very angry before. It's like you're angry, hurt someone then it's done. I've had little tits for tats then later I'm done.

I'm very mean. I try to get people where it really hurts. I really try to hurt them.

Some not only use aggression to express themselves but also as a way to relieve stress, cope with life challenges or a means to release emotions.

It doesn't do anything. It doesn't prove anything just makes you look crazy. I don't know. It's a release for me; in the end it doesn't prove anything.

To vent--to like-- to let it out. So you know it's not bottled up; After that you feel better.

I think it is a coping mechanism when I'm stressed out.

Both of these participants learned how to express themselves through aggression by watching an aggressive parent express themselves in a similar manner.

When I was younger I saw that's how my mom released it. So that's what I do. I still have more work to be done. I'm not perfect. I've learned better ways by watching others like (name deleted).

I had a bad temper. My dad was the same way. My dad gets mad and throws stuff. My brothers did the same thing; they get mad and throw stuff.

This participant described incidents of watching her father physically abuse her mother and how she learned early on in life how to use aggression to express herself so individuals will not take advantage of her.

I think that's my best emotion to express. I know it. You know I can be all happy about a boy and love him and stuff like that I will not tell him, but if he makes me mad I'll tell him that. I think it's a way for people to not walk all over you and, you know, so you don't have to look weak.

### *Theme Two: Using Aggression as a Shield of Protection*

Five participants in the study discussed aspects of protecting or defending themselves as a primary reason for engaging in aggression. These participants reported engaging in various acts such as yelling, screaming, hitting, throwing objects, or attacking with a harmful object to protect or defend self. Some participants became so determined to never let themselves become vulnerable that they became aggressive women to protect self.

In the words of the participants:

When I get really angry I will start to yell and scream. So to a point I will yell but you have to provoke me. Usually what provokes me to yell is when

someone tries to talk over me when I'm trying to talk to them...then from there I will start really screaming and throw objects and things like that.

When I get in a fight with someone I probably would say bad things to even out the playing field.

A few of the participants reported that family members told or taught them how to defend themselves and not to let anyone walk all over them.

I did a lot of fighting at school; that's why I got expelled. I got into an incident (with the principal). I was trying to walk out and he tried to stop me so he involved a security guard. I learned early on to defend myself. Where I'm from you learn to fight or get beat down.

My brothers encouraged me to fight and hit people back. I guess they were trying to make me tough.

### *Theme Three: Occurrences of Aggression Among Inner,*

#### *Circle – Family, Friends, Significant Others*

Participants reported displaying aggression toward the people closest to them. For some participants, committing aggression not only reduced the barriers of future aggression, but lead to attempts to justify the aggression by blaming the other person as deserving it. A common reason for women's aggression was to retaliate for real or perceived wrongdoing.

Well I did do something bad to (name deleted). I hit her in the head with a bag of ice (laughing) and it was over something really stupid. It was over the thermostat. We were arguing about what to put the temperatures on. I got so mad; my sister knows how to push my buttons.

Just mostly towards my family (aggressive); (Name deleted) when I dated him. I kicked him one time...I hurt him a little bit. I feel like a crazy maniac.

I said (name deleted) why are you looking at me like that. I got in her face. I backed handed her. I also punched her in the face. Growing up I had

severe aggression. I've grown up some. Growing up, my mom thought I was bipolar.

This participant described an incident in which she and her partner were mutually abusive to each other.

With an ex-boyfriend we were together for about three years. It was a bad decision. We fought a lot of time. He choked me, pushed me down. But I used to kick him in the stomach, slapped him. I said many hurtful comments. I usually backhanded him or flat out hit him.

I usually curse people out when I get upset. When I found out someone was talking about me behind my back I told them I thought it wasn't right. I told them I thought they were a real bitch and should have been a real woman about it.

I can't find myself getting really upset with someone I don't know. It's with my close friends, guy friends or family.

When I get mad at (name deleted) I'm more likely to haul off and hit her.

I use aggression more with the people I'm close to than people I really don't know.

Let's see...I would say basically ...I really got mad and I was physically violent, punching, screaming, yelling at my ex-boyfriend. I just kept hitting and punching him—I couldn't stop. It really wasn't me. I don't know what happen to me. I was really mad. It was a lot of small things that kept adding up until I exploded.

*Theme Four: Childhood Experiences With Parents/Caregivers –Inadequate and Poor Role Modeling—Personal Loss*

Another theme that was dominant among the interviews was the experiences of the women during childhood. Some described painful memories of observing abuse, being abused or not having adequate parental involvement.

I hit my daddy in the head with a bottle of lotion. It was probably in high school—that's because my daddy is an abusive person. He can be. He—I don't know—my daddy will be nice and everything we get along. Whatever, then one week it will build up. When he gets aggravated he smokes cigarettes more. You can see him get pissed off about little bitty stuff. He knows its building up. Then he just explodes.

This participant vaguely remembers an incident where her dad physically abused her mother. She watched her dad and mom fight, break up, make up through out her childhood.

My first memory I was two or three my daddy got mad about something. He threw the meat. I try not to cry about it. (Crying) I remember that. It's so stupid to me—you know. I wish they would get a divorce. That's so stupid to me.

It's been years since he (dad) did it, but just like last month before (name deleted) went to Stevensville he choked her. It's stuff like that.

It's other little stuff he does. I know one time he was mad because my momma was going to bring a cake to work. It's little stupid stuff like that. I remember one time he thought my momma was cheating on him and he followed her to church on a Sunday morning and came back and said "yeah I thought she was with some boy." My dad is a nut case. He is. He can be a sweet person when he's not crazy.

Other participants told how distance, lost of respect and lack of trust occurred in their family of origin.

I think it (aggression) kind of separated us (family) a little bit. We are not as close as we can be because of it. I'm not as trusting.

They didn't really respond to it (aggression). ....it was kinda like to them--I needed validation it was thought as innovation but my friends...it was something else.

My dad was never around but my grandfather compensated for that. I talk to my father off and on. He's been on drugs; an alcoholic. He's stuck. I don't know for how long. Nobody in my family talks to him. I'm the only one he can call if he wants to check on everyone.

Because, its hum it probably because of my parents, up bringing. My biological parents can be considered aggressive also. They both can be violent when they want to be. They are take charge people. Uhm whooo (blowing heavily) my mom took charge of everything and everyone she encountered. If it needed to be done they went ahead and did it whether it was good or bad.

Like most families somebody has been involved in something. Cousins had drug charges... cousins who fight a lot-- assault charges. My mom is a big time criminal in my opinion. She's been in trouble for writing checks, many financial crimes. Identify theft... that kinda thing.

When he gets angry he takes it out on everyone. He yells at you it's kinda rubbed off on me. He yells at the stupidest little thing. One time I asked him why are you going to the store. He got really mad and started yelling at me. Most people tell you not to blow up or go berserk.

He yells all the time and doesn't handle situations as well. I saw my dad slap my mom over money a few times. We can't do anything because he'll turn on us.

My mother divorced my biological dad when I was one. Then my mother married my stepfather when I was three. He's not what you would call a family man. When he is home he goes out into the garage or sits in his truck to smoke a cigarette.

I grew up with both of my parents. Both were inside of the home. When I was sixteen my dad lost his job for the second time then a month later he had brain cancer. So we dealt with that on and off for about two and half years. He passed away after my high school graduation.

My dad was in jail a lot. One time it was for robbing a place then second time for escaping and other time for drinking and driving.

My mom treated me and my sister differently so that had a lot to do with it growing up. My sister was the baby and she got everything she wanted. She could get in trouble and still you know. My mom cared for me but she did not show it like she did my sister. She didn't show me the love like she did my sister. I felt like I was an outcast. That's why I got into trouble a lot.

I got more aggressive after my dad died. I was so angry and just mad at the world. I felt somehow it was my fault that he died. I blamed my mom, my brothers...myself.

*Theme Five: Witnessing Abuse in Family of Origin*

Some of the participants reported having been victims of bullying and being abused as children. In addition they reported that the perpetrators were not only friends, but in many cases were family members including their parents. Participants also reported seeing violence between their parents. Some cried. This part of the interview was very emotional for most participants. Twice the researcher has to pause or wait for the participant to regroup or collect their thoughts. In a few incidents the participant would start talking about the abuse in their family but could not continue or complete the story. For example, this participant starting talking about how her parents constantly get into fights, and do things to hurt each other like when her father got her mother's friend pregnant.

My family is sick... My dad beat my mom so bad one time she ended up in the hospital (crying)...I can't believe she went back to him; even when he cheated on her with her best friend, she still took him back. We all have problems. I hate my dad for the way he treated my mom; but then I hate my mom for staying.

This participant discussed the abuse she witnessed between her parents. She said her parents only got married because her mother was pregnant with her. Observing the emotional distance between her parents has resulted in her making a vow to herself that if she will get married it will only be because of love.

I think they should get a divorce because they do not like each other. If I get married I'm going to be with a person I love and want to be with. They

sleep in separate rooms from like since I was in high school. Now they sleep in the same room because I'm there. My mommy is too good for my dad but stays because she can live in Plano, have the nice car and do not have to worry about the bills and stuff like that.

My parents did fight in front of us. They said hurtful things in front of us. It was sarcastic anger. They made each other feel stupid.

I remember my mom screaming at me but then I remember my mom hitting my sister a lot.

Yes. I witness my parents arguing. Years back my parents got physically violent towards each other. At the time I was trying to protect myself... I was scared. I just hid.

My mom and dad fighting ... my sister... my sister watching me and I did my chores but I didn't do her chores and she got mad and threw a chair at me. I ran. She said I better not tell the parents.

#### *Theme Six: Relationship With Family of Origin*

Resilience among children living in high-risk environments indicates that a warm and supportive relationship with an adult, particularly a parent, may help prevent the development of aggression. Some of the participants reported the relationship they had with their family of origin was not always ideal.

I think it kind of separated us a little bit. We are not as close as we can be because of it.

I don't talk to my mom. Me and my sister talks everyday. My mom is always so negative. I talk to my grandparents all the time.

Its better to be in a broken home than be part of a broken home. You see your parents fighting-- it's better to have a single mom who's happy with a boyfriend than be stuck in a bad marriage. I know people will be with someone like thier daddy. That's why I look for the warning signs. Someone who talks down to you, controlling, they want to dictate what you dress, they want to know where you're at all the time—that's the warning signs. I know. I guess. I know. I get angry at my mom for staying.

I'm not close to my dad because of the way he is. He's selfish. He takes it out on us. When I was little he used to ground us for stupid stuff.

Mom she will yell at us. My dad tried to recently hit me. He shoved me I told him don't touch me. He says we are talking back. And really I'm trying to share a point of view. He doesn't like to listen. It makes me really mad.

Being the oldest I felt I should control everything and if they did not listen to me I felt I had the right to punish them which now is not true. I viewed that totally wrong. Being the oldest I felt that I should get special treatment and they should respect me but I did not have to respect them. My 18 year old sister ran away. She got into drugs, started having sex with random guys. She recently started sending my mother letters. She will talk to my younger sister but not me.

Yeah it really did affect me and my youngest sister. There for about 4 to 5 years she was terrified of me. Absolutely terrified of me; she wouldn't talk to me hardly ever. She stayed away from me. She started staying in her room a lot. My middle sister borrowed things from me. She wasn't able to talk to me as much as people could talk to their older sister. Both of them kept to themselves because they were afraid of how I would react. And other than that my mom and I are fine. It's been between me and my sisters.

I would say hateful things to my parents. I told my mom I hated her. Things I said and did in high school. My parents were very strict. I was an A student I was really a good kid. I would get upset because they did not trust me. I think that was... where my anger came from. Sixteen to eighteen was a rough time for me.

It was crazy being the oldest. I think I was compared a lot to my dad's oldest brother. Because his oldest brother got them all up, cooked them all breakfast like helped them do their homework. Like he did everything and I think I was always compared to him I would do things for them but I was not a mom to them I picked them up from school, if they needed something I did. I had a job in high school. I had to keep my grades up.

My parents and I drifted apart. We ignored each other. Now we get along but in high school it was different.

I hold a lot of anger towards my real father. I talk to him now through email and he makes me angry because he says he loves me and says it's my

mom's fault. He doesn't listen. He doesn't understand I have a new family. To me he is a stranger; he doesn't get that.

### Systems Perspective

According to systems theory, relationship violence is viewed as a phenomenon affecting all members of the family; not just those individuals identified as either perpetrators or victims of abuse. Participants in this study identified as victims and perpetrators of aggression; their behavior had a direct influence on individuals within their family of origin along with friends and peers. For example, in the first theme participants stated that their aggression occurred on a continuum ranging from angry words to physical contact. These women actions directly and indirectly affected others. For instance one participant explained how her relationship with her sister is strain and distant. Also some women in the study used aggression as a way to protect themselves from further harm or abuse by becoming perpetrators of aggression.

Straus (1974) described the family as an adaptive goal seeking system with the resulting violence as a "system product" or output. His systems model specified positive feedback loops thought to be responsible for the escalation of violence as well as negative feedback loops that were conversely thought to either maintain or lessen the present level of violence.

## Unspoken Themes

### *Body Language*

Although participants told their individual stories about their childhoods and experiences with aggression, their body language and tone of voice also spoke volumes. During the individual interview sessions the researcher noted that many participants cried when discussing their childhood. One participant held her car keys the entire session another person kept clasping and unclasping her hands. Some participants hesitated or lost eye contact with the researcher when asked to describe their family of origin. In addition, participants also had difficulty discussing how they were victimized either by observing violence, abuse by a parent, relative or another person. However, three participants appeared indifferent or nonchalant when describing their displays of aggression; one even laughed. These participants' responses led the researcher to believe they detached themselves from the actual incidents.

### *Emotions and Emotional Abuse*

Participants did not verbally state they have experienced emotional abuse, but the interaction among family and friends could be described as emotional abuse. Emotional abuse is a form of violence in relationships. Emotional abuse is just as violent and serious as physical abuse but is often ignored or minimized if physical violence is absent. All of the following elements are considered emotional abuse: a) rejecting a person or their worth b) degrading a person in

anyway such as ridiculing, humiliation and insults c) terrorizing or isolating a person and d) exploiting a person.

The most repeated form of emotional abuse these women experienced included being called a “bitch” or “stupid.”

I hated it. I hate that word (bitch). It makes me feel bad; like I’m nothing; like I’m worthless. He would say it just to make me mad.

I was called bitch, slut, cunt, any dirty word you could think of I was called.

Also the absence of a parent or a parent being physically present but emotionally absent had an impact on participants. Some participants did not live in the same household of their biological fathers because of divorce, death, work, or imprisonment. Three participants did not live with their biological mother because of divorce, work and the state judicial system terminating parental rights. Several participants recalled a time when they needed a parent and no one was there to meet their needs.

I grew up in different foster homes. The state terminated both of my parents’ parental rights. My dad was in and out of prison. My mom did and allowed horrible things to happen to me.

### Summary

The results of this phenomenological study about aggression and young adult women were presented in this chapter. No changes were made in the interview process after a pilot study of the first two interviews was conducted except an explanation of what the phrase family composition meant. The sample size for the study was 15 participants residing in two states of Texas and Florida.

Confidentiality was protected by assigning random numbers to each participant. The demographics, highlights of the interview and a narrative of emerging themes were presented in this chapter.

Six themes emerged from the interviews: a) using aggression as a shield of protection b) aggression as a way to express individual c) occurrences of aggression among inner circle – family, friends, significant others d) childhood experiences with parents/caregivers –Inadequate and poor role modeling— personal lost e) witnessing abuse in family of origin f) relationship with family of origin. The participants' responses illustrate that aggression had an impact not only on the members in their family but on the participants as well.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study described young adult females' individual experiences with displaying aggression and their views regarding the affect their aggression had on their families. The study sought to give participants a voice by understanding the meaning young adult females have placed on their own aggression and the impact it has had on their families. This qualitative study explored how aggression of young adult women influences family relationships, as related by individuals who are now adults. A total of 15 adult women, between the ages of 18 to 24, volunteered to participate in the study. To accommodate the needs of the participants, interviews were conducted at the home of participants, offices, university campus, or inside vehicles. Establishing rapport with the participant was vital which dictated the setting for each interview. All audio-recordings of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher.

#### Discussion of Findings

The research questions explored in this study were:

1. What are the meanings young adult females ascribe to their acts of aggression and/or aggressive behavior?

2. How do the meanings that young adult females ascribe to their experiences of aggression contribute and affect their family of origin relationships?
3. How do the meanings young adult females ascribe to their experiences with aggression influence perspectives on family and peer relationships?

### Findings Related to the Research Questions

#### *Research Question 1*

The first research question was “What are the meanings young adult females ascribe to their acts of aggression and/or aggressive behavior?” Twelve participants minimized their aggressive behavior by making the acts seem small, inconsequential or minimizing the importance of the other person’s feelings. For example, one participant said “I didn’t hit him. I only pushed him a little bit.” Another participant said “I punch my sister a lot. She’ll start it then I will continue it.” Participants covered up their aggressive behavior by denying, minimizing and blaming the other person. Empirical studies indicate that it is not uncommon for aggressive or abusive individuals to make light of aggression. Groetsch (1996) found other common traits seen in batterers or perpetrators of aggression include denial, minimization of incidents, rationalization, low self-esteem, and manipulation. The results from the current study support the findings of Groetsch who examined characteristics of perpetrators. In addition Groetsch found that, minimization was used as a means to de-emphasis the incidents of aggression or violence.

In addition, anger, stress and frustration were also reasons participants used to express grounds for engaging in aggression. One participant described aggression as a “stress reliever.” Participants also indicated their aggression helped prove their worth and sent a message to others they would not be pushed around. Dasgupta (1999) also found a similar concept in her interviews with women who perpetrated violence; the women retaliated. In a study by Miller, Sears, Mowrer, Doob and Dollard (1941) their frustration-aggression hypothesis asserted that the experience of frustration produces different responses including aggression. These findings were consistent for the participants in the current study.

When asked about the reasons for their aggression, the women viewed their aggression and violence as a trait of their personality. Some indicated they have been aggressive their whole life in a variety of ways; when faced with a threatening situation, their first response was to be a fighter. Additionally, while some of the women perceived themselves as assertive, dominant, and aggressive as part of their personal characteristics, others indicated that they do not see themselves as “very aggressive.” They stated they are only aggressive in particular situations and that their aggression is often justified. For these women aggression symbolized independence and confidence by not allowing others to take advantage or “walk over them.” They also viewed aggression as a means to minimize the chances of being abused since half of the participants observed family violence between parents.

The meanings of aggression for these young women varied with the majority viewing their displays of aggression as no big deal. One participant said she learned better ways of handling incidents instead of resorting to violence.

### *Research Question 2*

The second research question was “How do the meanings that young adult females ascribe to their experiences of aggression contribute and affect their family of origin relationships?” Participants’ relationships with their family of origin were mostly described as distant as or less than ideal. Peterson (2006) examined 166 adolescents from three high schools to study the quality of relationships they had with their parents. Peterson found that peer relationships are built upon shared understanding and reciprocity and maintained through consensual validation. In contrast, parent-child relationships are inherently role differentiated where the parent acts to regulate interpersonal exchanges and the child acts as a passive or active recipient of information. Also other studies reported that females seek greater commitment and emotional support from friends (Freeman & Newland, 2002; Galliher, Rostosky, Welsh, & Kawaguchi, 1999) over family of origin during adolescence. The participants’ interviews suggest some participants lack close ties with family members. Trickett, Mennen, Kim and Sang (2009) found that most of the 303 adolescences in their study experienced emotional abuse severe enough to affect healthy development. Only two participants in the study currently live in the same household with their family of origin. The

other 13 participants left home using college as a way to escape the abuse or moving in with peers or a significant other.

### *Research Question 3*

The third research question was “How do the meanings young adult females ascribe to their experiences with aggression influence perspectives on family and peer relationships?” Participants reported having better relationships with peers than family. Coyne et al. (2006) assessed 422 adolescents in a school environment found that girls perceived aggression as more harmful than boys. Other studies also had similar findings (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Lagerspetz et al., 1988). In general females value social relationships and experience more hurt when these relationships are harmed or put into jeopardy (Coyne et al., 2006). In addition, women place a high value on friendships and mutually shared qualities (Brown, 2003). Nilan (1991) described girls’ friendships as requiring a collectively agreed upon moral order that includes caring, trust, and loyalty. The individuals who do not exhibit these qualities are placed at a higher risk of exclusion from the group. In general females view friendship stronger than males (Thomas & Daubman, 2001). Participants in this study placed high values in having and maintaining relationships with peers. Even though all of the participants reported having at least one close friend, none of the participants reported having many friends. The researcher noticed that some of the participants were very aggressive with family members and

significant others, but engaged in less aggression among close friends. One participant discussed how she never went looking for fights, but she always ended up fighting the bully.

### Review of Data Analysis

Phenomenological research methods were utilized in order to capture the meanings of young adult women experiences with aggression. In addition, this study used a phenomenological research perspective as described by Patton (1990) which allowed the researcher to utilize a small sample in order for the researcher to gather in-depth accounts of the individual participants' experiences.

Each interview was transcribed and reviewed by the researcher. A number was assigned to each participant in an effort to protect confidentiality. The researcher listened to all audiotapes and took brief notes before the tapes were transcribed. The researcher categorized the participants' comments using a color coding system. When interviews were transcribed they were coded by hand in the right hand margin with stars, check marks or circles and keywords summing up what the participants were sharing.

The passages relevant to young women's aggression were identified and highlighted. Coding involved taking the text data and labeling those categories with a term usually based in the language of the participant (Creswell, 2003). The researcher analyzed the participants' transcripts by preliminary grouping categories followed by reducing the number of categories by clustering. As

themes began to emerge, the individual descriptions from each participant were constructed.

### *Theme One: Using Aggression as a Shield of Protection*

One of the first themes to emerge was women using aggression to protect themselves. The participants talked about not letting others walk all over them, evening out the playing field and standing up for their individual rights. Downs, Rindels, and Atkinson (2007) asserted that women use a variety of strategies to protect themselves, including violence. Both physical and nonphysical means of self protection were reported by participants in the current study. These participants reported engaging in various acts such as yelling, screaming, hitting, throwing objects, or attacking with a harmful object to protect or defend self. In addition researchers (Downs, Rindels & Atkinson, 2007; Runyan, Casteel, Moracco, & Coyne-Beasley, 2007; Simmons, Lehmann, Cobb & Fowler, 2005) found that women incorporate a range of methods as a shield to protect themselves.

### *Theme Two: Aggression as a Way to Express Individual Self*

Another major theme that emerged was using aggression as a means to express oneself. Bandura's (1973) social learning theory indicated that the modeling of aggressive behaviors increased aggressive behavior in these participants. A quote from a participant depicts this attitude: "When I was younger I saw that's how my mom released it so that's what I do." Participants said they

learned to use aggression as a way to express themselves because they saw their parents model that type of behavior.

Many participants reflected on their parental figures as being instrumental in teaching them how to express themselves. One participant stated, "I had a bad temper. My dad was the same way. My dad gets mad and throws stuff. My brothers did the same thing. They get mad and throw stuff." Women typically view acts of aggression as a loss of self control whereas men views aggression as a means of control over others. For instance, another participant said "I think that's my best emotion to express. I know it. I can be all happy about a boy and love him... I will not tell him but if he makes me mad I'll tell him that. I think it's a way for people to not walk all over you ... so you don't have to look weak."

Empirical studies show that women express more emotional behavior than men in general (Becht & Vingerhoets, 2002; Chentsova-Dutton & Tsai, 2006; Driscoll, Zinkivskay, Evans & Campbell, 2006).

*Theme Three: Occurrences of Aggression Among Inner Circle –  
Family, Friends, Significant Others*

Another prevalent theme among the participants was their experiences during childhood. Participants reported displaying aggression towards the people closest to them. For example, participants reported being angry at a parent who stayed in an abusive marriage or an absent parent. Six participants witnessed their parents being physically abused by the other spouse. One participant said, "He yells all the time and doesn't handle situations as well. I saw my dad slap my

mom over money a few times.” Family violence is very common (Ireland & Smith 2009; Jackson, 2003; Lawrie, 2008; Martin, 2008) along with partner violence (Cunradi, Todd, Duke & Ames, 2009; Forgey & Badger, 2006; Henderson, Bartholomew, Trinke, Kwong, 2005; Little & Kaufman, 2002). A common reason for women’s aggression was to retaliate for real or perceived wrongdoing. Recent studies indicate that the rates of childhood trauma and abuse are very high among women who use aggression. In a study by Swan et al., (2005), a sample of women who used intimate partner violence, 60% experienced emotional abuse and neglect, 58% were sexually abused, 52% were physically abused, and 41% were physically neglected. All of the participants described some sort of abuse in their past. Abuse occurred primarily in three forms: exposure to domestic violence between parents or caregivers, abused as a child, or previous domestic violence victimization. In a study of 2,729 women who have been abused, Gatz et al., (2005) found that women whose abuse started earlier in life were more likely to have more occurrences being abused repeatedly. Having one victimization experience places an individual at an increase risk of future victimization (Rich et al., 2005). Also found that a past history of physical abuse is linked with violence in adolescence and adulthood relationships (Rich et al., 2005).

*Theme Four: Childhood Experiences With Parents/Caregivers –Inadequate and Poor Role Modeling—Personal Loss*

One of the areas the researcher explored with participants was the participant's childhood and adolescent experiences. Coding their responses led to the category of disappointing role modeling and lost respect. These categories suggested how the participants' early childhood relationships contributed to their individual experiences with aggression. Participants reported engaging in aggressive acts with boyfriends and companions. Previous research confirms the findings of this study. Studies of women who use aggression in their intimate relationships have also found value in exploring their participant's early childhood relationship experiences (Cernkovich, Lanctot, & Giordano, 2008; Swan & Snow 2006). Seamans (2003) discovered that 10 of the 13 participants in her study reported feeling disconnected from their mothers and or fathers, an emotional distance between themselves and the maternal caregivers that continued to exist into adulthood.

Similarly, the descriptions of the mother-daughter relationship or father-daughter relationship by the participants in this study indicate they are not as close as they would prefer. Transcripts from the interviews suggest participants felt disappointment in the role-modeling behavior of parents. Some of the disappointment was derived from instances of physical and or emotional abuse from a parent.

### *Theme Five: Witnessing Abuse in Family of Origin*

All of the participants described some sort of victimization in their past. Victimization occurred primarily in three forms: exposure to domestic violence between parents or caregivers, abused as a child, or previous domestic violence victimization. Haynie, Petts, Maimom, Piquero (2009) had a sample of 11,949 school age adolescents in the U.S. and found that exposure to violence is associated to greater risks of coming in contact with the criminal justice system, becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence, or running away from home. Research has been consistent in finding that children and adolescents who experience violence are more likely to engage in antisocial behavior later in life (Eitle and Turner, 2002; Molnar et al., 2005; Weaver, Borkowski & Whitman, 2008). Ireland and Smith (2009) found that experiencing violence was predictive of violent behavior while witnessing violence was predictive of delinquent behavior. In a sample of 1615 couples, McKinney et al. (2009) found that women exposed to any type of childhood family violence were more than 1.5 times as likely to engage in reciprocal intimate partner violence. The Straus (2004) study found that half of all students who perpetrate violence also indicated they received corporal punishment before the age of 12. Straus described how this supports his belief that experiencing corporal punishment or physical abuse as a child is strongly related to the delivery of aggression and is consistent with some of the participant's reports in this study.

### *Theme Six: Relationship With Family of Origin*

When the researcher asked participants about their family of origin few made positive comments. Aggression resulted in separation or caused strife among family members. In a study by Johnson (2007), three hundred sixty-three school-aged children from violent and nonviolent families were interviewed about their friendships social contacts. However, children exposed to marital violence were found to feel lonelier and have more conflicts with a close friend (Johnson, 2007). Participants in this study also indicated they were not as close to family members and some had few friends.

### Conclusions

There is minimal research on aggression and girls and the affect it has on families. The current study attempted to understand young adult females' individual experiences with displaying aggression and their views regarding the effect their aggression had on their families. The study sought to give participants a voice by understanding the meaning young adult females have placed on their own aggression and the impact it has had on their families. This study provided a medium through which these females could discuss their views. This qualitative study explored how aggression of young adult women influences family relationships, as related by individuals who are now adults.

### Implications

The purpose of this study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of young adult females' individual experiences with displaying aggression and their

views regarding the effect their aggression had on their families. Currently, preventative and intervention resources for aggressive women are limited representing an underserved group. The results of this study indicate several implications for professionals and families.

Professionals having a better understanding of aggression and the systemic effects of aggression can provide better insight and understanding when working with this population.

Second, participants reported learning how to engage in aggression by observing other family members. There is an urgent need to intervene with aggressive females in order to minimize the intergenerational cycle of aggressive behavior. As these females may eventually become mothers, efforts to support aggressive girls' positive development can have immediate and long term significance. Targeting macro and micro-level factors within a systematic framework may assist in reducing aggression. Community programs and after-school programs that reduce the opportunity to witness violence and aggression would be beneficial. Indeed, high-structure, close supervision programs such as the YMCA, community centers, and boys and girls clubs where youth can congregate after school with adult supervision could be beneficial towards achieving these goals. These programs may counteract the inadequate and poor role modeling experiences these women reported they had with their parents and caregiver, since half of the participants reported witnessing physical abuse between their parents.

Third, intervention efforts directed both at an individual and community level in preventing and treating abuse should be continued and enhanced. Community level programs for detecting and preventing abuse such as parenting courses are necessary at a macro level. At an individual level, for girls that have been physically abused, targeting intervention efforts for dealing with the emotional trauma and consequences should be addressed.

Having training sessions to help teachers and staff recognize and address aggression and bullying in girls could potentially minimize aggressive acts. The findings of this study indicate that women are more likely to be aggressive against individuals closest to them such as friends or boyfriends. Aggression can occur physically or verbally. Therefore it is important for teachers and administrators to understand the dynamics and signs of relationship violence. Also schools having extracurricular activities and programs may encourage parental involvement. Counselors may gain a better understanding of the need to intervene with aggressive females in order to minimize the intergenerational cycle of aggressive behavior. Family life educators, caseworkers and advocates need to become more proactive in becoming resources in administering information to women and their families.

Teaching women conflict resolution and negotiating skills may provide aggressive women other alternatives to protect themselves instead of engaging in violence. These skills may empower and prepare women to deal successfully with conflicts later on in life. Learning how to manage conflict in a productive way

can help reduce aggression and teach problem solving skills in order to handle conflict in nonviolent ways. Also school violence prevention programs aimed at aggressive adolescents may help decrease deviant behavior. School administrators need to give priority to policies that reduce aggressive behavior at school, these policies include anti-bullying, and violence prevention.

Other Implications include :

1. An important finding of this study was the number of participants using aggression as a shield of protection. Women also stated they used aggression to protect or defend themselves. Families and family science professionals need to be aware of the techniques women employ to protect themselves. Families also need to understand the cycle of violence and how their behavior may contribute to the aggression in females. Schools can design curriculums teaching girls about self esteem and self expression. Also educators should manage girls' behavior by emphasizing personal responsibility, self control and self discipline without force or intimidation.
2. Another finding of this study was that aggression resulted in separation or caused strife among family members. Professionals need to continue to work with families to foster cohesion and unity within the family of origin if possible. This may be accomplished through family counseling, engaging activities as a family, and learning better ways to communicate with family members. The implication of this finding is

that families do not need to withdraw from aggressive women but continue to provide a structured support system. Establishing a system of support with extended family and community resources could also be beneficial especially when a parent is prone to violence. Since many of the participants learned inappropriate ways to resolve conflicts from family members, positive mentors and role models are crucial. Mentors and role models can teach young girls how to show respect and establish appropriate boundaries within healthy relationships. Children and adolescents require a high level of interpersonal commitment as they develop. When adolescents are abused and mistreated they develop strategies for self survival which can be detrimental to others. Professionals need to understand and research the link between prior abuse and victimization and family connectedness.

3. The women reported experiencing or observing some type of abuse within their family of origin during childhood. Parents need to learn productive ways to handle conflicts and model appropriate behavior in front of their children. Resources within the community that offer parenting and anger management skills may be beneficial to this population. Findings also indicate that the women learned by observing how their parents dealt with each other and experiences of conflict with

a parent. Offering classes that teach conflict resolution skills in high school or middle school may be beneficial.

4. Professionals need to work with women to teach them healthy ways to express anger. Passive aggressiveness methods aimed at getting back at another individual are destructive. Teach parents that conflict is a natural part of relationships. Teach women early on better ways to manage conflict and give them other alternatives to engaging in violence.
5. Public policy should aim toward implementing massive mentoring programs for youth. One of the most promising strategies for addressing youth aggression and violence is mentoring. Mentoring relationships have been proven to steer children away from the dangers of gangs, and violence (Clinton, 2002; Rollin, Kaiser, Potts, & Creason, 2003). Mentored youth are 46% less likely to start using drugs and alcohol, 33% less likely to act violently, and more likely to graduate from high school, go on to college, or join the workforce (Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 2003).
6. There needs to be additional support and funding for acts and policies which reduce violence both at the state and federal level.

#### Limitations

There are several limitations that apply to this study. First, the sample was not an accurate representation of the general population within the United States.

This was a non-probability sample. The majority of participants lived in North Texas and the remaining five lived in Florida. Also the participants were all volunteers. The findings of this study are only reflective of young adult women who were willing to participate in the study and openly discuss aggression. However, participants were reluctant to openly talk about their experiences with aggression. The researcher had difficulty obtaining information on aggression from the participants. The sample size was adequate for a qualitative study; however a larger sample may have added more credibility to the study. Also the use of retrospective self-reporting to assess and describe participants' individual experience with aggression could be clouded by memory, or faulty perceptions.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Qualitative research regarding young adult women's aggression is limited. There is an overall need for more qualitative research in this area. There is a specific need to further explore the meaning of aggression for young adult women. The following are suggestions for future research:

1. The study was limited in size and geographical region. Future studies could utilize a larger sample from different geographical regions.
2. A longitudinal study of young adult women from middle school to adulthood would greatly benefit the family studies field. Some of the participants stated they became less aggressive as they got older.

Tracking the changes in participants over a time span could provide valuable information.

3. Interview members of the family of origin to increase triangulation and add credibility to the study. Talking with other family members could serve two purposes. First, it would allow the research to verify information and the accuracy of recollection on the participants' memory. Lastly talking to others will allow the researcher to get more insight into the phenomenon.
4. The study should be extended to study the role of motherhood in female aggression. When discussing their families, many of the participants talked mostly about their fathers and only mentioned their mothers in relation to their fathers. Studying women's maternal relationships may give better insight in the use of aggression.
5. The study should look to see if having siblings influences the likelihood that a female will become aggressive since every participant except one had at least one sibling.
6. The study should focus on the family as a system impacts individuals' displays of aggression.
7. Additional research could focus on the role of media, music, movies and television or other influences on aggressive behavior.

## References

- Aceves, M. J., & Cookston, J. T. (2007). Violent victimization, aggression, and parent-adolescent relations: Quality parenting as a buffer for violently victimized youth. *Journal Youth Adolescence*, 36, 635–647.
- Allen, J. A. (1998). Understanding families. Children's Bureau, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, United States Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved February 18, 2007 from [http://www.state.nd.us/humanservices/policymanuals/wraparound-508/641\\_40\\_01.htm](http://www.state.nd.us/humanservices/policymanuals/wraparound-508/641_40_01.htm).
- Anooshian, L. (2006). Violence and aggression in the lives of homeless children. *Journal of Family Violence*, 20(6), 373-387.
- Archer, J. (2006). Cross –culture differences in physical aggression between partners: A social-role analysis. *Personality & Social Psychology Review*, 10, 133-153.
- Archer, J., & Coyne, S. (2005). An integrated review of indirect, relational and social aggression. *Personality & Social Psychology Review*, 3, 212-230.
- Arseneault, L., Walsh, E., Trezesniewski, K., Newcombe, R., Caspi, A., & Moffitt T. E. (2006). Bullying victimization uniquely contributes to adjustment problems in young children: a nationally representative cohort study. *Pediatrics*, 1, 130-138.

- Atkinson, L., Schneider, B. H., & Tardif, C. (2001). Child-parent attachment and children's peer relations: A quantitative review. *Developmental Psychology, 37*(1), 86-100.
- Avakame, E. F. (1998). Intergenerational transmission of violence, self-control and conjugal violence: A comparative analysis of physical violence and psychological aggression. *Violence and Victims, 13*(3), 301-316.
- Baldry, A. C. (2003). Bullying in schools and exposure to domestic violence. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 27*, 713-732.
- Bandura, A. (1973). *Aggression: A social learning analysis*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Barboza, G. E., Schiamberg, L. B., Oehmke, J., Korzeniewski, S. J., Post, L. A., & Heraux, C. G. (2009). Individual characteristics and the multiple contexts of adolescent bullying: An ecological perspective. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38*, 101-121.
- Basow, S. A., Cahill, K. F., Phelan, J. E., Longshore, K., & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, A. (2007) Perceptions of relational and physical aggression among college students: Effects of gender of perpetrator, target, and perceiver. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 31*(1), 85-95.
- Becht, M. C., & Vingerhoets, J. (2002). Crying and mood change: A cross-cultural study. *Cognition & Emotion, 16*, 87-101.
- Bjorkqvist, K. (1994). Sex differences in covert aggression among adults. *Aggressive Behavior, 20*, 27-33.

- Bjorkqvist, K. (2001). Different names, same issue. *Social Development, 10*, 272-274.
- Bjorkqvist, K., Lagerspetz, M. J., & Kaukiainen, A. (1992). Do girls manipulate and boys fight? Developmental trends in regard to direct and indirect aggression. *Aggressive Behavior, 18*, 117-127.
- Bjorkqvist, K., & Osterman, K. (1992). Parental influence on children's self estimated aggressiveness. *Aggressive Behavior, 18*, 411-423.
- Bjorkqvist, K., Osterman, K., & Lagerspetz, M. J. (1994). Sex differences in covert aggression among adults. *Aggressive Behavior, 20*, 27-33.
- Block, J. H. (1983). Differential premises arising from differential socialization of the sexes: Some conjectures. *Child Development, 54*, 1335-1354.
- Bonica, C., Arnold, D. H., Fisher, P. H., Zeljo, A., & Yershova, K. (2003). Relational aggression relational, victimization, and language development in preschoolers. *Social Development 12(4)*, 551-562.
- Broidy, L. M., Tremblay, R. E., Brame, B., Fergusson, D., Horwood, J. L., & Laird, R., et al., (2003). Developmental trajectories of childhood disruptive behaviors and adolescent delinquency: A six-site, cross-national study. *Developmental Psychology, 39(2)*, 222-245.
- Buntaine, R. L., & Costenbader, V. K. (1997). Self-reported differences in the experience and expression of anger between girls and boys. *Sex Roles, 36*, 625-637.

- Bureau of Justice Statistics (2001). U. S. Department of Justice. Retrieved February 22, 2007 from <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/>
- Burton, L. A., Hafetz, J., & Henninger, D. (2007). Gender differences in relational and physical aggression. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 35(1), 41-50.
- Buss, A. H. (1961). *The psychology of aggression*. New York: Wiley.
- Cairns, R. B. & Cairns, B. D. (1994). *Lifelines and risks: Pathways of youth in our time*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cairns, B. D., Cairns, R. B., Ferguson, L. L., Garipey, J., & Neckerman, H. J. (1989). Growth and aggression: Childhood to early adolescence. *Developmental Psychology*, 25, 320–330.
- Carlyle, K. E., & Steinman, K. J. (2007). Demographic differences in prevalence, co-occurrence, and correlates of adolescent bullying at school. *Journal of School Health*, 9, 623-629.
- Cernkovich, S. A., Lanctot, N., & Giordano, P. (2008) Predicting adolescent and adult antisocial behavior among adjudicated delinquent females. *Crime & Delinquency*, 1, 3-33.
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2008). Understanding youth violence. Retrieved March 27, 2009 from <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/YV-FactSheet-a.pdf>
- Chapell, M., Casey, D., De la Cruz, C., Ferrell, J., Fonnar, J., Lipkin, R., Newsham, M., Sterling, M., & Whitaker, S. (2004). Bullying in college by students and teachers. *Adolescence*, 39, 53-64.

- Chapell, M. S., Hasselman, S. L., Kitchin, T., Lomon, S. N., MacIver, K. W., & Sarullo, P. L. (2006). Bullying in elementary school, high school, and college. *Adolescence, 41*, 633-648.
- Charmaz, K. (2001). Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. In J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 675-694). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Chentsova-Dutton, Y. E., & Tsai, J. L. (2006). Gender differences in emotional response among European American and Hmong Americans. *Cognition & Emotion, 1*, 161-181.
- Clinton, G. (2002). Mentoring programs for at-risk youth. *Prevention Researcher, 1*, 9-19.
- Coe, C., Gibson, A., Spencer, N., & Stuttaford, M. (2008). Sure start: Voices of the hard-to-reach. *Child Care Health & Development, 4*, 447-453.
- Coie, J. D., & Dodge, K. A. (1988). Multiple sources of data on social behavior and social status in the school: A cross-age comparison. *Child Development, 59*, 815-829.
- Coie, J. D., & Dodge, K. A. (1998). Aggression and antisocial behavior. In: W. Damon and N. Eisenberg, Editors, *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 3. Social, emotional, and personality development*, Wiley, New York (1998), pp. 779–862.
- Congerm R., Neppl, T., Kim, K., & Scaramella, L. (2000). Study of parents and children. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 2*, 143-160.

- Cox, D. L., Stabb, S. D., & Hulgus, J. F. (2000). Anger and depression in girls and boys: A study of gender differences. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 1*, 110-112.
- Coyne, S. M., & Archer, J. (2005). The relationship between indirect and physical aggression on television and in real life. *Social Development, 2*, 324-338.
- Coyne, S. M., Archer, J., & Eslea, M. (2004). Cruel intentions on television and in real life: Can viewing indirect aggression increase viewers' subsequent indirect aggression? *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 3*, 234-253.
- Coyne, S. M., Archer, J., & Eslea, M. (2006). "We're not friends anymore! unless": The frequency and harmfulness of indirect, relational, and social aggression. *Aggressive Behavior, 32*, 294-307.
- Crawley, T., & Martin, F. H. (2006). Impulsive-aggression, antisocial behavior and subclinical psychopathy: Preliminary findings from an undergraduate female sample. *Psychiatry, Psychology, and Law, 13*, 232-242.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory Into Practice, 39*, 124-131.
- Crick, N. R. (1995). Relational aggression: The role of intent attribution, feelings of distress, and provocation type. *Development and Psychopathology, 7*, 313-322.

- Crick, N. R. (1996). The role of overt aggression, relational aggression and prosocial behavior in the prediction of children's future social adjustment. *Child Development, 67*, 2317-2327.
- Crick, N. R. (1997). Engagement in gender normative versus nonnormative forms of aggression: Links to social-psychological adjustment. *Developmental Psychology, 33*(4), 610-617.
- Crick, N., & Bigbee, M. (1998). Relational and overt forms of peer victimization: A multi-informant approach, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 66*, 337–347.
- Crick, N. R., Casas, J. F., & Ku, H. (1999). Relational and physical forms of peer victimization in preschool. *Developmental Psychology, 35*, 376–385.
- Crick, N. R., Casas, J. F., & Nelson, D. A. (2002). Toward a more comprehensive understanding of peer maltreatment: Studies of relational victimization. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 11*, 98–101.
- Crick N. R., & Grotpeter J. (1995). Relational aggression, gender, and social-psychological adjustment. *Child Development 66*, 710–722.
- Crick, N. R., Ostrov, J. M., & Werner, N. E. (2006). A longitudinal study of relational aggression, physical aggression and children's social-psychological adjustment. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 34*, 131-142.

- Crick, N. R., & Werner, N. E. (1998). Response decision processes in relational and overt aggression. *Child Development, 69*(6), 1630-1639.
- Crick, N. R., Werner, N. E., Casas, J. F., O'Brien, K. M., Nelson, D. A., Grotzinger, J. K. & Markon, K. (1999). Childhood aggression and gender: A new look at an old problem. In D. Berstein (Ed.), *The Nebraska symposium on motivation: Gender and motivation* (pp. 75–141). Omaha, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Crothers, L. M., Field, J. E., & Kolbert, J. B. (2005). Navigating power, control, and being nice: Aggression in adolescent girls' friendships. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 83*, 349–354.
- Crowley, D. (2001). Understanding women's anger: A description of relational patterns. *Health Care for Women International 22*, 385-400.
- Cunradi, C. Todd, M., Duke, M., & Ames, G. (2009). Problem drinking, unemployment, and intimate partner violence among a sample of construction industry workers and their partners. *Journal of Family Violence, 2*, 63-74.
- Daniels, D., Dunn, J., Furstenberg, F., & Plomin, R. (1985). Environmental differences within the family and adjustment differences within pairs of adolescent siblings. *Child Development, 56*, 764-774.
- DasGupta, S. (1999). Coping and related characteristics delineating battered women's experiences in self-defined, difficult/hurtful dating relationships: A multicultural study. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 4*, 561-577.

- Denham S. A., Caverly, S., Schmidt, M., Blair, K., Demulder, E., Caal, S., Hamada, H., & Mason, T. (2002). Preschool understanding of emotions: Contributions to classroom anger and aggression. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, 43(7), 901-916.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). (2003). *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- DeVoe, J. F., & Kaffenberger, S. (2005). Student reports of bullying: Results from the 2001 school crime supplement to the national crime victimization survey (NCES 2005-310). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Dixon, L., Hamilton-Giachritsis, C., & Browne, K. (2005). Attributions and behaviors of parents abused as children: A meditational analysis of the intergenerational continuity of child maltreatment. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, 1, 58-68.
- Dodge, K. A. (1980). Social cognition and children's aggressive behavior. *Child Development*, 51, 162-170.
- Dodge, K. A. (2008). Framing public policy and prevention of chronic violence in American youths. *American Psychologist*, 7, 573-590.
- Dogan, S. J., Conger, R. D., & Kim, K. J. (2007). Cognitive and parenting pathways in the transmission of antisocial behavior from parents to adolescents. *Child Development*, 78, 335-349.

- Dowling, P. (2005). Master of research online: Research and the theoretical field. Retrieved February 16, 2009 from <http://homepage.mac.com/paulcdowling/ioe/rtf/rtf.pdf>.
- Downs, W. R., Rindels, B., & Atkinson, C. (2007). Women's use of physical and nonphysical self-defense strategies during incidents of partner violence. *Violence Against Women, 13*, 28-45.
- Driscoll, H., Zinkivskay, A., Evans, K., & Campbell, A. (2006). Gender differences in social representations of aggression: The phenomenological experience of differences in inhibitory control? *The British Psychological Society, 97*, 139-153.
- Eagly, A. H., & Steffen, V. J. (1986). Gender and aggressive behavior: A meta-analytic review of the social psychological literature. *Psychological Bulletin, 100*, 309-330.
- Eitle, D., & Turner, J. (2002). Exposure to community violence and young adult crime: The effects of witnessing violence, traumatic victimization, and other stressful life events. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 2*, 214-237.
- Elias, M. J., & Zins, J. E. (2003). Bullying, other forms of peer harassment, and victimization in the schools: Issues for school psychology research and practice. *Journal of Applied School Psychology, 2*, 1-5.

- Estell, D. B., Farmer, T. W., Pearl, R., Acker, R., & Rodkin, P. C. (2008). Social status and aggressive and disruptive behavior in girls: Individual, group and classroom influences. *Journal of School Psychology, 46*, 2, 193-212.
- Fagan, A. A. (2005). The relationship between adolescent physical abuse and criminal offending: Support for an enduring and generalized cycle of violence. *Journal of Family Violence, 20*, 279-290.
- Farber, N. K. (2006). Conducting qualitative research: A practical guide for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling, 9*, 367-375.
- Fekkes, M., Pijpers, F. I. M., & Verloove-Vanhorick, S. P. (2004). Bullying behavior and associations with psychosomatic complaints and depression in victims. *The Journal of Pediatrics, 144*, 17-22
- Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R., Turner, H., & Hamby, S.L. (2005). The victimization of children and youth: A comprehensive, national survey. *Child Maltreatment, 10*, 5-25.
- Flick, L. (2002). Principles and methods in research. Retrieved January 20, from <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/siegle/research/Qualitative/qualitativeInstructorNotes.html>.
- Forgey, M., & Badger, L. (2006). Patterns of intimate partner violence among married women in the military: Type, level directionality and consequences. *Journal of Family Violence, 21*(6), 369-380.

- Forrest, S., Eatough, V., & Shevlin, M. (2005). Measuring adult indirect aggression: The development and psychometric assessment of the indirect aggression scales. *Aggressive Behavior, 1*, 84-97.
- Frabutt, J. M., & White, J. W. (2002). Delinquency and violence among girls. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice, 5*, 241-247.
- Freeman, H. S., & Newland, L. A. (2002). Romantic partners, best friends, mothers, and fathers: Link between adolescent social worlds. Paper presented at the meeting the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence. New Orleans, LA.
- Galen, B. R., & Underwood, M. K. (1997). A developmental investigation of social aggression among children. *Developmental Psychology, 33*, 589-600.
- Gallagher, R. V., Rostosky, S. S., Welsh, D. P., Kawaguchi, M. C. (1999). Power and psychological well-being in late adolescent romantic relationships. *Sex Roles, 9*, 689-710.
- Garrido, V., & Morales, L. A. (2007). Serious violent or chronic juvenile offenders: A systematic review of treatment effectiveness in secure corrections. Retrieved March 27, 2009 from [http://db.c2admin.org/doc-pdf/Garrido\\_seriousjuv\\_review.pdf](http://db.c2admin.org/doc-pdf/Garrido_seriousjuv_review.pdf).
- Gatz, M., Russell, L., Grady, J., Kram-Fernandez, D. Clark, C., & Marshall, B. (2005). Women's recollections of victimization, psychological problems, and substance use. *Journal of Community Psychology, 4*, 479-493.

- Gelles, R. J., & Straus, M. A. (1979). Determinants of violence in the family: Toward a theoretical integration. In W. R. Burr, R. Hill, F. I. Nye, & I. L. Reiss (Eds.), *Contemporary Theories about the Family* (pp. 549-581). New York: The Free Press.
- Giles, J. W., & Heyman, G. D. (2005). Young children's beliefs about the relationship between gender and aggressive behavior. *Child Development, 1*, 107-121.
- Gilligan, C. (2003). *The birth of pleasure: A new map of love*. New York: Random House.
- Glaser, B. G. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in methodology of grounded theory*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 3*(1). Retrieved February 19, 2008 from [http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3\\_1/pdf/groenwald.pdf](http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_1/pdf/groenwald.pdf)
- Groetsch, M. (1996). *The battering syndrome: Why men beat women and the professional's guide to intervention*. Brookfield, WI: CPI.
- Grotmeter, J. K., & Crick, N. R. (1996). Relational aggression, overt aggression and friendship. *Child Development, 67*, 2328-2338.
- Gruber, J. E. (2007). The impact of bullying and sexual harassment on middle and high school girls. *Violence Against Women, 13*, 627-643.
- Halbur, K. V. (2005). Bullying in the academic workplace. *Academic Leader, 21*, 3-7.

- Haridakis, P. (2006). Men, women, and televised violence: Predicting viewer aggression in male and female television viewers. *Communication Quarterly, 2*, 227-255.
- Harris, J. R. (1995). Where is the child's environment? A group socialization theory of development. *Psychological Review, 102*, 458-489.
- Haynie, D., Petts, R., Maimon, D., Piquero, A. (2009). Exposure to violence in adolescence and precocious role exits. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence, 3*, 269-286.
- Henault, C. (2001). Zero-tolerance in schools. *Journal of Law and Education, 30*, 547–553.
- Henderson, A., Bartholomew, K., Trinke, S., & Kowng, M. (2005). When loving means hurting: An exploration of attachment and intimate abuse in a community sample. *Journal of Family Violence, 4*, 219-230.
- Henry, C. S., Robinson, L. C., Neal, R. A., & Huey, E. L. (2006). Adolescent perceptions of overall family system functioning and parental behaviors. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 15*, 319-329.
- Herrenkohl, T. I., & Herrenkohl, R. C. (2007). Examining the overlap and prediction of multiple forms of child maltreatment, stressors, and socioeconomic status: A longitudinal analysis of youth outcomes. *Journal of Family Violence, 22*, 53–562.

- Heyman, R. E., & Slep, A. M. Smith, (2002). Do child abuse and interparental violence lead to adulthood family violence. *Journal of Marriage & Family* 64(4), 864-870.
- Hong, L. (2000). Toward a transformed approach to prevention: Breaking the link between masculinity and violence. *Journal of American College Health*, 6, 269-280.
- Howard, D.E., Feigelman, S., Li, X.M., Cross, S., & Rachuba, L. (2002). The relationship among violence victimization, witnessing violence, and youth distress. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 6, 455-462.
- Hun-Soo, K., & Hyun-Sil, K. (2007). Aggression among Korean adolescents: A comparison between delinquents and nondelinquents. *Social Behavior and Personality* 35(4), 499-512.
- Ireland, T., & Smith, C. (2009). Living in partner-violent families: Developmental links to antisocial behavior and relationship violence. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence*, 3, 323-339.
- Jackson, D. (2003). Broadening constructions of family violence: Mothers' perspectives of aggression from their children. *Child and Family Social Work*, 8, 321-329.
- Johnson, S., & Mize J. (2007). Physical attractiveness in preschoolers: Relationships with power, status, aggression and social skills. *Journal of School Psychology*, 5, 499-521.

- Junger, M., Feder, L., Clay, J., Cote, S. M., Farrington, D. P., Freiberg, K., Genoves, V. G. et al., (2007) Preventing violence in seven countries: Global convergence in policies. *Europe Journal of Criminal Policy Research* 13, 327-356.
- Kerestes, G., & Milanovic, A. (2006). Relations between different types of children's aggressive behavior and sociometric status among peers of the same and opposite gender. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 47, 477-483.
- Kim, J. N. (2008). The cubicle bully. *Scientific American Mind*, 3, 13-19.
- Knutson, J. F., DeGarmo, D. S., & Reid, J. B. (2004). Social disadvantage and neglectful parenting as precursors to the development of antisocial and aggressive child behavior: Testing a theoretical model. *Aggressive Behavior*, 30, 187-205.
- Kokko, K., Tremblay, R. E., Lacourse, E. Nagin, D. S., & Vitaro, F. (2006). Trajectories of prosocial behavior and physical aggression in middle childhood: Links to adolescent school dropout and physical violence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 16, 403-428.
- Kokko, K., & Pulkkinen, L. (2005). Stability of aggressive behavior from childhood to middle age in women and men. *Aggressive Behavior*, 5, 485-497.
- Kretchmar, M. D., & Jacobvitz, D. B. (2002). Observing mother-child relationships across generations: boundary patterns, attachment, and the transmission of caregiving. *Family Process*, 41, 351-374.

- Kruttschnitt, C., Gartner, R., & Hussemann, J. (2008). Female violent offenders: Moral panics or more serious offenders? *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 1, 9-35.
- Kyung-Hye, L., Baillargeon, R. H., Vermunt, J. K., & Hong-Xing, W. (2007). Age differences in the prevalence of physical aggression among 5-11-year-old Canadian boys and girls. *Aggressive Behavior*, 33, 26-37.
- Lagerspetz, K. M. J., Bjorkqvist, K., & Peltonen, T. (1988). Is indirect aggression typical of females? Gender differences in 11- to 12-year old children. *Aggressive Behavior*, 14, 403-414.
- Law, M. (2002). *Evidence-based rehabilitation: A guide to practice*. Thorofare, NJ: Slack.
- Lawrie, M. (2008). Family violence: What's in a name. *Journal of Family Studies*, 14, 157-159.
- Lee, R. T., & Brotheridge, C. M. (2006). When prey turns predatory: Workplace bullying as a predictor of counteraggression/ bullying coping and well-being. *European Journal of Work & Organizational Psychology*, 3, 352-377.
- Lester, S. (1999). An introduction to phenomenological research. Retrieved February 3, 2007 from <http://www.devmts.demon.co.uk/resmethy.htm>.
- Lewis, D. (2004). Bullying at work: The impact of shame among university and college lecturers. *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling*, 32, 281-299.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

- Little, L., & Kaufman, K. G. (2002). Using ecological theory to understand partner violence and child maltreatment. *Journal of Community Health Nursing, 3*, 133-145.
- Livingston, J. A., Hequembourg, A., Testa, M., & VanZile-Tamsen, C. (2007). Unique aspects of adolescent sexual victimization experiences. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 4*, 331-343.
- Loudin, J. L., Loukas, A., & Robinson, S. (2003). Relational aggression in college students: Examining the roles of social anxiety and empathy. *Aggressive Behavior, 5*, 430-439.
- Loukas, A., Paulos, S., & Robinson, S. (2005). Early adolescent social and overt aggression: Examining the roles of social anxiety and maternal psychological control. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 4*, 335-345.
- Marsee, M. A., Weems, C. F., & Taylor, L. K. (2008). Exploring the association between aggression and anxiety in youth: A look at aggressive subtypes, gender, and social cognition. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 17*, 154-168.
- Martin, C. (2008). The trauma of domestic violence. *Therapy Today, 10*, 23-25.
- McCabe, K. M., Luccini, S. E., Hough, R. L., Yeh, M., & Hazen, A. (2005). The relationship between violence exposure and conduct problems among adolescents: A prospective study. *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 75*, 575-584.

- McKinney, C., Caetano, R., Ramisetty-Mikler, S., & Nelson, S. (2009). Childhood family violence and perpetration and victimization of intimate partner violence: Findings from a national population-based study of couples. *Annals of Epidemiology, 1*, 25-32.
- Miller, J. L., & Vaillancourt, T. (2007). Relation between childhood peer victimization and adult perfectionism: Are victims of indirect aggression more perfectionistic? *Aggressive Behavior, 3*, 230-241.
- Miller, N. E., Sears, R. R., Mowrer, O. H., Doob, L. W. & Dollard, J. (1941). The frustration-aggression hypothesis. *Psychological Review, 48*, 337-342.
- Molnar, B., Roberts, A., Browne, A., Gardener, H., Buka, S. (2005). What girls need: Recommendations for preventing violence among urban girls in the US. *Social Science & Medicine, 10*, 2191-2204.
- Moore, T. E., & Pepler, D. J. (2006). Wounding words: Maternal verbal aggression and children's adjustment. *Journal of Family Violence, 1*, 89-93.
- Moretti, M. M., Obsuth, I., Odgers, C.L., & Reebye, P. (2006). Exposure to maternal vs. paternal partner violence, PTSD, and aggression in adolescent girls and boys. *Aggressive Behavior, 32*, 385-395.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Murray, J., & Farrington, D. P. (2005). Parental imprisonment: Effects on boys' antisocial behavior and delinquency through the life-course. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 12, 1269-1278.
- Murray-Close, D., Ostrov, J. M., & Crick, N. (2007). A short-term longitudinal study of growth of relational aggression during middle childhood: Associations with gender, friendship intimacy and internalizing problems. *Development Psychopathology*, 19, 187-203.
- Nansel, T., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R., Ruan, W., Simons-Morton, B., & Scheidt, P. (2001). Bullying behaviors among U.S. youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285, 2094-2100.
- Nelson, D.A., Robinson, C.C., & Hart, C.H. (2005). Relational and physical aggression of preschool-age children: Peer status linkages across informants. *Early Education and Development*, 16, 115–139.
- Nelson, E. D., & Lambert, R. D. (2001). Sticks, stones, and semantics: The ivory tower bully's vocabulary of motives. *Qualitative Sociology*, 24, 83-106.
- Nickerson, A. B., & Martens, M. P. (2008). Associations with control, security/enforcement, educational/therapeutic approaches and demographic factors. *School Psychology Review*, 2, 228-243.
- Nilan, P. (1991). Exclusion, inclusion, and moral ordering in two girls' friendship groups. *Gender and Education*, 2, 163-182.

- O'Donnell, L., Stueve, A., Myint-U. A., Duran, R., Agronick, G., & Wilson-Simmons, R. (2006). Middle school aggression and subsequent intimate partner physical violence. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 35, 693-703.
- O'Keefe, M. (1998). Factors mediating the link between witnessing interparental violence and dating violence. *Journal of Family Violence*, 13(1), 39-57.
- O'Leary, K. D. (2005). Partner aggression and problem drinking across the lifespan: how much do they decline. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 25, 877-884.
- Olesen, V.L. (2003). Feminisms and qualitative research at and into the millennium. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp.332-370). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Orpinas, P., & Horne, A. M. (2006). *Bullying prevention: Creating a positive school climate and developing social competence*. Washington , DC: American Psychological Association.
- Osterman, K., Bjorkqvist, K, & Lagerspetz, K. J., (1999). Locus of control and three types of aggression. *Aggressive Behavior*, 25, 61-65.
- Ostrov, J. M., Gentile, D. A., & Crick, N. R. (2006). Media exposure, aggression and prosocial behavior during early childhood: A longitudinal study. *Social Development*, 4, 612-627.

- Owens, L., Shute, & R., Slee, P. (2007). They do it just to show off. Year 9 girls, boys and their teachers' explanations for boys' aggression to girls. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 4, 343-360.
- Pakaslahti, L., Spoof, I., Asplund-Peltola, R., & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, L. (1998). Parents' social problem-solving strategies in families with aggressive and non-aggressive girls. *Aggressive Behavior*, 24, 37-51.
- Patterson, G. R., Chamberlain, P., & Reid, J. B. (1982). A comparative evaluation of a parent-training program. *Behavior Therapy*, 13, 638-650.
- Patterson, G. R., Cobb, J. A., & Ray, S. A. (1973). A social engineering technology for retraining the families of aggressive boys. In H. E. Adams and I. P. Unikel (Eds.), *Issues and trends in behavior therapy*. Springfield, Ill: Thomas.
- Patterson, G. R., Debaryshe, B. D., & Ramsey E. (1989). A developmental perspective on antisocial behavior. *American Psychologist*, 44, 329-335.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3<sup>rd</sup>.ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Penney, S. R., & Moretti, M. M. (2007). The relation of psychopathy to concurrent aggression and antisocial behavior in high-risk adolescent girls and boys. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 25, 21-41.

- Peterson, J. (2006). Punishment in intimate relationships: Does it exist and how does it impact relationship satisfaction. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 1, 45-60.
- Pettit, G. (2004). Violent children in developmental perspective. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 5, 194-197.
- Pipher, M. (2002). *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the selves of adolescent girls*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Prinstein, M.J., Boergers, J., & Vernberg, E.M. (2001). Overt and relational aggression in adolescents: Social psychological adjustment of aggressors and victims. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 30, 479– 491.
- Reiss, A. J., Jr. & Roth, J. A. (1993). *Understanding and preventing violence*. Washington DC: National Academy Press.
- Rich, C. L., Gidycz, C. A., Warkentin, J. B., Loh, C., & Weiland, P. (2005). Child and adolescent abuse and subsequent victimization: A prospective study. *The International Journal*, 12, 1373-1394.
- Rigby, K. (2001). *Stop the bullying: A handbook for teachers*. Markham, Ontario, Canada: Pembroke Publishers.
- Rings, L. (2006). The oral interview and cross-cultural understanding in the foreign language classroom. *Foreign Language Annals*, 1, 49-53.
- Rollin, S., Kaiser, C., Potts, I., & Creason, A. (2003). A school based violence prevention model for at-risk eight grade youth. *Psychology in the Schools*, 4, 403-27.

- Roseth, C. J., Pellegrini, A. D., Bohn, C. M., Ryzin, M. V., & Vance, N. (2007). Preschoolers' aggression, affiliation and social dominance relationships: An observational longitudinal study. *Journal of School Psychology, 5*, 479-497.
- Rudestam, K. E., & Newton, R. R. (Eds.). (2007). *Surviving your dissertation: A comprehensive guide to content and process*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Runyan, C. W., Casteel, C., Moracco, K. E., Coyne-Beasley, T. (2007). US women's choices of strategies to protect themselves from violence. *Injury Prevention, 4*, 270-275.
- SaLuis, F. M. (2008). Bullying, burnout and mental health amongst Portuguese nurses. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 4*, 411-426.
- Scott, E. S., & Steinberg, L. (2008). Adolescent development and the regulation of youth crime. *Future of Children, 2*, 15-33.
- Seamans, Cindy L (2003). A qualitative study of women perpetrators of domestic violence: Comparison with literature on men perpetrators of domestic violence. Retrieved March 18, 2009 from <http://www.researchpaper.org/files/pollreport.pdf>
- Shenton, A. K., (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information 22*, 63-75.
- Siegfried, C. (2007). Victimization and youth violence. *Prevention Researcher, 1*, 14-26.

- Simmons, C. A., Lehmann, P. Cobb, N., & Fowler, C. R. (2005). Personality profiles of women and men arrested for domestic violence: An analysis of similarities and differences. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 4*, 63-81.
- Simpson, R., & Cohen, C. (2004). Dangerous work: The gendered nature of bullying in the context of higher education. *Gender, Work, and Organization, 11*, 163-186.
- Smith, P. K., Morita, Y., Junger-Tas, J., Olweus, D., Catalane, R., & Slee, P. (Eds.). (1999). *The nature of school bullying*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, P. K., Singer, M., Hoel, H., & Cooper, C. L. (2003). Victimization in the school and the workplace: Are there any links? *British Journal of Psychology, 94*, 175-188.
- Solberg, M. E., & Olweus, D. (2003). Research on school bullying and victimization: What have we learned and where do we go from here? *School Psychology Review, 32*, 365–384.
- Sorenson, S. B., Upchurch, D. M., Haikang, S. (1996). Violence and injury in marital arguments: Risk patterns and gender differences. *American Journal of Public Health, 1*, 35-41.
- Speziale, H., & Carpenter, D. (2003). *Qualitative research in nursing: Advancing the humanistic imperative* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Philadelphia, Pa: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

- Spillett, M. A. (2003). Peer debriefing: Who, what, when, why, how. *Academic Exchange Quarterly*. Retrieved April 5, 2009 from <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Peer+debriefing:+who,+what,+when,+why,+how-a0111848817>
- Sroufe, L.A., & Ward, M.J. (1980). Seductive behaviors or mothers of toddlers: Occurrence, correlates and family origins. *Child Development, 51*, 1222-1229.
- Stader, D. L. (2004). Zero tolerance as public policy. *Clearing House, 2*, 62-66.
- Strandmark, K. M., & Hallberg, L. (2007). The origin of workplace bullying: Experiences from the perspective of bully victims in the public service sector. *Journal of Nursing Management, 15*, 332-341.
- Straus, M. (1973). A general systems theory approach to a theory of violence between family members *Social Science Information, 3*, 105-125.
- Straus, M. (1991). Family violence in American families: Incidence rates, causes and trends. In D. D. Knudsen & J. L. Miller (Eds.), *Abused and battered: Social and legal responses to family violence. Social institutions and social change* (pp. 17-34). Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Straus, M. (2004). Cross-cultural reliability and validity of the revised conflict tactics scales: A study of university student dating couples in 17 nation. *Cross-Cultural Research, 4*, 407-432.
- Straus, M. A., Gelles, R. J., & Steinmetz, S. K. (1980). *Behind closed doors: Violence in the American family*. New York: Doubleday.

- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Strohschein, L. (2005). Household income histories and child mental health trajectories. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 46*, 359-375.
- Suchman, N. E., & Luthar, S. S., (2000). Maternal addiction, child maladjustment and socio-demographic risks: Implications for parenting behaviors. *Addiction, 9*, 1417-1428.
- Swan, S., Gambone, L., Fields, A., Sullivan, T., & Snow, D. (2005). Women who use violence in intimate relationships: The role of anger, victimization and symptoms of posttraumatic stress and depression. *Violence and Victims, 3*, 267-285.
- Swan, S. C., & Snow, D. (2006). The development of a theory of women's use of violence in intimate relationships. *Violence Against Women, 12*(11), 1026-1045.
- Talbott, E., Celinska, D., Simpson, J., & Coe, M. G. (2002). Somebody else making somebody else fight: Aggression and the social context among urban adolescents girls. *Exceptionality, 10*, 203-221.
- Taylor, L., & Pittman, J. F. (2005). Sex of spouse abuse offender and directionality of abuse as predictors of personal distress, interpersonal functioning and perceptions of family climate. *Journal of Family Violence, 5*, 329-339.

- Teijlingen, E. (2001). The importance of pilot studies. *Social Update*. Retrieved February 20, 2007 from <http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU35.html>.
- Temcheff, C. E., Serbin, L. A., Martin-Storey, A., Stack, D. M, Hodgins, S., Ledingham, J., & Schwartzman, A. E. (2008). Continuity and pathways from aggression in childhood to family violence in adulthood: A 30 year longitudinal study. *Journal of Family Violence, 23*, 231-242.
- Thomas, J. J., & Daubman, K. A. (2001). The relationship between friendship quality and self-esteem in adolescent girls and boys. *Sex Roles, 2*, 53-65.
- Tolan, P.H., Gorman-Smith, D., & Henry, D. B. (2003). The developmental ecology of urban males' youth violence. *Developmental Psychology, 39*, 274-291.
- Tomada, G., & Schneider, B. H. (1997). Relational aggression, gender, and peer acceptance: Invariance across culture, stability. *Developmental Psychology, 4*, 601-609.
- Townsend, L., Fisher, A. J., Chikobvu, P., Lombard, C., & King, G. (2008). The relationship between bullying behaviors and high school dropout in Cape Town, South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology, 1*, 21-32.
- Trickett, P. K., Mennen, F. E., Kim, K., & Sang, J. (2009). Emotional abuse in a sample of multiply maltreated, urban young adolescents: Issues of definition and identification. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 1*, 27-35.

- Troop-Gordon, W., & Ladd, G. W. (2005). Trajectories of peer victimization and perceptions of the self and schoolmates: Precursors to internalizing and externalizing problems. *Child Development, 76*, 1072–1091.
- Tutty, L. M., Babins-Wagner, R., & Rothery, M. A. (2006). Group treatment for aggressive women: An initial evaluation. *Journal of Family Violence, 21*, 341-349.
- Underwood, M. K. (2003). *Social aggression among girls*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Underwood, M. K. (2005). Observing anger and aggression among preadolescent girls and boys: Ethical dilemmas and practical solutions. *Ethics & Behavior, 15*, 235-245.
- Underwood, M. K., Galen, B. R., & Paquette, J. A. (2001). Top ten challenges for understanding gender and aggression in children: Why can't we all just get along? *Social Development, 10*, 248-266.
- Underwood, M. K., Scott, B. L., Galperin, M. B., Bjornstad, G. J., & Sexton A. M. (2004). An observational study of social exclusion under varied conditions: Gender and developmental differences. *Child Development, 5*, 1538-1555.
- U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation (2007). Crime in the United States. Retrieved February 19, 2008 from [www.fbi.gov/publications/leb/2007/jan2007/jan2007leb.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/publications/leb/2007/jan2007/jan2007leb.htm)

- Vierikko, E., Pulkkinen L., Kaprio, J., & Rose, R. J. (2006). Genetic and environmental sources of continuity and change in teacher-rated aggression during early adolescence. *Aggressive Behavior, 32*, 308-320.
- Vitaro, F., Brendgen, M., & Tremblay, R. E., (2002). Reactively and proactively aggressive children: Antecedent and subsequent characteristics. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 43*, 495-505.
- Von Bertalanffy, L. (1968). *General systems theory: Foundations, developments, applications*. New York: Braziller.
- Von Salisch, M. (2002). Children's emotional development: Challenges in their relationships to parents, peers, and friends. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 25*(4), 319-329.
- Weaver, C. M., Borkowski, J. G., & Whitman, T. L. (2008). Violence breeds violence: Childhood exposure and adolescent conduct problems. *Journal of Community Psychology, 36*, 96-112.
- Webster, L. & Hackett, R. K. (2007). A comparison of unresolved versus resolved status and its relationship to behavior in maltreated adolescents. *School Psychology International, 28*, 365-378.
- Werner, N. E., & Crick, N. R. (2004). Maladaptive peer relationships and the development of relational and physical aggression during middle childhood. *Social Development, 13*(4), 495-514.

Women in Prison Project: Survivors of abuse in prison fact sheet. Retrieved March 27, 2009 from

[http://correctionalassociation.org/publications/download/wipp/factsheets/Suvivors\\_of\\_Abuse\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_2008.pdf](http://correctionalassociation.org/publications/download/wipp/factsheets/Suvivors_of_Abuse_Fact_Sheet_2008.pdf)

Xie, H., Farmer, T. W., & Cairns, B. D. (2003). Different forms of aggression among inner-city African-American children: Gender, configurations and school social networks. *Journal of School Psychology, 5*, 355-375.

Xie, H., Swift, D. J., Cairns, B. D., & Cairns, R. B. (2002). Aggressive behaviors in social interaction and developmental adaptation: A narrative analysis of interpersonal conflicts during early adolescence. *Social Development, 2*, 205-224.

Young, E. L., Boye, A. E., & Nelson, D. A. (2006). Relational aggression: Understanding, identifying, and responding in schools. *Psychology in the Schools, 43*, 297-312.

Zaborskis, A., & Vareikiene, I. (2007). School bullying and its association with health and lifestyle among schoolchildren. *Medicina, 3*, 232-239.

Zalecki, C. A., & Hinshaw, S. P. (2004). Overt and relational aggression in girls with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology, 1*, 125-137.

Zimmerman, F. J., Glew, G. M., Christakis, D. A., & Katon, W. (2005). Early cognitive stimulation, emotional support, and television watching as predictors of subsequent bullying among grade-school children. *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*, 159, 384–388.

Zweig, J. M. (2003). Vulnerable youth: Identifying their need for alternative educational settings. The Urban Alternative. Retrieved February 17, 2008 from [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410828\\_vulnerable\\_youth.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410828_vulnerable_youth.pdf).

## APPENDIX A

### Questions

## Questions

### Research Questions

- What are the meanings young adult females ascribe to their acts of aggression and/or aggressive behavior?
- How do the meanings that young adult females ascribe to their experiences of aggression contribute and affect their family of origin relationships?

### Interview Questions

14. How do you view aggression?
15. Have you ever used aggression or violence toward others? Tell me as much as you can remember about the most violent you have been against someone.
16. What do you make of your violence/aggression? Why do you think you use aggression?
17. Tell me about the family that raised you?
18. Did you ever witness any violence between your parents?
19. What other types of behavior have you been involved in that your parents or school might consider violent or aggressive?
  - a. When did these behavior(s) start
  - b. How often do these behaviors occur
20. How did your family of origin respond to your acts of aggression?
21. I see you have \_\_\_\_\_ brothers and sisters. What was it like growing up in that kind of family?
  - a. How did this influence the amount of supervision you got from your parents?
  - b. How did the size of your family influence your behavior?
22. Is there any history of criminal or violent behavior in your family?
  - a. How has this affected

your behavior?

- How do the meanings young adult females ascribe to their experiences with aggression influence perspectives on family, and peer relationships?
23. What are your personal experiences with aggression towards others?
  24. How would you describe your displays of aggression?
  25. How has aggression affected your relationship with family?
  26. How has aggression affected your relationship with peers?

## APPENDIX B

### Demographic/Background Data Sheet

Demographic/Background Data Sheet

Culture/Ethnicity

- Caucasian
- African-American
- Hispanic
- Native American
- Asian
- Other (Specify)

Age

Birth Month and Year \_\_\_\_\_

Indicate how many people usually lived in your household (including yourself) when you were a child under the age of 18 \_\_\_\_\_ exact number

Please indicate your highest level of education

- Less than 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- High School Graduate
- College Graduate
- Some college
- Graduate School

Approximate family income level annually \_\_\_\_\_

Family Composition \_\_\_\_\_

1. Have you or any of your family members ever been arrested and/or convicted of a violent crime?

No

Yes (please explain and charge and length of incarceration)

2. Have you or any of your family members ever been arrested and/or convicted of a non-violent crime?

No

Yes (please explain and charge and length of incarceration)

3. Have you ever been suspended or expelled from school?

No

Yes (please explain)

4. Have you or any of your family members ever been a victim of a crime?

No

Yes (please explain)

5. Have you or any of your family members ever witnessed a crime?

No

Yes (please explain)

APPENDIX C  
Consent Form

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: A Phenomenological Study of Aggression and Young Adult Females

Investigator: Sharon Pugh.....

Advisor: Lillian Chenoweth, PhD .....940-898-2688

Explanation and Purpose of Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study for Sharon Pugh's dissertation at Texas Woman's University. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to obtain an in-depth understanding of young adult females' individual experiences with displaying aggression and their views regarding the effect their aggression had on their families. The study seeks to give participants a voice by understanding the meaning young adult females have placed on their own aggression and the impact it has had on their families. This qualitative study aims to explore how aggression of young adult women influences family relationships, as related by individuals who are now adults.

Research Procedures

For this study, the investigator will conduct face-to-face interviews with young women. The interview will be completed at a private location agreed upon by the participant and the investigator. The interview will be audiotaped during the face-to-face interview. The purpose of the audiotaping is to provide a transcription of the information discussed in the interview and to assure the accuracy of that information. Your maximum total time commitment in the study is estimated to be no more than two hours. You will be asked to complete a demographic form too.

Potential Risks

Potential risks related to your participation in the study include loss of confidentiality, fatigue and physical or emotional discomfort during your interview. To avoid fatigue, you may take a break (or breaks) during the interview as needed. If you experience physical or emotional discomfort regarding the interview, you may stop answering the questions at any time. If you feel as though you need to discuss your discomfort with a professional, the investigator will provide a list of names and phone numbers that you may use. Loss of time will be minimized as you may stop answering questions at any time. Another possible risk to you is the release of confidential information. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. Names will remain anonymous by the use of codes. The names mentioned in the interview will be deleted in the

transcripts. Also audio-tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed within two years.

The interview will take place in a private location agreed upon by you and the researcher. Only the investigator, and advisor will have access to the transcriptions and the disks containing the transcriptions will be stored in a locked cabinet. The tapes and disks will be destroyed after the completion of the dissertation.

### Participants and Benefits

Your involvement in this research study is completely voluntary, and you may discontinue your participation in the study any time without penalty. The benefit of this study to you is that at the completion of the study an abstract of the results will be mailed to you upon request.

### Questions Regarding the Study

If you have any questions about the research study you may ask the researchers. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the Texas Woman's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3375 or via email at IRB@twu.edu. You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researchers know at once if there is a problem and they will help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because you are taking part in this research.

I have read this consent form and understand the information about the study. All my questions about the study and my participation have been answered. I agree to participate in the study.

---

Participant's Name (please print)

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

The above consent form was read, discussed and signed in my presence. In my opinion the person signing form did so freely and with full knowledge of its contents.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\*If you would like to receive a summary of the results of this study, please provide an address to which this summary should be sent:

Address 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Address 2 \_\_\_\_\_

City, State and Zip code \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

### List of Resources for Participants

## List of Resources for Participants

### **Boulevard Comprehensive Care Center**

1833 Boulevard, #500  
Jacksonville, FL 32206  
904- 665-3040

### **CCD family Counseling**

1512 Scripture Denton TX 76201  
[www.ccdcounseling.com](http://www.ccdcounseling.com)  
940-382-5328 Denton  
800-897-7068 Lewisville

### **Child and Family Guidance Center**

8915 Harry Hines Dr. Dallas, TX 75235  
214-351-3490  
[www.childrenandfamilies.org](http://www.childrenandfamilies.org)

### **Counseling and Family Development Center-TWU**

P.O. Box 425769  
Denton TX 76204  
940-898-2600  
[www.twu.edu/cope/famsci](http://www.twu.edu/cope/famsci)

### **Counseling and Human Development-UNT**

P.O. Box 310829  
Denton TX 76203  
940-565-2970

### **Family Counseling Services**

1639 Atlantic Blvd.  
Jacksonville, FL 32207  
904- 396-4846  
[www.fcsjax.org](http://www.fcsjax.org)

### **Friends of the Family**

1400 Crescent suite 5  
Denton, TX 76201  
940-387-5131 Denton  
[www.dcfof.org](http://www.dcfof.org)

### **Mental Health and Mental Retardation**

2519 Scripture  
Denton TX 76202  
940-381-5000  
800-762-0157  
[www.ntmhmr.org](http://www.ntmhmr.org)

Appendix F  
Interview Protocol

## Interview Protocol

Date of Interview:

Participant's code:

"The purpose of this phenomenological study is to obtain an in-depth understanding of young woman's individual experiences with displaying aggression and their views regarding the effect their aggression had on their individual families. In order to conduct this study, it is necessary to hear the stories young adult women experiences with aggression. Your willingness to participate in this study may aid family practitioners and other professionals who work with youth and their families. The interview questions for this study are constructed to collect information that will assist in this research.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. You may stop anytime during the process of the interview or refuse to answer any question. As we discussed, the purpose of this research is to obtain an in-depth understanding of young woman's individual experiences with displaying aggression and their views regarding the effect their aggression had on their individual families. If at anytime during the interview you want to stop and not continue you have that option."

Do you have any questions? Before we begin the interview, let us go over the consent form. Do you have any questions about the consent form? After you sign the form I will give you a copy for your files.

The questions I ask you during this interview will focus on how your aggression and the effects on your family. During the interview, I will be taking notes. If you

mention names, I might ask clarifying questions as to the relationship that person has to you so that I might refer to him or her as your father, mother, sister, friend etc. Your name and anybody else name you mention will not be transferred to the transcript or any other record. Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay, I'm going to turn on the recorder now. As I mentioned earlier the purpose of this study is to....”

Prompts:

What else can you tell me?

Can you elaborate?

Let's move on to the next question?



**Institutional Review Board**

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619  
940-898-3378 Fax 940-898-3416  
e-mail: IRB@twu.edu

August 28, 2008

Ms. Sharon Pugh  
8941 Thompson Circle  
Frisco, TX 75034

Dear Ms. Pugh:

*Re: A Phenomenological Study of Aggression and Young Adult Females*

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and appears to meet our requirements for the protection of individuals' rights.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp and a copy of the annual/final report are enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. The signed consent forms and final report must be filed with the Institutional Review Board at the completion of the study.

This approval is valid one year from August 28, 2008. According to regulations from the Department of Health and Human Services, another review by the IRB is required if your project changes in any way, and the IRB must be notified immediately regarding any adverse events. If you have any questions, feel free to call the TWU Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David J. Nichols". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Dr. David Nichols, Chair  
Institutional Review Board - Denton

enc.

cc. Dr. Larry LeFlore, Department of Family Sciences  
Dr. Lillian Chenoweth, Department of Family Sciences  
Graduate School