

RISING ABOVE RELATIONAL AGGRESSION:
A RESEARCH-BASED COACHES GUIDE TO IDENTIFYING
AND COPING WITH RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

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ABSTRACT

This paper served as a method to develop training materials for high school volleyball coaches pertaining to addressing and coping with relational aggression. The training materials were developed based upon research and personal experience to help convey the importance of increasing knowledge on the subject of relational aggression in high school volleyball. Based upon research and input from qualified peers, the paper defines relational aggression, provides suggestions on how to identify and cope with relational aggression should it occur within the framework of a volleyball team, and offers examples of relational aggression. Role play exercises to do with a team in an effort to prevent and cope with relational aggression are also provided.

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PART I. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

As a high school volleyball coach, I work within an intricate social dynamic, a group of teenage girls. Just when I think I have mastered how to motivate the players, understanding and being able to effectively communicate with each individual is further challenged by seasonal change in players and staff. This scenario creates a continuously morphing atmosphere in which I am expected to not only maintain order, but also to evoke peak physical performance. While there are countless physical attributes each athlete has that will help determine the level of success of my team, I must realize there are behavioral factors that make at least as much of a contribution, possibly more, to the outcome of our season.

My experience as a coach has made me aware of various cases of relational aggression throughout the years and has helped fuel my desire to further research the topic and offer other coaches some insight that may assist them if they encounter relational aggression within their team. Based upon recent research, it is clear that relational aggression is something that many girls will come in contact with throughout their teenage years, whether as an aggressor, or as a victim (Card & Hodges, 2008; Nansel et al., 2001). Relational aggression may occur on or off the court; however, the effects are sure to make their way onto the court and have some impact on the entire team. While this is not exclusively a 'girl problem', it is the most prevalent type of aggression seen among girls and, as such, something with which coaches of teenage girls should be familiar.

This project will define relational aggression, discuss how relational aggression is used as a specific form of bullying, discuss current and recent literature relating to relational aggression, assist coaches in identifying different participant roles within their

team, as well as ultimately offer coaches tips on how to help athletes cope with relational aggression.

What is Relational Aggression?

Social aggression and indirect aggression are some terms that have been commonly used to define aggressive behavior; however, for the purposes of this project, I will be referring to these behaviors as relational aggression (RA). RA is manipulation calculated to hurt or control another's ability to maintain rapport with peers. RA is behavior that is intended to hurt someone by harming his or her relationships with others (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). RA is not prototypical bullying (either physical or verbal) but a more subtle form of aggression that threatens friendships and uses relationships to damage or manipulate others.

As a high school girls volleyball coach, I see girls every year struggling with different types of bullying, on and off the court. RA is a specific type of bullying that may not be easily identifiable. Part of the problem with identifying RA is that many girls do not understand the basis of the bullying and do not associate these aggressive behaviors with bullying. It is too often just passed over as “girls being girls.”

A growing concern in today's instant gratification society is that RA has gone electronic, being inflicted through text messages, Facebook posts, and other instant communication through the use of computers and cellular devices (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). This negative experience with technology can cause youth to second guess valuable on-line resources and can result in “severe functional and physical ramifications” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). RA is not limited to technology: eye rolling, dirty looks, shunning from groups or parties, excluding girls from their otherwise inclusive groups or settings, writing

derogatory comments about them, exposing secrets, and spreading rumors are all forms of RA (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995, Galen & Underwood, 1997). By using these outlets, aggressors use social skills in a negative way to gain control over their victims, and in some cases, ascend the social ladder (Adler & Adler, 1995).

When it comes to girls, bullying is much less likely to involve physical punches being thrown and is more likely to involve emotional and psychological damage that lasts longer than a bruise or even a broken bone; these scars can be lifelong, making this type of abuse much more concerning. Because acts of RA rely less on physical strength and can be anonymous, victims of RA can be inflicted with harm while the aggressor remains physically safe (Crick & Bigbee, 1998).

Why Relational Aggression?

Family cohesion and school climate have been shown to be predictors of aggressive behavior in females, with paternal responsiveness emerging as the most important variable in predicting female RA aggressors, according to a recent study (Pernice-Duca, Taiariol, & Yoon, 2010). Increased support from parents was associated with less involvement across all forms and classifications of bullying (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). It is possible that these subtle forms of aggression increase as children develop more effective verbal and social-cognitive skills (Crick et al., 1999). Girls tend to develop these skills more quickly than boys; this may result in RA seeming to be most prevalent among adolescent girls (Galen & Underwood, 1997).

Recent public scrutiny over the behavior of athletes may be a contributing factor to why some athletes choose to employ RA as a safer alternative to express anger than physical aggression (Storch, Werner, & Storch, 2003). Eberle (2010) notes that girls are

more likely not to engage in aggressive (both physical and relational) behaviors based on their participation in sport. In a 2010 study by Fejgin, Talmor, and Eldar, no link is evident between sports and violent behavior; however, a positive direct link exists between sports and self-image, and perceptions of relations with the opposite gender.

Hinduja and Patchin (2008) noted how the perceived anonymity of online identities seems to free those communicating from the standard codes and ethics of personal interaction while also having the ability to infiltrate the personal confines of the victim. This could be a possible explanation of why cyberbullying is becoming a more widely used form of bullying in general (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009).

It would be nearly impossible to attempt to learn how to navigate through all of the social networking and electronic medium that our youth are using today. As the coach and mentor of adolescents, it is our responsibility to make an attempt to understand the guidelines on bullying that have been put in place by the school or governing body of which we are working and to be open to learning more about the electronic avenues that are used to affect our athletes, both positively and negatively.

Relational Aggression in Literature

A critical structural form in the lives of children is the clique (Adler & Adler, 1995); clique membership plays a role in RA. Early in life, we are introduced to the confines of acceptable social arrangements. Relationship structure and status within peer groups are important for the social and emotional development of children (Zimmer-Gembeck, Geiger, & Crick, 2005). As girls mature, their need for social approval is partially fulfilled by making self-comparisons within these cliques (Willer & Cupach, 2011). It is within these social circle dynamics that we must investigate the interworking

of RA. There is a hierarchy within these groups, and often the leader will draw in new members only to build them up and consequently tear them down again to maintain their position of authority (Adler & Adler, 1995). While doing this, the members of this in-group develop intolerance towards the out-members, thus laying the groundwork for future prejudice social behavior in adults. Competition for higher status results in elevated RA due to the desire to increase social standing within the group (Adler & Adler, 1995; Watling Neal, 2009; Willer & Cupach, 2011).

There are general categories of cliques or social groups. Pokhrel, Sussman, Black, and Sun (2010) noted the following pursuant to each group. Brains/Academics tend to focus on academic success whereas Elites/Socials invest their time participating in extracurricular activities. Jocks/Athletes often are grouped together with the Elite/Social group due to their reputation as popular students. These two groups tend to become more relationally aggressive over time. High-Risk Youth/Deviant gravitate towards noninvolvement in school activities. This group may also show increasingly violent behavior if they are popular among peers, in an attempt to maintain or enhance their popularity. Members of High-Risk/Deviant and Elite groups may find that aggressive behavior is not only acceptable, but a necessary tool in achieving acceptance or popularity. The group with which one chooses to align oneself is a predicting factor to that individual's tendency to behave aggressively. Having friends from various groups or having protective friends can help buffer children from potential RA (Crick & Nelson, 2002).

Being part of a popular group may not mean, however, that an individual will be immune to RA. Popularity within a social group also plays a role in determining the

aggressor and the victim. To be successful at spreading rumors or excluding others requires some social status (Watling Neal, 2009), thus perpetuating the cycle for popular kids to maintain popularity or become more popular at the expense of those lacking the social standing within the circle (Willer & Cupach, 2008). Having well-connected friends may help a victim of a rumor mill; however, social exclusion is likely without adequate social connections. Students with a higher self-image and more positive relationship with their parents tended to be less violent; however, students with a higher perceived status with the opposite gender and higher perception of their looks tended to be increasingly violent (Fejgen, Talmor, & Eldar, 2010).

Previous research has suggested that the identity that people want to portray to other people is considered their face. A person's face can be threatened either positively or negatively. Acts of RA can threaten both the negative and positive face (Willer & Cupach, 2008; Willer & Soliz, 2010). An example of threatening positive face would be an act of RA that would challenge a person's sense of worth, whereas, an example of negative face could be exclusion from one's own group or space. Face threatening acts (as described by Brown & Levinson, 1987, in Willer & Cupach, 2008) can be verbal (such as name calling), as well as non-verbal (giving dirty looks). Aggressive acts by girls more popular than their victims were perceived more negatively than those by girls who were equally or less popular; additionally, aggressive acts committed that involved other individuals were perceived to have a greater threat than when the aggressor acted alone (Willer & Cupach, 2008).

While the Internet was once touted as an extraordinary educational aid, schools and teachers are now attempting to control the negative and distracting ways in which children

are using electronic media (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). There is a direct association between time spent online and the likelihood of being both a cyberbully and a victim of cyberbullying; and as traditional forms of personal communication are being replaced by instant messaging, blogs, and social networking, the sheer numbers that electronic communications can reach instantly make this particular method of using RA that much more potentially damaging (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). The rapid increase in the use of technology has helped take bullying beyond the walls of schools and given bullies access to their victims even when the victims are within the safety of their own home; further, an association has been shown between being victimized at school and being a victim of cyberbullying after or outside of school (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Positive parental influences are indicated as a protective factor for adolescents with boys more likely to be cyberbullies and girls more likely to be cyber victims (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). In cases of cyberbullying, victims are less likely to tell an adult about the victimization due to concerns about parental restrictions involving technologies and internet privileges (Juvonen & Gross, 2008).

Repercussions of Relational Aggression

Girls are not only striving to be a part of these relationships as children; this desire continues into adulthood (Willer & Soliz, 2010). Galen and Underwood's (1997) study concludes that:

Social aggression may continue to be common among some women in later life, and it is easy to imagine that these behaviors could impair relationships with friends and work colleagues, disrupt romantic relationships, and interfere with effective parenting. Recognizing social aggression among

girls as hurtful behavior is an important first step in understanding that important complex of behaviors that may relate to girls' social and personal adjustment.

Crick and Bigbee (1998) state maladjustment for these children can cause those who have had a negative experience to come to negative conclusions about themselves, feeling as if there is something wrong with them, hence becoming depressed and thinking no one is nice to them. Maladjustment can lead to a lack of self-confidence and cause them to be more submissive in future peer interactions. On the other hand, children can adopt a negative outlook on their peers, feeling that all of the kids at school are mean; this can cause them to have self-control and self-restraint issues, becoming impulsive and overcome with anger as they may struggle with the urge to retaliate (Crick & Bigbee, 1998). In both cases, children who are victims of RA often experience reciprocal social problems; being a victim results in feeling badly about oneself, which in turn makes the child more susceptible to future attacks. Looking at the victims as they mature, there is a positive correlation between RA and peer rejection as well as a negative correlation between RA and prosocial behavior in women, more disturbingly, a positive correlation between RA and alcohol use in women who were victims of RA (Storch, Werner, & Storch, 2003). There is also an association between RA and antisocial as well as borderline personality features, higher levels of peer rejection, lower levels of prosocial behavior, and bulimia (Werner & Crick, 1999). It is possible that disliked children may be more likely to partake in aggressive behavior as a way of getting back at others and compensating for their own lack of success in such relationships. Girls attempting to harm other girls are driven by the desire to damage friendships or feelings through purposeful

manipulation (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Especially evident during adolescence, girls may use RA to aggress against other girls in an attempt to strengthen a relationship with boys; this could result in the aggressor to be better liked by boys (Crick, Casas, & Nelson, 2002; Smith, Rose, & Schwartz-Mette, 2009). More generally speaking, maladjusted children with other socio-psychological issues may be either more at risk to be a victim of RA or more susceptible to being an aggressor (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Girls who were highly victimized by RA tend to have low levels of emotional sensitivity and engage in aggression even when there is no apparent emotional arousal if it is a means to an end for them (Mathieson et al., 2011).

Identifying Relational Aggression

It is not always obvious where to look for RA. Relationally aggressive girls do not tend to exclude their friends from their own aggressive behavior; rather, will act out aggressively within the bounds of their friendships (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996). Girls who report more RA within their close friendships also report a higher level of intimacy within those friendships (Banny, Heilbron, Ames, & Prinstein, 2011, Watling Neal, 2009), which fosters divulging deep secrets, thus increasing the risk for one girl to be controlled by another as she may decide to betray that confidence if certain demands within the relationship are not met. These more exclusive friendships experience more conflict and betrayal than those of non-relationally aggressive girls (Banny, Heilbron, Ames, & Prinstein, 2011; Grotpeter & Crick, 1996). Many high school girls report they share a close relationship with their aggressor (Willer & Cupach, 2011), so girls who enter into a friendship dynamic with a relationally aggressive girl are in a vulnerable position. While these relationally aggressive girls tend not to divulge much about themselves to others,

their friends are reported to self-disclose intimate details to them. It is possible that relationally aggressive girls tend to choose girls who are more likely to disclose personal thoughts and feelings, thus putting them at risk of being controlled by the relationally aggressive friend later in the relationship when it behooves the aggressor. Girls are more likely to be victimized relationally than physically by their friends, and this victimization within the friendship is especially painful since it involves such a personal betrayal, yet some victims remain involved in the dyad (Crick & Nelson, 2002). This involvement in troubled relationships may hinder the development of healthy social skills, so it is important to be able to identify and intervene in these situations (Crick, Casas, & Nelson, 2002). In some cases, the victim has such a strong desire to remain in a relationship with the aggressor, that they maintain contact with them (Crick & Nelson, 2002).

Coping with Relational Aggression

Based upon existing research, it is obvious that RA has devastating affects not only upon the victim, but upon the aggressor as well, consequences which can carry over into adulthood and have a negative impact on the overall life and health of those involved. The best attempt at minimizing permanent damage caused by RA is strive to provide a positive environment in the arenas where children spend the most time -- home and school- - and to realize that the school day includes after-school activities as well. Although adolescent peer ecologies do not include adults, they are affected by and can affect them (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). The best we can do as coaches is to strive to recognize which children may exhibit signs of being an aggressor or a victim, attempt to identify situations in which RA has the potential to occur, address it as quickly as possible, and assist the athlete in coping with the situation.

While limited literature exists on coping strategies specific to RA, some articles referenced in this section study adolescent coping strategies in general. With regard to RA, Tenenbaum, Varjas, Meyers, and Parris (2011) and Remillard and Lamb (2005) detail two primary categories for coping strategies. It is important to realize that these are not all recommended strategies; some can actually cause more harm than good. Problem-focused coping addresses the situation directly by taking action after carefully thinking about and analyzing the problem, as well as possible solutions to it. Speaking with others, including the bully, in an attempt to resolve the situation is a problem-focused coping strategy.

Other problem-focused coping strategies include:

- Stand up to the bully – with this strategy, the choice is made to stand up directly to the bully in an attempt to resolve the situation. Because the victim takes the time to think about and analyze the problem and possible solutions to the problem prior to taking action, this strategy is considered a problem-focused strategy. This particular strategy has the potential to cause more trouble for the victim if it results in further retaliation from the aggressor.
- Self-defense – this strategy involves the victim protecting oneself through physical action when they feel they have no other choice. This strategy is considered problem-focused as it results from thinking through other possible solutions and is determined to be to only strategy.
- Seeking social support – with this strategy, the victim looks to others for support or advice on how to address the situation. This strategy can be used either as a problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategy. Seeking social support has

been shown to be the most used strategy by girls (Tenenbaum, Varjas, Meyers, & Parris, 2011).

- Distancing – this coping strategy involves the victim ignoring or walking away from the bullying, or even letting the bullying happen and then letting it go while attempting to move on and forget about it. This strategy can be used either as a problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategy.
- Internalizing – using this strategy involves not letting anyone else know what is going on and attempting to not sharing feelings about the situation. This strategy can be used either as a problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategy. This strategy can potentially cause more damage to the victim.

Emotion-focused strategies are attempts to manage stress by regulating emotions associated with stress. This strategy could entail listening to music to calm down, deep breathing exercises, or crying after an incident. The following strategies are considered emotion-focused strategies; as noted above, some of them can be employed from either perspective:

- Seeking social support - with this strategy, the victim looks to others for support or advice on how to address the situation. This strategy can be used either as a problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategy. Seeking social support was shown to be the most used coping strategy by girls (Tenenbaum, Varjas, Meyers, & Parris, 2011) and the most successful coping strategy in terms of resolving the issue and maintaining a close level of friendship.
- Distancing - this coping strategy involves the victim ignoring or walking away from the bullying, or even letting the bullying happen and then letting it go while

attempting to move on and forget about it. This strategy can be used either as a problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategy.

- Internalizing - using this strategy involves not letting anyone else know what is going on and attempting not to share feelings about the situation. This strategy can be used either as a problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategy. This strategy can potentially cause more damage to the victim.
- Tension-reduction/externalizing – this strategy involves attempting to reduce stress and calm down by taking deep breaths, reading, or perhaps trying to blow off steam by physically harming or yelling at someone else. When the bullied children just cannot take it anymore and feel they had to act out, this strategy is used as an emotion-focused coping method. This coping strategy was reported as frequently used by girls (Remillard & Lamb, 2005).
- Focus on the positive – this coping strategy involves the victim maintaining a positive attitude and looking upon the bullying situation in a positive light. This coping strategy is used from an emotion-focused perspective as the children choose to focus on things they know to be true and look for good. This coping strategy was reported as frequently used by girls (Remillard & Lamb, 2005).
- Self-blame – using this strategy involves the victim feeling personally responsible in some way for the bullying. This is coping from an emotion-focused perspective as the victim begins to self-blame immediately after the bullying situation.

Victims often choose more than one of the strategies described and depending upon the success of one attempt, may choose to use of combination of emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies to cope. Social support has been shown to be the best and most

likely-used coping strategy among girls (Remillard & Lamb, 2005). They further showed that the more hurt a girl experienced, the more likely she was to engage in wishful thinking, blame, keep to herself, and engage in stress-reducing activities. Remillard and Lamb (2005) also indicates that seeking social support is the most significant coping strategy to use when resolving a situation with hopes of keeping a friendship close.

There are some specific strategies that can be used for coping with electronic RA (Schenk & Fremouw, 2012), including:

- Blocking the aggressor's screen name – by doing this the victim can block future incoming messages from that bully (user).
- Changing your screen name – creating a new online identity for yourself can help avoid online aggressors.
- Send a warning – responding to an online aggressor with a request to stop communications or a warning of alerting others about their aggression.
- Restrict use – some victims simply choose to avoid using that certain site, network, or technology.

Salmivalli (1999) suggests it is important to understand that there are more participants involved in bullying incidents than simply a bully and a victim. By looking further to identify possible reinforcers, outsiders, and defenders, we can better determine the context of a bullying situation, as well as help adolescents understand that if they are not helping stop the bullying, they are contributing to its continuation. The role approaches to bullying categorizes participants into the following groups:

- Bully – those taking an active role in and/or initiating the attack.
- Victim – the target of the attack.

- Reinforcers – those who may join in the attack once started by others or may not actively attack, but encourage the behavior of the bully. Adolescents need to understand that by encouraging the bully, they are becoming an accomplice to the bullying.
- Outsiders – stay away from the attack without taking sides. Adolescents need to understand that by not actively working to stop the bullying from happening or occurring, they are indirectly facilitating the attack upon the victim.
- Defenders – exercise clear anti-bullying behavior in an attempt to stop the attack.

The role approach is also helpful when it comes to intervention. If we look at the adolescent population as a whole and educate them on how they may get involved, we may see more positive results (Salmivalli, 1999). Using role play activities to encourage group members to take on another role within the group: for example, having non-active participants to stand up for the victim, can be helpful peer training that could make a difference in future potential relationally aggressive situations.

Social networks and online support groups and chat groups have been shown to be an effective coping mechanism for adolescents who have been through a tragedy or are struggling to get through an emotional crisis (Juvonen & Gross, 2008), so it is important that we strive to maintain a positive environment online that adolescents can turn to for support, rather than be further victimized by. It is suggested that simply transferring the victim to another social group after the RA has occurred is not an effective solution to the problem; the situation should instead be dealt with in the social group in which it has arisen (Salmivalli, 1999). Role play activities, team bonding, team building, and routine rotation of groups within practice to discourage cliques within the team are possible

proactive measures coaches can take to help lessen the occurrence of relational aggression within the team.

In the previous paragraphs, RA has been defined, and the problems associated with it have been discussed. Then, problem- and emotion-based coping strategies were outlined. Armed with this knowledge about the nature of RA, the next portion of this paper outlines a training program, targeted to girls sports coaches. It is hoped that the scholarly literature can be used to make marked changes in RA in girls sport.

PART II. DEVELOPMENT

I initially became interested in this topic because of the alarming frequency in which I witnessed different aspects of relational aggression occurring among my players. In an effort to attempt to better equip myself with the skills to recognize relational aggression, I have researched RA. Through my research, I have discovered that there is no one way to handle RA. Each situation is different, each victim is different, and will respond and cope differently. One common thread is that it is essential to be aware of the environment and your players so that you can recognize when that environment changes, this will help alert you that there could be an issue. The most important thing I have learned from my experience as a player and coach; is that regardless of the situation, it is essential that the adolescent realize that you as the coach care about their well-being, that you are there to support them if they choose to come to you with a problem, and that you will do your best to assist them in resolving the situation. Together, through the research I conducted and my experiences as a high school girls volleyball coach, I have designed training materials specifically for fellow high school girls volleyball coaches. I hope this will help coaches:

- understand what RA is
- recognize which athletes exhibit signs of being an aggressor
- recognize which athletes exhibit signs of being a victim
- identify situations in which RA has the potential to occur
- address the RA behaviors as quickly as possible
- assist the athletes in coping with RA.

This part of this paper details the development of the training material that will be presented at the conference; the actual materials to be presented are included in the appendices.

The presentation is based upon the preceding research and my experiences as a high school girls volleyball coach; beginning with a PowerPoint presentation and narrative (Appendix A), allowing time for questions, and handing out a flyer for the coaches (Appendix B). I open the presentation showing relevance of RA to teenage girls by discussing some of the recent societal headlines involving suicides after RA victimization. After discussing the fragile dynamic in which we coach and the ever-changing makeup of the team, I define RA and different mediums used to inflict RA attacks.

The focus then shifts to how to recognize relational aggression within your team by not only identifying potential victims, but potential bullies, defenders, outsiders, and reinforcers. Part of this process includes coaches getting to know their players' personalities better and players getting to know their teammates better. Role playing and team building/team bonding activities are a great way to accomplish this. One potential way to reduce occurrences of RA is to increase the number of defenders within your team, for example, having athletes practice working together and/or defending each other.

I then discuss how to help athletes cope with RA and suggest different emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies that can be effective. Social support has been shown to be the best and most likely-used coping strategy among girls. It is common to see more than one strategy used, for example, tension reduction, to blame and keep to themselves, and wishful thinking.

The presentation concludes with some of the lingering effects of RA that victims may experience and some suggestions how to possibly prevent RA within your team. Intermixing groups and constantly rotating within practice and other team activities can help reduce the formation of cliques and promote team cohesion. I feel the most important part of being a volleyball coach is teaching the athletes more than just skills and strategies of the game; hopefully by expanding the knowledge of coaches about RA, we can help them instill bigger values and practice more important drills.

Each summer, there is a coaching clinic for high school volleyball coaches in the state of Minnesota. Coaches can apply to the state high school volleyball coaches association requesting a session of time be made available for the presentation of materials they feel would benefit fellow coaches. This presentation would be a great fit for a conference of this nature, and I would like to one day present these training materials at such an event. In order to ensure the quality of my training materials, I had them reviewed by qualified experts. Those reviews follow in the next part of this paper.

PART III. REVIEW OF CURRICULUM

This part includes a review of my proposed curriculum by fellow volleyball coaches and/or volleyball players. Reviewers were chosen by me based upon their experience as former collegiate players or current roles as coaches or instructors. The target audience of these training materials is comprised of volleyball coaches, so I felt that given their experience, the selected reviewers were well qualified to give educated opinions and suggestions on the relevance and quality of the training materials.

The reviewers have the following qualifications:

Reviewer #1 was/is a:

- Division II volleyball player for 4 years
- high school volleyball coach for 7 years
- USAV JO Club volleyball coach 5 years
- Division III volleyball coach 2 years - currently

Reviewer #2 was/is a:

- 2-time Division II All-American Setter
- Division II volleyball player for 4 years
- Division II student VB assistant coach for 2 years
- varsity high school volleyball coach for 1 year
- camp volleyball coach for 8 years – currently
- Division III assistant volleyball coach for 7 years - currently

Reviewer #3 was/is a:

- Division II volleyball player for 4 years
- assistant college coach for 1 year

- club volleyball coach for 5 years
- high school volleyball coach for 4 years – currently
- elementary school teacher – currently

Reviewer #4 was/is a:

- Division II volleyball player for 4 years
- MA – communication Graduate
- PhD – communication Student – currently
- Communications Instructor for 6 years – currently

Reviewers were asked to view the training materials (the PowerPoint presentation, the narrative that will accompany the PowerPoint presentation, and the take-home handout) that will be given to the coaches via email. The reviewers were asked the following questions about the materials:

1. Is it relevant?
2. Is the material understandable?
3. What piece did you like best?
4. Where does the package need improvement?

The responses of the reviewers were then compiled by me and summarized in the following section.

Is it Relevant?

All of the reviewers found the training materials to be very relevant. R1 and R2 commented that they observe girls on their teams constantly struggling for acceptance, higher ranking in their social circles, relationships, friendships, and weight. R1 mentioned that “simply hearing about the topic caused reflection upon situations which may have

been RA, but due to lack of knowledge about RA, were not handled as such”. R2 had previously thought of bullying as a ‘boy’ problem. R2 wondered “how often signs of RA and victims of RA were not recognized” due to not knowing what to look for and wanted more knowledge on the topic. R3 and R4 stated the materials were relevant and would benefit any coach or adult who interacts with teenagers.

Is the Material Understandable?

All of the reviews found the training materials to be understandable. R1 felt that “information was broken down in a way that was easily understandable” and relative to their experiences. R2, R3, and R4 found the material to be “very understandable” and “very easy to follow”. R2 thought it was “very thought provoking” and is now thinking about the changes that can be made within their program to minimize the opportunity for relational aggression to take place.

What Piece Did You Like Best?

The reviewers each listed different areas within the training materials they liked best. R1 liked the "girls being girls" description. R1 mentioned that so often we turn our back on what is really going because it is just teenagers and girls, have to learn through the process of teammates and relationships, even if they are negative. R1 also liked the identifying the roles section, stating, “we always see the attacker and the victim but a lot of times we forget to address the outsiders of one sort or the other.” R2 found the most beneficial part to be the discussion on signs to look for in both the aggressor and the victim. R2 commented, “I have always tried as a coach to be more of a life coach than a volleyball coach, now I realize I need to keep very open lines of communications with all players so they feel a sense of trust and security if they need to confide in me with regards

to this or anything for that matter”. R2 would like focus on improving this area of coaching. R3 liked the overall concept of the project and suggested that coaches of all women’s teams would benefit from the information. R4 stated that the training materials presented will help “bring attention to an issue that often goes unnoticed;” adding, “while people are becoming aware and being vigilant about stepping in when there are instances of (typical) bullying, many people attribute relational aggression to being just a part of growing up.” R4 believed the recent attention on bullying made the training materials even more important because as punishments for (typical) bullying become more severe, young people may turn to relational aggression as it is much more difficult to prove it is actually happening. R4 also enjoyed the team roles section.

Where Does the Package Need Improvement?

The reviewers each gave different suggestions on which pieces of the package need improvement. Some of the suggestions were mentioned by more than one reviewer. R1 thought the package was very well done, mentioning, “I had to slow my reading down because there was a lot of information.” R2 and R4 felt a specific example of how to practice role play exercises within team training time would be helpful, but overall thought the package was very well presented and something that all coaches should be made aware of. R3 and R4 felt that more information on the emotion and problem-focused coping strategies was needed in the presentation. R3 and R4 suggested considering broadening the scope to include more than just high school volleyball coaches. R3 would have liked more examples in the PowerPoint presentation of how RA is inflicted and how to proactively prevent RA. R4 suggested a chart further describing and differentiating the

coping strategies discussed, suggesting three columns: problem-focused, either problem-focused or emotion-focused, and emotion-focused.

Reflections

I feel that the package was well received by the reviewers and that the majority of coaches would deem this topic and presentation relevant and understandable. I attempted to communicate in a way that would be clear, easy for coaches to understand, and easy for coaches to relate to. After reading the reviews, I feel like I accomplished creating relevant and understandable materials.

I think that each reviewer, and further, each coach, will find different areas more beneficial to them depending upon their training, background, and experience. There are many different facets to approaching and coping with RA, so hopefully there is something for everyone to learn, from novice to long time coach.

RA was a relatively new subject to R1 and R2. As such, suggestions for improvement were limited to a request for an example of how to practice role play exercises. I revised the materials to include an example of an exercise that could be used to practice role play. R3 would have liked more examples of how RA is inflicted in the PowerPoint presentation. I made revisions to the slide and narrative defining RA and how it is inflicted to include more examples to accommodate this request. R3 and R4 had more existing knowledge about RA and were looking for more details on specific coping strategies, namely the differences between emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies. R4 requested a chart to further explain which strategy would be considered which type of coping method. If this training material were to be presented in a more academic setting, I would consider presenting this section in a more in-depth. Although

more detail is given in the narrative accompanying the PowerPoint presentation, I did add a chart to the presentation to break down the categories of coping strategies, listing which are considered emotion-focused, problem-focused, or either. R3 and R4 also suggested broadening the scope of the project to include coaches of all women's teams; however, for the purpose of this paper, I will remain focused on only high school volleyball coaches since that is the area in which I have the most knowledge and experience. After considering all suggestions from the reviewers, I made some minor changes, as reflected in the training materials found in the appendices. It is my hope to be able to use these training materials to help inform high school volleyball coaches of the problem of RA and to provide an additional method of reducing RA within our school and the lives of adolescents.

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PAMELA OSTERFELD

HS Volleyball coach for 11 years
USAV JO Club Director/coach for 8 years
Division I and II Volleyball player
USAV National Volleyball player

1

- thank for attendance
- introduce self and talk about coaching experience

RISING ABOVE RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

A RESEARCH-BASED COACHES GUIDE TO IDENTIFYING AND COPING WITH RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

2

- introduce presentation – how materials came about
- agenda
 - PowerPoint
 - Q & A
 - handout
- how many of you have experienced some type of bullying within your team?
- talk about specific cases I've seen
- last few years, girl bullying has become a household word
- cases on the news of young girls being picked on so much that they think the only way to stop it is through ending their own lives

CURRENT EVENTS RELATIVE STORIES

- 10-year old Ashlynn Conner found dead in her closet
- Phoebe Prince, a 15-year old transfer student committed suicide
- 12-year old Brooklyn girl named Maria Herrera hanged herself
- Canadian teenager Dawn-Marie Wesley committed suicide

3

- present recent extreme cases of bullying
- explain not all RA related, but raising the awareness of the severity of bullying in general
- 10-year old Ashlynn Conner was found dead in her closet by her sister, an apparent suicide...shockingly similar to the case of
- 15-year old transfer student Phoebe Prince ended her own life
 - harassed relentlessly
 - called names
 - scribbled out on school posters
 - endlessly tormented through online social networks and texts
- because she had briefly dated one of the popular upperclassmen when she first

started at her new school

- 12-year old Brooklyn native Maria Herrera hanged herself
 - repeatedly reporting incidents at school
 - name calling due to braces
 - having her hair cut off
 - even told the school counselor she was considering suicide
- Canadian teenager Dawn-Marie Wesley committed suicide after enduring an onslaught of verbal threats and psychological abuse from classmates
- these girls felt they had no voice, that their cries for help were going unheard
- specific cases of extreme bullying, you may encounter less severe cases of RA among your team
- give examples of RA in my experience, how players performance can be an indicator of trouble outside of the sport

PURPOSE

This presentation will:

- define relational aggression (RA)
- discuss how RA is used as bullying
- offer coaches tips on how to identify and cope with RA within your team

4

- this presentation will define RA, discuss how RA is inflicted, and offer tips

WHAT IS RELATIONAL AGGRESSION?

- RA is not physical or verbal aggression.
- RA uses relationships to damage or manipulate others and their peer relationships

5

What is RA?

- aka indirect aggression or social aggression
- specific, subtle aggressive behaviors using relationships to damage or manipulate others and threaten friendships
- calculated to hurt or control another child's ability to maintain rapport with peers.
- not be easily identifiable.

...IT'S COMPLICATED...

Relational aggression is something that many girls will come in contact with in some capacity throughout their teenage years, whether as an aggressor, or as a victim

6

- many girls will come in contact with RA in some capacity
- a certain amount of exposure to relationally aggressive behavior is normal for most children and adults, it is those who are repeatedly targeted at extreme levels that are considered to be victims

HOW IS RA USED?

RA is inflicted by

- spreading gossip
- shooting dirty looks
- excluding girls from groups or settings
- threatening friendships
- writing derogatory comments
- through electronic media such as Facebook, Myspace, texting, tweets, etc.

7

How is RA used?

- associate these aggressive behaviors with bullying, not just “girls being girls”
- RA inflicted by:
 - spreading gossip
 - shooting dirty looks
 - excluding girls from groups or settings
 - threatening friendships
 - writing derogatory comments about them.
- electronic mediums outside of school or off the court, i.e., text messages, Facebook posts, tweets, and other instant communication

- likely to be victimized in and out of school
- less likely to report cyberbullying - scared to lose online privileges

RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS

- be aware at all times
- it's not always obvious
- look for sudden changes in behaviors and habits
- identify roles of your athletes within your team dynamic

8

- intricate social dynamic
- awareness, concern, and response is essential

TEAM ROLES

- Bully – those taking an active role in and/or initiating the attack
- Victim – the target of the attack
- Reinforcers – may join in the attack once started by others or may not actively attack, but encourage the behavior of the bully
- Outsiders – stay away from the attack without taking sides
- Defenders – exercise clear anti-bullying behavior in an attempt to stop the attack

9

- Know the roles of your team members within the team dynamic
- Bullying is a group phenomenon, members take on different roles
- If they are not helping stop the bullying, they are contributing to its continuation
- The role approaches to bullying categorizes participants into the following groups:
 - Bully – those taking an active role in and/or initiating the attack
 - Victim – the target of the attack
 - Reinforcers – those who may join in the attack once started by others or may not actively attack, but encourage the behavior of the bully
 - Outsiders – stay away from the attack without taking sides
 - Defenders – exercise clear anti-bullying behavior in an attempt to stop the attack

ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY

- Keep your eyes and ears open to body language
- Watch for eye rolling and repetitive exclusion of certain players

10

- RA is not something that occurs only among girls who are in different social circles
- RA is often observed in among close intimate friends
- List possible behaviors
 - Eye rolling
 - Repetitive sarcasm focused and directed towards an individual
 - Recurring exclusion of certain players from group activities
 - Sudden change in social circle among teammates
- If you notice these behaviors, look for potential victims
 - Sudden change in mood
 - Sudden change in social circle among teammates

- Withdrawal from team activities
- Negative or emotional outbursts
- Negative change in teacher reports

ADDRESS RA ASAP

- there is NO place for RA among team- mates!
- RA affects more than just the victim!

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- Make it clear that there is NO place for RA among team mates!
- The strength of the team is only as strong as the weakest link of the team
- If one of the team members is a victim of RA, they will most likely have performance issues; likewise, the relational aggressor will have to deal with repercussions of their behavior, and both the victim and aggressor may have trust issues with other teammates

ASSIST IN COPING

Problem-focus vs. Emotion-focus strategies include:

Problem	Both	Emotion
Self-defense	Seek social support	Externalizing
Stand up to the bully	Distancing	Focus on positive
	Internalizing	Self-blame

12

- You are aware of the issue, how to help the athlete work through what has happened
- Attempt to collect information from multiple sources to gain a better understanding of the situation
- There has been some research done on coping strategies, no clear way to address the problem, some may prove to be more successful than others given the dynamic of those involved and some are clearly unhealthy coping strategies
- Coping strategies are emotion-focused, problem-focused, or both
- If the victim comes to a conclusion after carefully thinking through the problem and analyzing possible solutions, and then takes action, the method chosen is a problem-focused coping strategy: problem-focused strategies include:

- Self-defense – involves the victim protecting oneself through physical action when they felt they had no other choice
- Stand up to the bully – stand up directly to the bully in an attempt to resolve the situation
- If the victim responds based on impulse, frustration, or attempts to otherwise manage stress by regulating emotion, the method used would be considered an emotion-focused coping strategy, emotion-focused strategies include:
 - Self-blame – victim feels personally responsible in some way for the bullying
 - Tension-reduction/externalizing – attempts to reduce stress/calm down by taking deep breaths, reading, trying to blow off steam by physically harming or yelling at someone else
 - Focus on the positive – victim maintains a positive attitude, looks upon the bullying situation in a positive light
- Many victims employ multiple coping strategies to cope with RA, some can be considered both problem and emotion-focused, depending on the situation, those methods include:
 - Distancing – victim ignores or walks away from the bullying, or even lets the bullying happen and lets it go, attempting to move on and forget about it
 - Internalizing – not letting anyone else know what is going on and attempting to not sharing feelings about the situation
 - Seeking social support – with this strategy, the victim looks to others for support or advice on how to address the situation

ASSIST IN COPING

Recommended Strategies include:

- Social support
- Externalizing
- Distancing
- Focus on the positive

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- Some of the more recommended coping strategies include: social support, standing up to the bully, tension reduction/externalizing, focusing on the position, distancing, and self-defense
- Social support has been shown to be the most likely used among girls
- Most potential for maintaining close relationship after resolution
- More hurt girls experienced = more likely to engage in tension reduction/externalizing

ASSIST IN COPING

Strategies that are NOT Recommended or should be carefully considered due to potential retaliation include:

- Internalizing
- Self-blame
- Stand up to bully
- Self-defense

14

- Not recommended coping strategies include: internalizing and self-blame
- Discuss how internalizing/not talking about issues can lead to greater harm and telling someone who could possibly assist in coping with RA if not help stop it
- Standing up to the bully could possibly backfire

I'M JUST HERE TO COACH...

Victims of RA can be affected by RA for years after the attack(s) have ended & are more likely to have social maladjustment issues, including:

15

- Adolescent peer groups do not include adults but can affect and be affected by them
- Accept that you are coaching more than just volleyball skills

I'M JUST HERE TO COACH...

- alcohol abuse in women
- antisocial behaviors
- borderline personality features
- higher levels of peer rejection
- bulimia
- impaired relationships
- depression
- lack of self-confidence
- lower levels of prosocial behavior

16

- Social maladjustment issues include:
 - alcohol use in women
 - antisocial behaviors
 - borderline personality features
 - higher levels of peer rejection
 - bulimia
 - impaired relationships
 - depression
 - lack of self-confidence
 - lower levels of prosocial behavior

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Expand your knowledge = better coach!

Teach more than VB skills, teach life skills

Leave a legacy bigger than trophies

17

- Problem solving, teamwork, and coping skills to take forward throughout life
- We are teaching by example
- Hindsight is 20/20, take proactive steps to reduce chances of RA
- Simply moving the victim into a different social group after the RA has occurred is not the best answer
- Deal with the situation in the social group which is has occurred
- There is no clear one way to address the problem
- Know your school guidelines on bullying both inside and outside of school walls
- Being aware of different medium used by adolescent to communicate is helpful

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Be proactive: take control of who is in a group/require intermixing

Team bonding and role playing activities

18

- Be proactive, take control of who is in a group for particular activities, and require intermixing of groups when possible
- Team bonding activities can be of great assistance here; encourage the number of defenders on the team, and reduce the number of reinforcers and bystanders
- Assign yourself, another coach, or an empty chair as the role of the victim. Assign your athletes different roles within the RA situation and act out a certain scenario, then have the athletes respond differently or take on a different role (outsider vs. defender) to see how responses impact the direction of the victimization. Assist the athletes with possible ways to side with the victim, resist peer pressure, and otherwise deal with the situation. Encourage the players to “freeze” the scene and discuss feelings and emotions.

THANK YOU!

Q & A

Contact me at:
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APPENDIX B. FLYER/HANDOUT

What is Relational Aggression? - manipulation to hurt or control another's ability to maintain rapport with peers, a subtle form of aggression that uses relationships to damage or manipulate others and threaten friendships.

Watch for these behaviors from aggressors:

- eye rolling
- repetitive sarcasm
- recurring exclusion of others in group activities
- sudden change in social circle among team.

Watch for the behaviors from victims:

- sudden mood changes
- sudden changes in social circle among the team
- withdrawn behavior towards team or teammates
- negative outbursts, unusual/negative reports from teachers

What should I do if I recognize RA is occurring?

- help by defending or getting help from others and showing support for victim

Recommendations for team building include:

- role playing
- rotating warmup/drill groups
- require that they include ALL team members
- assign team building games or challenges to help team members realize that the actions of one can positively or negatively affect the entire team and that they can only be as strong on the court as the weakest link in the chain of their team