Introduction

Adolescent friendships serve many purposes. They provide a social support network in the midst of biological, physical, and emotional changes. Friends commonly create a sphere of influence, a touchstone from which adolescents can assess their own attributes in relation to their peers. They are sources of information, advice, reassurance, and compassion. Friendships can motivate young people to find social strategies to fit in or belong in their desired peer group, which may include experimenting with or actually changing one's beliefs, behaviors, or appearance. Pipher (1994) writes, "Adolescents are travelers, far from home with no native land, neither children nor adults" (p. 52). Finally, adolescent friendships are often a safety net as adolescents "wander" toward adulthood, experimenting with aspects of their identity and conquering the process of moving away from the influence of parents and toward their own sense of identity.

Reliable teen friendships are invaluable in navigating the angst, terror, joys, and triumphs of adolescent life; however, when these friendships are not dependable, teens can find themselves adrift in challenging waters without the lifeboat of trustworthy friends. Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan (1995) writes that for girls, relationships can "encourage them when their courage falters and teach them strategies for dealing with adversity in the world. Yet relationships can also be an equally powerful hindrance if they become the source of discouragement or ridicule" (p. 174). In recent years, relational and social aggression, or bullying, among girls and female adolescents has gained national attention as a psychological issue worth exploring. Parents, educators, counselors, and extended family may be baffled at the psychological and emotional power friendships have over girls. Additionally, the threat of losing these friendships can feel overwhelming to teens. When these peer connections are in jeopardy, particularly for girls, the process of surveying the damage, fixing the problem, and monitoring the results can be all consuming. Furthermore, as caring adults watch the highs and lows, twists and turns in the course of adolescent friendships, many may struggle to identify ways to help girls or adolescent females cope when they experience conflict with their friends.

Gaining insight into the nature of conflict among girls provides adolescents and adults with awareness of how tension among friends or peers may take shape and why resolution is often elusive. Popular books such as *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* (Simmons, 2002) and *Queenbees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends and the Realities of Adolescence* (Wiseman, 2002) opened the doors for adolescent females to name or identify bullying, learn about its dynamics, understand its impact, and create strategies for managing peer conflict. Additionally, the popular adolescent movie, *Mean Girls* (2004), focuses on the dynamics involved in relational and social aggression among adolescent females in a school setting; although several other movies feature storylines or scenes that involve female characters in conflict, often being particularly nasty, rude, or indifferent to one another. For some, there is comedic value in featuring girls, who are "supposed" to be nice and kind, being covertly or overtly ruthless in how they solve problems with one another. For some adolescent females, these media representations confirm their peer experiences, providing validation for the role of victim or perpetrator. Unfortunately, Coyne, Archer, and Eslea (2004) found that viewing relational or socially aggressive approaches to conflict on television can increase the probability of using these behaviors in real life. Furthermore, "indirect/relational/social aggression is often portrayed on television to be justified, rewarded, and by attractive characters, all characteristics that have been shown to increase the likelihood that viewers will behave aggressively after viewing aggression on television" (p. 296).

In a recent article, three of the four authors of this book (Crothers, Field, & Kolbert, 2005) examined gender role, or how young people go about "being female," as one variable in explaining why girls may adapt and maintain behaviors associated with bullying. We found that gender role can contribute to self-reported relational aggression as participants "identified with a more traditional feminine gender role were more likely to perceive themselves as using relational aggression than were adolescent girls who identified with a nontraditional gender role" (p. 353). Males can exhibit relational and social aggression too; however, this book will primarily focus on bullying among females, as we believe that girls possess a different orientation (i.e., more emotional intensity) toward friendships than males, and socially sanctioned gender roles for girls may contribute directly to why girls engage in relational and social aggression more than physical aggression. Letendre (2007) writes, "girls' sense of themselves is deeply intertwined with connection to others and thus threatened when faced with situations where there is conflict or disagreement" (p. 356).

The purpose of this book is to blend academic, empirical, and practical perspectives to answer the questions of what relational and social

aggression is, why it happens, what it looks like behaviorally, how to measure it, and what counselors, teachers, and parents can do to help girls and adolescent females with these issues. Furthermore, we will not distinguish between race, ethnicity, nationality, or socioeconomic status when discussing bullying among females, as we believe these behaviors can occur across different identities and worldviews. For example, in a study spanning seven different countries, Eslea et al. (2003) found that "bullying is a universal phenomenon with serious social and emotional correlates for the victims" (p. 80). Additionally, other studies have demonstrated that relational and social aggression has been identified across diverse cultural groups (Weisz et al. 1993; French, Jansen, & Pidada, 2002; Xie, Farmer, & Cairns, 2003). Österman et al. (1998) found evidence of indirect aggression across multiple racial and ethnic groups and concluded "indirect aggression is the most applied aggressive style among adolescent females in school settings" (p. 4). Thoroughly delineating how bullying is manifested among girls from different cultural backgrounds warrants additional research and another book.

This book is primarily written for counselors who work in schools, although school psychologists, teachers, administrators, mental health counselors, community counselors, and parents of girls may find the content useful to their respective practices or interests. Schools are the primary gathering place for young people and certainly may be a haven for bullying behavior. Our assumption is that counselors who work in schools should be invested in assisting students with issues that interfere with academic achievement. This interference includes an inability to focus one's attention on academic and healthy social development. If a young woman's psychological, emotional, and physical safety needs in her learning environment are not being met, she will not be able to thrive or reach her potential.

Finally, this book is not intended to further perpetuate any stereotypes that girls are mean, shallow, superficial, or incapable of getting along with one another. Through our clinical work in schools, mental health agencies, and our various research endeavors with females, each of us has directly observed the strength, intellect, and resilience of girls and adolescent females and their capacity to grow, evolve, change, and adapt. When girls engage in relational and social aggression, their "meanness" is not a static state or evidence that girls have a permanent inability to relate to one another in honest, assertive, or genuine terms. Rather, these behaviors signify that girls and adolescent females have not found alternative ways to resolve conflict, deal with female competition, garner peer acceptance, and find self-confidence. Furthermore, use of bullying also implies that girls have found what works while balancing society's expectations

for female behavior with their own needs for expressing or repressing anger, frustration, and experiencing power.

This book will focus on what counselors can do to support adolescent females who experience and/or perpetrate relational or social aggression and help them learn alternative ways of managing conflict. Additionally, because school is a primary setting for all types of bullying, including relational and social aggression, this book also outlines what counselors can do to consult with teachers and parents whose students or children are impacted by relational and social aggression.

Chapter 1 defines relational and social aggression as well as suggests theoretical explanations for why it exists. The "rules of engagement" are presented to provide adults with further insight into how bullying works and may be experienced by females.

Chapter 2 focuses on assessment or measuring incidences of relational and social aggression within the school environment. School personnel are more likely to receive administrative support to develop and implement programming to address relational and social aggression among students if they are able to quantitatively (statistics) and qualitatively (description of problem) assess the need. Additionally, measuring the effectiveness of such programming may help to maintain funding or support.

Chapter 3 focuses on how relational and social aggression impacts the school climate and outlines different types of interventions that can be used in schools to address these issues at multiple levels.

Chapter 4 provides specific suggestions for counselors working with parents and teachers. Practical strategies are discussed so that counselors may add more tools to their current consultation repertoire.

Finally, Chapter 5 presents one approach that counselors may use when intervening with girls who engage in and/or have been victimized by relational or social aggression. The Goodwill Girls small-group curriculum is designed to help school counselors educate adolescent females about bullying while providing them with a constructive outlet to discuss these issues and try out new ways to relate to one another and resolve conflict. Because this curriculum was piloted with seventh- and eighth-grade girls in the fall of 2007 by one of the authors, each group lesson is followed by specific group facilitation tips for the counselor. Additionally, if group counseling is not feasible, each of the lessons could also be used as a series of classroom guidance lessons.

It is our hope that this book assists counselors with healing the divide among girls who have experienced or are experiencing relational and social aggression among their friendships or peer circles. We believe that female friendships hold magical holding and healing powers across the lifespan. No life obstacles are unconquerable when surrounded by caring,

loving friends. Dismantling the impact and/or use of relational and social aggression early in a girl's life will assist her with learning to trust and relate to others honestly and assertively while she works through problems thoughtfully and constructively. These are skills that she will use throughout her lifetime.