

A Closer Look at Conflict on Campus: The Effects of Moral Disengagement on Relational Aggression

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ABSTRACT

College campuses provide more than an education to their students; they offer a community for the development of social relationships and personal growth. Relational aggression is a problem of social relationships and can negatively affect a student's life by diminishing the quality of a living learning environment. Moral disengagement increased the likelihood of relational aggression as it has been shown to be the case in children. This is an exploratory study and through interviews shows intervals to test in theoretically designed research. In an effort to examine the effects of moral disengagement on relationally aggressive behaviors students living in dormitories were interviewed for this study. Participants (n= 21) included 5 females and 16 males with a mean age of 18.5 years. Five of the 21 participant's interviews were noteworthy because they reveal details of relational aggression among college age students and will be discussed further. A spectrum of social behaviors and understanding of their impact was found in this research including relational aggression and moral disengagement like dehumanization. When victims are dehumanized they are denied the human right to fair treatment and respect.

Introduction

College campuses provide more than an education to their students; they offer a social community for the development of social relationships and personal growth. This is addressed in the welcoming statement of the residence life program at the university used in this study: "The mission of the Residence Life program, in order to support the academic endeavors of the residence halls students, is to provide a safe, structurally sound and accepting living learning environment through educational programming and personal contact" (University Wisconsin Superior, 2010). Relational aggression, as defined below, is a problem of social relationships and can negatively affect a student's life by diminishing the quality of a living learning environment.

The maladaptive behaviors that define relational aggression include lying, gossip, betrayal, exclusion, and withholding love and friendship (Crick & Bigbee, 1998). One of the objectives of this study is to explore the psychological processes that cause or inhibit relational aggression. Bandura's theory of moral disengagement is one way to understand the rationale behind acting out against peers. Bandura identified several contributing factors leading to diminished moral response (1986). Maladaptive behaviors can easily repeat because one does not understand what impacts the behaviors. By the time a person reaches the college level they have undergone a series of developments in cognitive process through learning experiences that allow them to make sense of situations and select responses. Relational aggression, albeit maladaptive, is one learned response available to college students. Capacity and effectiveness for inhibiting relational aggression varies among college students.

The current study is an exploratory study identifying some of the relationally aggressive behaviors existing at a college level. Also considered is the presence of moral disengagement as a likely cause of relational aggression. These findings increase knowledge of how emerging adults experience and understand conflict in a living learning environment.

College students are faced with a multitude of conflicts, but the present study focuses on conflict that interferes with and damages relationships. Conflicts can often be solved amicably, but sometimes evolve into a more serious confrontation. One way to measure some features of relational aggression is to identify when students seek help in conflict situations. The personal decision to engage in help seeking has different thresholds depending upon the type of harmful behavior. For example fourth to sixth grade

students rated teasing as less serious when compared to threats and physical harassment (Newman & Murray, 2005). As a result they reported fewer instances of help seeking to resolve teasing.

Relational Aggression

Most studies focusing on relational aggression involved a young and mostly female population. The interview opportunities of the present research provided the ability to add to the understanding of relational aggression in emerging adult males.

According to theories of social information processing, perception is a key cognitive process. For example, if the behaviors of others are interpreted as aggression the victim then responds aggressively (Crick & Dodge 1996). These theories claim that cognitive processes such as perceived loss of power among peers are responsible for aggressive reactions. Other researchers claim that the response is due to social contextual factors like peer influence (Crain, Finch & Foster, 2005). This disagreement demonstrates one need for additional research.

One study of relational aggression in college students researched by Werner and Crick (1999) is unique in its focus. This is the only study of relational aggression on college students found. This further supports the need for additional research. In the study by Werner and Crick, relational aggression was found to exist in adults as it does in children. Their research participants were from sororities and fraternities. However, the researchers observed that students living in dormitories would be more representative of an average classroom setting. Accordingly, another purpose of the current study is to assess relational aggression in college dormitories.

Harmful Effects of Relational Victimization

Research on relational aggression in college students can be built upon Crick and Bigbee's (1998) study of fourth and fifth graders. Self and peer reports were administered to assess whether students experienced maladaptive behaviors as a result of being victimized. The findings confirmed this by showing examples of adjustment problems including avoidance, social anxiety, emotional distress and subservient temperament.

The consequences of relational aggression have been reported to be different between males and females. Most prior research was done on females (Crick & Bigbee, 1998). Female victims reported a high degree of emotional responses including depression and social anxiety due to relational aggression. The behaviors that were reported by peers to be characteristic of male students such as physical responses were found. Also reported were emotional frustrations of male victims of relational aggression. This was reported to ostracize males from their peers and as a consequence report experiencing anxiety, loneliness and low self-esteem (Crick, 1997).

Interestingly, both child perpetrators and victims of relational aggression reported similar social-psychological maladjustment (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). In addition perpetrators were peer rated as disliked. Self reports also confirmed a difficulty interacting within their social environments. It was inferred by the researchers that students who were lacking in social relationships may seek to compensate by retaliating against the relationships of others (Crick & Grotpeter).

How Relational Aggression is Overlooked

People often underestimate the amount of relational aggression that occurs largely because those victimized do not have bruises or other physical marks. A lack of visual evidence leads to underestimating the seriousness of relational aggression. This misperception may help facilitate the acceptance of relational aggression.

In a Southwestern study on socially harmful actions including relational aggression, students of an undergraduate educational program were asked to rate the seriousness of school related scenarios (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006). When comparing hypothetical relational, verbal, and physical harassment, participants indicated that they would likely minimize situations of relational aggression or rationalize the bad behavior. Participants also reported they would respond to victims of such offenses with less empathy (Bauman & Del Rio).

Moral Disengagement

It is thought most people do not wish to harm others, yet aggression exists. Relational aggression is often evoked through conflict involved in defective social relationships. One way to understand the causes of relational aggression is Bandura's theory of moral disengagement (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 1996). Moral disengagement is the psychological process of altering moral standards to fit one's behavior. The sequence of behaving first and justifying the behavior second may seem counterintuitive, yet through inquiry of psychological research this type of thinking has been confirmed. This process disables the mechanism of self-condemnation and makes immoral behavior more likely (Bandura, 1986). If a person is not reminded of their moral principles and is not aware of the reality of their actions it becomes easier for them to commit relational aggression.

The heart of Bandura's theory of moral disengagement is the process of regulation. According to his theory people sometimes act impulsively and ignore personal principles of moral conduct (Bandura, 1999). When people rely on personal principles their regulation of moral conduct is moderated through a process of social and internalized sanctions (Bandura, 1991). These sanctions are personal guidelines for dictating actions. This process includes self censure, minimization, comparison of behavior to circumstances and affective self-reaction.

People respond differently in each of the environments they interact in. Their responses will vary depending on where they were, who they were with or what they were prepared for. According to Bandura, only when there is cognitive involvement is an ability to analyze situations of conflict to learn and develop sanctions possible.

Empirical confirmation of the importance of minimizing the consequences of harmful conduct is an important way that moral disengagement occurs (Beck & Buss, 1962). It was assessed in college students by measuring the level of shock participants set for confederates to receive in a teacher learner research paradigm. Participants in the experimental condition reported that their administrations of electric shocks to a confederate were less than those reported by participants in a control group. At the same time the actual level of shock set for the victim was less than that of the participants in controlled conditions. Therefore, minimizing is associated with greater levels of aggression. The beliefs about consequences directly affected the treatment of the victim. Bandura (1986) also found this minimization effect in the justification of other behaviors like cheating and lying.

Another study confirming theories of moral disengagement in sixth to eighth grade children was authored by Bandura et al. (1996). The researchers found mechanisms of moral disengagement in instances of delinquent conduct. Students who were reported by peers to be rejected also had higher levels of moral disengagement than students who were accepted by peers or neutral. This supports theories on relational aggression that have connected rejected status with harmful behavior (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

Sanctions we learn as children can include rules like do not steal, cheat or hurt others. Moral disengagement occurs when people disregard these sanctions (Bandura, 2004). These kinds of excuses help explain why ordinary persons can be violent or aggressive. Bandura has shown how the regulation of sanctions requires continuous control and maintenance of thought in active memory. The regulation of sanctions is done by evaluating behavior, applying knowledge of how others behave to one's own actions, weighing the consequences of possible responses and assessing the responsibility for specific behaviors (Bandura). Peers also have an important effect and can encourage violations of self sanctions by influencing ones moral justifications. This process is subject to continuous change.

College students are particularly vulnerable because they are away from parental influence for the first time (Caprara et al., 1998). Some young adults in college must strengthen processes to monitor their own behavior. A study demonstrating these consequences of moral disengagement was conducted by Bandura et al. (1996). Adolescents who had a higher tendency to morally disengage were also more likely to act delinquently.

Another reason that self sanctions may be weak is the lack of moral learning (social knowledge). Defining social knowledge in third to fifth grade students as the understanding of behaviors and social interactions, one study looked at how this social knowledge and deviant processing influences aggressive

behaviors (Zelli, Dodge, Lockman, & Lard, 1999). Three ways this knowledge was shown to facilitate relational aggression included peer motives interpreted as harmful, limited access to constructive responses and rationalization of aggressive responses. Another purpose of this study would be to see if college students demonstrated the connection between social knowledge and relationally aggressive behaviors.

Statement of Intent

On-campus living arrangements have benefits as well as potential problems for students. Getting along with cohabitants may influence the quality of the college experience and performance. The author spoke with the housing director, resident assistants and prior dorm residents. It was reported that relationally aggressive behaviors existed in dorms and is why the author felt this study would be useful.

The intent of this study was to assess the presence of relational aggression in campus dormitories and add to the knowledge of how relational aggression is understood, elicited and responded to by emerging adults. Consideration of the effects of moral disengagement on behaviors is also important when seeking to understand the cyclic nature of relational aggression. Proposals for future areas of research within relational aggression are presented at the end of this study

Method

Participants

In an effort to examine the effects of moral disengagement on relationally aggressive behaviors, students living in dormitories were interviewed for this study. Participants (n= 21) included five females and sixteen males with a mean age of eighteen and a half years. Seven of the participants were international exchange students. A participant register is included in Appendix B.

Procedure

Participants were recruited May 10th to 18th of 2010. The researcher was granted access to residence halls by the housing director and went door-to-door recruiting participants and performing interviews. Interviews were recorded with permission of the participant. Participants were given a copy of the consent form and read the introduction to the study before being asked to continue the interview. The document of consent maintains confidentiality though absence of identifying information. Interview length ranged from four to twenty-nine minutes.

After completing 24 interviews, 21 participants were chosen to be examined closer by listening to each individual session and coding responses and examples. Three interviews were discarded prior to this step for circumstantial reasons. In one case the participant consented to be interviewed, but it was not recorded properly. In the second case the participant's request to cease questioning after return of roommate was honored. In the last case the participant responded comically to questioning showing a lack of seriousness. The three participants (males=2, females=1 and none were international students) excluded from the current study did not differ from the rest of the sample used.

Analysis of Responses

Questions asked aimed to explore (a) the thoughts and views of specific behaviors; (b) understanding of responsibility for actions; (c) responses to relationally aggressive situations and (d) the occurrence of these behaviors. Examples of questions are included in Appendix C. The questions structured a conversation, and depending on responses and readiness to disclose, were augmented to best capture variables in question. For example, if a student reported no problems between living partners, questions would be asked hypothetically. Multiple questions were asked until a student answered sufficiently and recurring questions were omitted. This occurred when participants were asked their views on behaviors and they would embellish their response with examples. The wording of questions was also adapted for individual comprehension without changing the nature of inquiry. Additional probes were given as needed for clarity.

Participants' ability to respond to questions regarding personal perceptions was assessed. Participants who were able to articulate their feelings demonstrated thoughtfulness in their responses.

Participants who could not articulate demonstrated thoughtless responses. For example a thoughtful response is, “you’re responsible for your actions ... people need to learn to take responsibility” (participant 112). A thoughtless response would be, “I don’t care, I would disrupt their sleep the next night” (participant 104).

The Bandura theory of mechanisms of moral disengagement (Appendix A) permits analysis of the understanding of responsibility for behaviors (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 1996). In an effort to identify instruments of relational aggression participant responses were assessed for these mechanisms. Notations were made when responses demonstrate healthy engagement of behaviors.

Method of handling conflict was assessed in participants who reported they would actively deal with the other person (“go talk to them about it”), seek help for the problem (“Go to someone about it”), ignore the situation (“wouldn’t let it get to me”) or retaliate (“get even”). If participants reported they would act in an aggressive manner, their responses were grouped into categories to illustrate the reasoning behind the behaviors.

Results

Five of the 21 interviews were chosen as examples and will be discussed further. These five participants can be understood from least to most relationally aggressive. Two of the five are exchange students (participants 120 and 111). Each section will first discuss responses from the entire subject pool followed by the five case studies in greater detail.

Participants Responses

When reporting thoughts and views of specific behaviors most of the 21 participants agreed that roommates should cooperate and make effort to resolve conflict or keep a respectful distance. Some participants reported negative views of relationally aggressive behaviors. Despite the range of responses nearly every participant understood it was a human right to be respected and treated fairly. Additional detail of quoted responses will be expanded in Appendix D.

Participant 108 reported several issues with his roommate in 2009-2010. He also reported use of healthy conflict resolution, “if you’re really mature enough to handle things you should be able to work it out yourself.” When asked about problems regarding differing opinions, the participant spoke of using empathy to appreciate the meaning behind unwanted behavior. This can be further explored in empirical research of theory building on the nature of one’s boundaries. He reported feeling surprised at first about his roommate’s boundaries which were sometimes more porous than his own. This brings us to question the expectations of boundaries and how these perceptions may influence the level of relational aggression experienced. In this case, the participant had learned the nature of the relationship the roommate had expected (familiar or sibling-like), “I had been surprised, but then got used to it.” The high maturity level was apparent in participant 108, and was an example of full understanding and affluence in social relationships.

International student participant 120 reported preserving the goodwill of the group as top reason to refrain from aggressive behavior. Although this participant reported this perception as an attribute, it may not always be the case. A balance of pursuing self interests as well as the interests of others is needed. Participant 120 gave an example of this perception when he said “It’s best for the group to just get along.” He felt it enabled personal growth to take care of the concerns of others. He originated from a nation state more collectivist than the U. S. and this may reflect a cultural difference.

International student participant 111 reported views of mutual benefit and personal gain as the leading factor for maintaining relationships. The benefits of a healthy roommate relationship were reported to be a life-long bond and pleasant memories of the college experience, “I will never forget him.” When discussing his roommate he explained, “I think sharing a room you become more than roommates, like brothers, “you can use my things but you have to know that when I use your things you have to be ok with it” (111). He reported both he and his roommate had benefited from their roommate relationship.

Participant 115 reported having constructive social relationships and gave thoughtful examples of how resolving issues with others helps build life skills, “it’s a learning experience.” This participant

reported that getting along with a roommate is of mutual benefit, and being a junior, he was able to report about several roommate relationships. This suggests the importance of researching relational aggression on roommate relationships that differ in levels of maturity.

Participant 118 revealed more destructive ways of handling the frustrations of communal living. She reported feeling that some people allow themselves to get pushed around and indicated she thought it is their fault if they do, “she’s kinda a push over so I get away with it” in regards to taking bad feelings out on her roommate. These words suggest blame for the victim (displacement of aggression), a classic mechanism of moral disengagement. This individual denounced the use of physical violence in any circumstance but did not denounce lying, exclusion, gossip, or rumor spreading to get back at someone, “I’m more of a verbal fighter.” These attitudes indicate relational aggression. Perhaps this immature response reflects the differing timeline of moral development, rejecting physical aggression but not yet rejecting relational aggression. Further research on the development of psychological beliefs on relational aggression is needed.

Understanding of Responsibility

To measure how participants understand responsibility, questions were asked (Appendix C) allowing participants to infer where responsibility is placed. Responses indicated they would place blame on others, on the context of the situation and on themselves. Blaming others shows a lack of understanding whereas considering the environmental contexts and personal behavior demonstrates a more sophisticated understanding of conflict. Blaming is also displacement of responsibility which contributes to moral disengagement.

Participant 108’s responses showed both understanding of social conflict and responsibility for accompanying actions, “I think everything you do, you are responsible for”. This is an excellent example of assuming full responsibility for actions. The importance of tolerance was reported, “You can’t always figure things out on your own, you need to see things from other’s eyes.” His responses also indicated that responsibility included seeking help and recognizing when to do so, “if it didn’t work with me saying something [or] if I or they were getting angry I would try to go to somebody.” This participant reported treating conflict as a learning experience and considered it a responsibility to learn from these situations.

International student participant 120 reported feeling it was a person’s responsibility to help others. He explained that serving the needs of others is one way to handle conflict. This participant reports, “If other people treat you bad it is not good for you to treat them in the same way.” This could be seen as maladaptive as this student is displacing the responsibility for resolving conflict.

International student participant 111 reported disregarding bad behavior that is not considered harmful, “I don’t mind if people do bad stuff as long as they say I’m sorry some other day.” He reported that when in conflict both parties are expected to accommodate the other through compromise. This approach can become complicated if one or more parties are unwilling to compromise. Similarly participant 111 reported help-seeking is seen as weakness if the problem could be handled individually, “I wouldn’t report anything. I think that’s a problem between [us]. We need to solve our problem.” This could demonstrate a resistance to seeking help if the situation isn’t solvable between those involved. Although intentions of this student are admirable this approach to problem solving can create problems when the situation exceeds the capabilities of either party.

Participant 115 reported some maladaptive behavior. For example, this participant believed certain situations call for pursuing your own interests, “sometimes, when you want to do what’s best for you it doesn’t coincide with others around you.” This statement reveals maturity in one’s responsibility to self interest but that if he or she ignores interests of others too much then it shows minimization and diffusion of consequences. Participant 115 also reported a personal history of retaliation, “when it’s a situation where someone is trying to get at you and you can’t get away from them... get back then get even.” He reported feeling frustrated when constructive means do not achieve a desired resolution. When questioned about help-seeking, the participant reported he would seek help from peers (finding strength in others) before seeking it from authorities which he considered “useless.”

Although participant 118 reported understanding that conflict among roommates created unnecessary stress, this participant did not report efforts to reduce conflict with her roommate. She reported using excuses to validate harmful actions taken upon her roommate, “I’ve used it as an excuse... throwing chocolate covered raisins at her because I was mad”. This participant displayed both diffusion of responsibility and lack of understanding of consequences. Using another person as an outlet for personal frustrations is dehumanizing and an example of moral disengagement. Participant 118 reported other behaviors characteristic of relational aggression like lying, “I would say that it would be ok to lie to someone.” Lying is an example of displacing responsibility in the situation. Participant 118 also reported retaliation against other students saying that she would “retaliate first and if that didn’t work [seek help]”. She reported, “it really irritated me” when her roommate borrowed her shoes. This participant then ate her roommate’s food in retaliation. This participant understood proper constructive adaptive behavior in an abstract but failed to utilize on a personal level.

Participant Responses to Relational Aggression

Methods of handling relationally aggressive conflicts varied among participants. It was reported that some participants would actively deal with the other person. Responses otherwise indicated that the participant would retaliate, ignore the behavior or seek help. Many participants had examples of relational aggression to draw on but others responded hypothetically.

Participant 108’s responses were of peacemaking and correction of unfavorable situations. He reported solving conflict by “talking things out and actually wanting to listen”. He also reported retaliation “doesn’t really work.” He reported he would ignore mildly disruptive behavior (i.e. “occasionally waking”, or “borrowing of food”), but if behavior were to persist he would attempt to resolve the issue.

When questioned about responses to situations participant 120 reported he would react with tolerance and patience. This would allow him to teach the other person another way of handling their problems. For example, “one of my friends is actually mean to me... but I still try to help him”. He reported not taking the slights as personal and trying to compensate with kindness.

Participant 111 reported a less proactive stance allowed him to ignore a student who bothered him. When asked about gossip and lies he reported, “I don’t care what people think of me. I care what I think and what my friends think.” It can be inferred that participant 111 would dismiss some offenses but this approach could also influence the further development of his and others social sanctions.

The responses given by participant 115 indicated he would inconvenience himself over a conflict with a disrespectful roommate. For example he recalled an instance where a roommate brought a girl back to their room and he then had to sleep in the lounge. When speaking of failed resolution attempts, participant 115 explained, “It happens but I voice my opinion.” If no progress is made he reported he would then retaliate against the offender. It was reported that this response had been used in very particular instances like nightly sleep disruptions. This inability to refrain from retaliation was reported to be a factor in past roommate relationships.

Discussion

Moral disengagement leads to lowered inhibition of antisocial behavior (Bandura, 1999). Bandura explains that people are continually changing their concept of what is moral. These effects can downgrade moral guidelines and contribute to moral disengagement. As damaging behaviors become more accepted they also become easier to commit (Bandura, 1986).

A spectrum of social behaviors and understanding of their impact was found in this research. Most participants reported they got along well with their roommates and found it worth compromising for mutual benefit. Some participants possessed greater conflict resolving skills and reported relating better with roommates. Others reported frustrations and difficulties when communicating with roommates. Some participants reported they acted out because of perceived injustices. Participants understood that acting out was detrimental to their relationships. In many cases an accelerating cycle of relational

aggression similar to the social information processing theories developed by Crick and Dodge (1996) was found.

When a person is dehumanized it becomes easier to respond to them with aggression. This pattern was noted in the reported relationship between participant 118 and her roommate. She had justified her relationally aggressive behavior by blaming the victim. She reported her victim was the reason for mistreatment. When victims are dehumanized they are denied the human right to fair treatment and respect.

When addressing aggression it is revealing to consider the motivating factors and how this influences the way relational aggression is responded to. Social incentives are not as effective as personal gains are in regulating proactive aggressors (Crick & Dodge, 1996). Conversely, those who do not personally perpetrate aggression but instead use aggression as a response are not motivated by personal gains. Retaliation to behaviors interpreted as hostile has been found to encourage reactive aggressors. According to the work of Crick and Dodge, when behaviors interpreted as hostile are responded to with hostility it may confirm the initial interpretation if the peer returns the antagonism. This cycle is damaging to relationships and ultimately reinforces an unhealthy tendency to resort to aggression in conflict. This is the type of aggressive retaliation reported in this study.

Limitations

Due to the timing of these interviews, it is likely that the most dysfunctional relationships were unavailable for evaluation. Many participants indicated they already had the option to change roommates. Perhaps, by the time interviews were conducted most cases of dysfunctional roommate relationships had already been addressed. Assessing roommate relationships prior to the end of term could allow for a more accurate measure of relational aggression.

This is an exploratory study to contribute to an evolving theory of relational aggression. While the small sample size obtained in this study is not useful for making comparisons or assessing correlation between moral disengagement and relational aggression, it contributes to a number of research hypotheses. Controlled tests of these hypotheses will lead to a more comprehensive picture of how roommate relationships affect student life.

In the current study several variables of relational aggression are expanded upon. The understanding of how relational aggression is experienced in adults and in males and social knowledge of conflict resolution is expanded. Also considered is the role of moral disengagement on relational aggression. This work is done in the context of discovery. Controlled hypothesis testing of these observations could lead to the development of understanding and better policies for the protection of adult students from victimization.

Concluding Remarks

Based on student reports obtained in this study, there is reason to suggest that relational aggression does exist on campus. The relationally aggressive behaviors reported by the participants in the current study included lying, teasing, gossip, and exclusion. Socially harmful behaviors that were found in a limited size could indicate they also exist in the larger population.

Of the relational aggression reported in this study there was evidence that aggressors justified their actions through cognitive processes of moral disengagement. Participants reported examples of diffused responsibility, distorted consequences and attribution of blame to the victim. The victims in this study were college students who also lived on campus.

Emerging adult participants in this study extend research on the relational aggression experienced by this age group. Although not measured in the current study, it can be inferred that the harmful effects of relational aggression are also present in students victimized in this way as well as the characteristic effects on the perpetrator.

The presence of socially harmful behaviors in a living learning environment creates a hostile atmosphere where concern for the wellbeing of others is diminished. This allows circumstances where

relational aggression is likely to occur. The more a behavior occurs the more these acts will be viewed as normal. This cycle increases the moral disengagement of relational aggression and thus fosters a continuation of the behaviors. Educational institutions should be made aware of this process and of the harm endowed upon the student victims who reside in the campus dormitories and their learning environment.

Future Research

Insight gained from this study is beneficial to understanding the social interactions of communal living. More specifically, these results widen our view of relationally aggressive behaviors in adults and the role moral disengagement plays in cultivating aggressive behaviors. This study helps set a knowledge base that can be expanded upon with future research.

Additional research on relational aggression should include a larger subject sample that is more gender equal. Exploring life history and personality components of participants could yield more comprehensive results and peer reports of behaviors would help to confirm findings. It could also improve the college experience if dormitories were individually studied and findings of relational aggression passed on to resident authorities. With this knowledge available to residence life policy, the quality of life could be increased for college students who reside in the dormitories.

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Appendix A

Terminology Definitions

Bandura's Theories of Moral Disengagement

Definition

The psychological process of altering the application of moral standards to one's behavior, as applied to an ethical dilemma, which disables the mechanism of self-condemnation and makes immoral behavior more possible (Bandura, 1986).

Examples

- i. Moral justification of harmful actions.
- ii. Euphemistic language targeting the victim.
- iii. Dehumanization or blame of victim.
- iv. Diffusion or displacement of responsibility for harmful actions.
- v. Diffused or distorted perception of the consequence to actions.

Relational Aggression

Definition

Socially destructive behaviors which are for the purpose of harming the relationships of the victim.

Examples

- i. Gossiping about others.
- ii. Excluding or ostracizing an individual.
- iii. Teasing or harassing.
- iv. Withholding love or friendship.

Responsibility of Harmful Actions

Definition

When an individual takes into consideration the consequences of their actions against another person, this also includes the ability to assess situations and weight options before responding.

Social Information Processing

Definition

Utilization of information inferred from social environments for the purpose of responding to others. When this process is inaccurate (the behaviors of others are misperceived) the resulting responses are maladjusted.

Appendix B

Table 1

Participant Register

Number	Gender	Age	Academic Year	Nationality
101	M	18	Freshman	***
102	M	19	Freshman	***
103	F	22	Junior	***
104	M	18	Freshman	***
105	M	18	Freshman	***
106	F	18	Freshman	***
107	F	19	Freshman	***
108	M	18	Freshman	***
109	M	18	Freshman	Foreign-born
110	M	18	Freshman	Foreign-born
111	M	18	Freshman	Foreign-born
112	M	20	Sophomore	***
113	M	18	Freshman	***
114	M	18	Freshman	Foreign-born
115	M	21	Junior	***
116	M	19	Freshman	***
117	M	18	Freshman	Foreign-born
118	F	18	Freshman	***
119	F	18	Freshman	***
120	M	18	Freshman	Foreign-born
121	M	19	Sophomore	Foreign-born

Appendix C

Question Set

Part 1: Feelings and views on behaviors

- a.) How do you feel about roommates that don't try to get along?
- b.) What is your opinion on someone who thinks they can use or borrow items without asking?
- c.) How would you expect a person to feel when excluded in a social situation?
- d.) What do you think about physical violence?
 - ➔ Is it ever ok for a person to physically harm another?
- e.) Do you agree that a good friend should never betray you?
- f.) Would you say that it is a person's right to be respected and treated fairly?

Part2: Identification of responsibility for actions

- a.) Sometimes people act out when they are having a bad day, should this excuse them from the consequences for their actions?
- b.) When is it ok or less harmful to tease someone?
- c.) When if ever is lying permissible?
- d.) Are there any exceptions for taking or using things without asking first?
- e.) How true is the phrase "fight fire with fire" in regards to handling a difficult situation?
- f.) Should you still speak up about threats even if your convinced nothing will come of them?
- g.) A person should handle their own problems, not seek help from others, right?

Part 3: Responses to relational aggression

- a.) How would you respond if you caught someone in a lie?
- b.) What would you do if you found that others were talking behind your back?
- c.) If someone didn't stop teasing you after you had asked them not to, what would you do?
- d.) If your roommate was disrespectful of your space or things what would you do in return?
- e.) If your sleep was needlessly disrupted what would you do in return?

Part 4: Actual occurrences of relational aggression

- a.) Has your roommate ever taken your things without asking? And for what reasons?
- b.) Has your roommate ever kept you up at night, or woken you early in the morning? And for what reasons?
- c.) Has your roommate ever made you feel left out? And for what reasons?
- d.) Have you ever caught your roommate gossiping or talking badly of yourself or others? And for what reasons?
- e.) Has your roommate ever lied to you? And what about?
- f.) Has your roommate ever interfered with your study time? And for what reasons?
- g.) Has your roommate ever teased you or said mean things to put you down? And for what reasons?
- h.) Has your roommate ever used physical force against you or others? And for what reasons?
- i.) Has your roommate ever held a grudge? And for what reasons?
- j.) Has your roommate ever made you feel betrayed? And for what reasons?
- k.) How respectful is your roommate of your space and things?

- l.) Has your roommate ever behaved in a way that affected a relationship of yours? And for what reasons?
- m.) Has your roommate ever gotten between you and another friend, boyfriend, or girlfriend? And how so?
- n.) Has your roommate ever threatened you about anything? And what was it about?
- o.) Has your roommate ever caused you to feel intimidated? And for what reasons?
- p.) Has your roommate ever caused you to feel isolated? And for what reasons?
- q.) Has your roommate ever withheld their friendship? And for what reasons?
- r.) Has your roommate ever pressured you into doing something you otherwise would not have?

Appendix D

Participant Responses

Roommate Relationships

“As for roommates not getting along it would probably be best for them to just avoid each other... If there’s just no way to resolve a conflict... just stay out of each other’s business”. (Participants 112)

“We kept hearing about roommates who didn’t get along at all but [my roommate and I] got along great”. (Participant 119)

“It’s like a brother[ly] relationship. No matter how strong you argue you will still be friends”. (Participant 111)

“I see him trying to not keep me awake and I appreciate it”. (Participant 121)

Right to Humane Treatment

“No matter who you are or what you’re like” (Participants 108).

“I don’t know if it’s a right but they should be [treated fairly]”. (Participant 113)

Taking Things without Asking

“It happens a lot... invasion of privacy”. (Participant 103)

“I don’t really like when roommates you don’t know touch your things”. (Participant 107)

“He already has my permission to take something if he really needs it...if I’m not there just take it and let me know afterwards” (Participants 116).

“What really irritated me is that when I confronted her about it she acted like she didn’t know what I was talking about” (Participant 118)

“I have nice things and I want to keep them”. (Participant 118)

Betrayal

“Yea I think everyone can agree [a good friend should never betray you]”. (Participant 101)

“Things happen and you get over it”. (Participant 106)

“I wouldn’t expect [betrayal from a friend]”. (Participant 114)

“You can betray a friend about something but it doesn’t mean you’re not friends... we are all human, we all make mistakes”. (Participant 111)

Teasing

“Not acceptable”. (Participant 101)

“When [my friends and I] say mean things we are joking around”. (Participant 102)

“If people know it’s in a joking manner [it’s ok]”. (Participant 107)

Gossip

“I would just ignore it, it’s their opinion”. (Participant 102)

“Everyone on this floor likes to talk about other people”. (Participant 119)

Exclusion

“...a little depressed” (Participants 101)

“I would let it go”. (Participant 106)

“I had been excluded a few times this year but I was also included so I know how it feels to be in both situations... isn’t fun to be excluded... disappointing. He either knew I didn’t get along with certain people or they didn’t with me”. (Participant 108)

“I would feel really bad [if excluded], I would say he doesn’t like me or something or someone inside his friends doesn’t like me. There is a problem”. (Participant 111)

Lying

“I would be angry and ask why”. (Participant 101)

“[It’s ok] when it’s personal to yourself and you don’t want others to know about it”. (Participant 106)

“I would go and say; hey you lied to me, why?” (Participant 115)

Physical Violence

“Hate it”. (Participant 101)

“Not for it unless in a sport”. (Participant 102)

“Only in self defense [is violence ok]”. (Participant 112)

“It is not ok to punch someone just because they said something”. (Participant 116)

Acting Out

“Family death or relationship problems [acting out] is acceptable”. (Participant 101)

“Doesn’t matter how your day is going you just have to push through it”. (Participant 113)

“If you’re having a bad day that negative energy affects everyone. If it got really bad I would just leave”. (Participant 119)

Retaliation

“It’s pretty accurate [way of responding to frustration]”. (Participant 101)

“I don’t like pay back”. (Participant 109)

112) “If someone is coming at you physically you have the right to fight fire with fire”. (Participant 112)

“I have my limitations as to what I would do”. (Participant 115)

“It doesn’t make the situation any better”. (Participant 119)

Help-Seeking

“If help’s there and you refuse to take it, it’s your own fault”. (Participant 101)

“There is nothing wrong asking for help”. (Participant 102)

“[Seeking help is good if it’s] something you can’t handle any more or is about to go into fist fight”. (Participant 112) “When I feel overwhelmed with a situation I can’t handle I go to another person just to vent a little... I think people should seek help”. (Participant 115)

“People are here to help... but it’s hard for some [to do this]”. (Participant 116)

“If they don’t even try to make an effort then they shouldn’t be surprised there’s conflict and extra stress in life”. (Participant 118)