



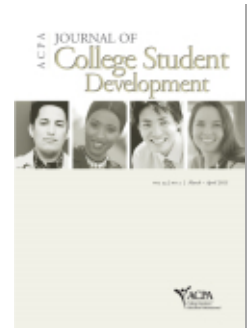
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Relational Aggression and Victimization in College Students

Eric R. Dahlen Katherine A. Czar Emily Prather Christy Dyess

For this study we explored relational aggression and victimization in a college sample (N = 307), examining potential gender and race differences, correlates, and the link between relational aggression and common emotional and behavioral problems, independent of relational victimization. Gender and race differences were observed on relational aggression and victimization. Relational aggression in peer and intimate relationships was positively correlated with depression, anxiety, stress, anger, and alcohol problems. Independent of gender, race, and relational victimization, peer relational aggression was predicted by anxiety, trait anger, and personal problems related to alcohol use.

In the last decade, the college student development field has witnessed an explosion of interest in the subject of *relational aggression*, a set of behaviors through which the aggressor intends to harm others by adversely affecting their relationships, sense of belonging, social status, or reputation (Ellis, Crooks, & Wolfe, 2009; Linder, Crick, & Collins, 2002; Werner & Crick, 1999). Relational aggression is sometimes viewed as a subtle form of bullying; however, the constructs are clearly not synonymous. *Bullying* is generally defined as requiring persistence over time and a power differential between the aggressor and victim (Cartwright & Cooper, 2007; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007), whereas relationally aggressive behaviors may be isolated occurrences where no difference in power is present.

Among children and early adolescents, *relational victimization* is associated with poor coping, self-defeating and delinquent behaviors, anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Ellis et al., 2009; Olafsen & Viemerö, 2000; Sullivan, Farrell, & Kliewer, 2006). Relationally aggressive youth report more peer rejection, delinquency, substance abuse, and a variety of externalizing behaviors (Crick, 1996; Sullivan et al., 2006). Moreover, there is evidence that even the presence of relational aggression in the school environment may contribute to students' perceptions of their schools as less safe (Goldstein, Chesir-Teran, & McFaul, 2008). Indeed, we should not be surprised by findings indicating that relational aggression can be as detrimental as overt physical aggression (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

While the correlates of relational aggression and victimization are well understood in children and early adolescents, far less is known about the nature of these behaviors in late adolescents and early adults (Schmeelk, Sylvers, & Lilienfeld, 2008). The university environment provides an ideal milieu for studying relational aggression during an important period of transition from adolescence to adulthood. For many students of traditional age, starting college represents the first time they are living independently. Peer and dating relationships become increasingly important, and myriad developmental tasks (e.g., identity

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formation, intimacy, career planning, etc.) must be accomplished. It is reasonable to expect that relationally aggressive behaviors (e.g., gossip, spreading malicious rumors, and social exclusion) may be extremely disruptive during this period. Thus, it is suggested that college and university personnel would benefit from understanding the nature of relational aggression in this environment.

A growing body of literature demonstrates that relational aggression and victimization can exact a considerable toll on the optimal functioning of college students. Relational victimization has been associated with anxiety and self-defeating behaviors (Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2002). Relational aggression has been associated with adjustment difficulties, peer rejection and reduced prosocial behavior, social anxiety, depression, substance use, disordered eating, and maladaptive personality traits (Linder et al., 2002; Miller & Lynam, 2003; Ostrov & Houston, 2008; Storch, Werner, & Storch, 2003; Werner & Crick, 1999). While most studies have focused on relational aggression among friends, the occurrence of such behaviors in the context of intimate relationships may be even more important to young adults due to the added value commonly placed on such relationships (Bagner, Storch, & Preseton, 2007). Studies of romantic relational aggression and victimization among college students have found associations with poor relationship quality and insecure attachment, depression, loneliness, and substance use (Bagner et al., 2007; Goldstein et al., 2008; Linder et al., 2002). Because some of the correlates of *romantic relational aggression* differ from those of *peer relational aggression*, understanding the differences may have implications for designing prevention and intervention strategies in the university environment.

In addition to exploring potential differences between peer and romantic relational

aggression, the possible role of gender and race in relational aggression among late adolescents and adults is poorly understood. During childhood, there is ample evidence that girls are more likely to engage in relationally aggressive behavior than boys (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006); however, the role of gender in relational aggression remains unclear among older adolescents and adults. Some studies found no gender differences (e.g., Bailey & Ostrov, 2008; Verona, Sadeh, Case, Reed, & Bhattacharjee, 2008), others have found that men are more likely to engage in relational aggression than women (e.g., Lento-Zwolinski, 2007), and still others have found that there may be gender differences in some contexts (e.g., romantic relationships) but not others (e.g., Murray-Close, Ostrov, Nelson, Crick, & Coccaro, 2010). Thus, we included respondent gender as a variable in order to assess its role in this sample. In contrast to the inconsistent findings regarding potential gender differences, race remains largely unexamined. In light of recent evidence that peer relational victimization is associated with depression among Black college women (Gomes, Davis, Baker, & Servonsky, 2009), it may be helpful to determine whether there are race differences in relational aggression and victimization. Such knowledge could facilitate the design of effective prevention or intervention programs to address relational aggression among students.

In addition to examining possible gender and race differences in peer and romantic relational aggression and victimization, we examined several variables potentially related to these behaviors. In selecting possible correlates, we started with variables that have been linked to relational aggression in previous studies of college students: depression, anxiety, alcohol-related problems, and loneliness. We started with these variables for two reasons. First, while they are known to relate to peer

relational aggression, few had previously been examined with regard to romantic relational aggression. Far more is known about relational aggression directed at peers, so we wanted to determine whether romantic relational aggression had similar correlates. Second, the literature supporting the relationship of relational aggression to anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and loneliness among college students has focused almost exclusively on the perpetrators of relational aggression rather than the victims (see Twenge et al., 2002, for an exception). We wanted to determine whether college students who were victims of relational aggression would show similar problems, as has been the case in many prior studies with children and early adolescents (e.g., Olafsen & Viemerö, 2000; Sullivan et al., 2006).

We also included measures of three constructs that had not been previously examined in the literature on relational aggression/victimization among college students but which were deemed relevant to understanding the manner in which relationally aggressive behaviors may disrupt college life: trait anger, academic burnout, and perceived social support from friends. *Trait anger* (i.e., one's general propensity to experience angry feelings) was selected to determine whether students involved in relational aggression were also more anger prone. Trait anger is related to overt physical and verbal aggression (Archer, 2004; Deffenbacher, 1992; Parrott, Zeichner, & Evces, 2005), but its role in relational aggression is not well understood. To the degree that these constructs are related, anger reduction strategies may be an important component of prevention and treatment efforts to address relational aggression. Academic burnout was selected because of its relevance to student retention (Meier & Schmeck, 1985; Pisarik, 2009), and while we were aware of no studies examining academic burnout in this context,

we expected that the stress of relational victimization might be evident here. Perceived social support was included because of its importance in mental and physical well-being (Cohen, 1988). Although a few studies have found that peer rejection is associated with relational aggression, we wanted to explore the potential relationship between social support and relational victimization. Again, we reasoned that this might have implications for prevention and treatment, as well as for improved understanding of relational aggression/victimization.

Most of the research to date has studied relational aggression as an independent variable, seeking to identify its correlates and understand the manner in which it may interfere with psychosocial functioning. An alternative conceptualization views relational aggression as a dependent variable and seeks to understand the factors that may make it more or less likely to occur (Czar, Dahlen, Bullock-Yowell, & Nicholson, 2011). While we believe that continued research on the correlates of relational aggression is necessary, given the many unanswered questions about the nature of the construct, we suspect that treating relational aggression as a dependent variable may have some benefits for those tasked with preventing the behavior and intervening in cases where prevention has failed. Thus, we utilized both approaches in the present study. After examining many potential correlates, we selected a subset for analysis as potential predictors of relational aggression (i.e., anxiety, depression, trait anger, and problems related to the misuse of alcohol).

As part of a larger project designed to map the nomological network of relational aggression among older adolescents and adults, the present study was designed with three objectives. The first objective was to examine potential gender and race differences in relational aggression and victimization

among college students, separating that which transpired in a peer context from its occurrence in intimate partnerships. Second, we sought to examine the potential correlates of both forms of relational aggression and victimization (i.e., peer and romantic) in order to determine how these constructs relate to a variety of social and emotional problems with particular relevance to a university setting. The third objective was to determine whether a subset of these constructs (i.e., anxiety, depression, trait anger, alcohol misuse) predicted relational aggression independent of relational victimization; that is, we wanted to examine the potential role of these variables in relationally aggressive behavior beyond that which might be attributed to aggressive exchanges where there were high degrees of both aggression and victimization.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 307 college student volunteers (208 women and 99 men; *Mdn* age = 20 years) from a midsized Southeastern university. They were recruited through the web-based system (Sona Systems Ltd.) used by the Department of Psychology, and they received course credit based on the average amount of time required to complete the study (approximately 30 minutes). Participants reported their ethnic backgrounds as follows: White (60%), Black (36%), with the remainder identifying as Asian (2%), Hispanic (1%), and Other (1%). Most were in the first 2 years of college (54%); however, the proportions of participants in each of the 4 years of college were similar. Informed consent, a brief demographic questionnaire, and all study measures were administered online using a secure Internet survey. The procedure was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

Measures

Self-Report of Aggression and Social Behavior Measure (SRASBM). Relational aggression and victimization were assessed with four subscales from the SRASBM (Morales & Crick, 1998): General/Peer Relational Aggression (7 items), Romantic Relational Aggression (4 items), General/Peer Relational Victimization (4 items), and Romantic Relational Victimization (4 items). Respondents rated each item as to how accurately it described them during the past year from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*very true*). The Romantic Relational Aggression and Romantic Relational Victimization items all had asterisks next to them, and respondents were instructed to skip these items if they were not currently in a romantic relationship and had not been in one during the past year. The four subscales used have demonstrated adequate internal consistency in college student samples, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .71 to .87 (Bailey & Ostrov, 2008; Czar et al., 2011; Goldstein et al., 2008; LentoZwolinski, 2007; Linder et al., 2002). Support for the construct validity of these subscales has been provided in the form of relationships with theoretically relevant constructs (Murray-Close et al., 2010; Ostrov & Houston, 2008).

Social Support Behaviors Scale (SS-B). Participants' perceived social support from friends was assessed with the 45-item SS-B (Vaux, Riedel, & Stewart, 1987). Although the SS-B permits independent evaluation of support from friends and family members, participants in this study were asked to provide information about the availability of supportive behavior only from friends. In addition to reducing multicollinearity, this better fit our focus on peer support. The SS-B assesses five modes of social support using 5-point Likert-type items: emotional (10 items), socializing (7 items), practical assistance (8 items), financial assistance (8 items), and advice/guidance

(12 items). Vaux et al. reported internal consistencies above .85 for all subscales as well as evidence of construct validity in the form of convergence with other measures of social support. Moreover, they found that the subscales were sensitive to the different forms of support related to each mode assessed. Subsequent studies have demonstrated that SS-B scores are positively related to proactive coping, inversely related to depression, and serve as a protective factor against suicide attempts among Black women experiencing intimate partner violence (Greenglass, Fiksenbaum, & Eaton, 2006; Meadows, Kaslow, Thompson, & Jurkovic, 2005).

UCLA Loneliness Scale. Loneliness was measured with the 20-item UCLA Loneliness Scale—Version 3 (UCLA-3; Russell, 1996). Respondents indicate the frequency with which each statement applies to them from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*always*), producing one total score. Russell (1996) provided evidence of the unidimensional nature of the scale, reported alpha coefficients ranging from .89 to .94, and found a 1-year retest coefficient of .73 in a sample of older adults. Considerable evidence has accumulated to support the construct validity of the UCLA-3 as one of the most widely used measures of loneliness (Hartshorne, 1993; Russell, 1996). Scores on this measure are positively related to other measures of loneliness, as well as depression and Internet use, and are inversely related to social support and self-esteem (Deniz, 2010; Russell, 1996).

Meier Burnout Assessment (MBA). College student burnout was measured with the 27-item MBA (Meier & Schmeck, 1985). The MBA assesses diminished expectations for rewards and emotional and physical exhaustion. Respondents indicate whether each statement is true or false for them with regard to their experience at their present university. Meier and Schmeck (1985) reported an alpha

coefficient of .82 and found support for the construct validity of the MBA in the form of expected relationships with other measures of burnout, memory, sensation seeking, self-esteem, and vocational identity.

Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS). The 21-item short version of the DASS (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) was used to measure participants' experience of depression, anxiety, and stress over the past week. Respondents rate items from 0 (*did not apply to me at all*) to 3 (*applied to me very much, or most of the time*), and the three 7-item scales provide measures of anxiety, stress, and depression. Alpha coefficients exceeding .85 have been reported for the scales, and validity has been supported through its correlations with other measures of depression and anxiety (Antony, Bieling, Cox, Enns, & Swinson, 1998; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

Trait Anger Scale. The 10-item Trait Anger Scale from the State–Trait Anger Expression Inventory–2 (Spielberger, 1999) was used to provide a brief measure of respondents' overall propensity to experience angry feelings. Items are rated from 1 (*almost never*) to 4 (*almost always*) as to how well they describe the respondent. Alpha coefficients range from .73 to .93 (Driscoll, Zinkivskay, Evans, & Campbell, 2006; Spielberger, 1999), and evidence of construct validity has been provided in the form of correlations with measures of similar constructs (Martin & Dahlen, 2007; Spielberger, 1999).

College Alcohol Problem Scale—Revised (CAPS-R). The 8-item CAPS-R (Maddock, Laforge, Rossi, & O'Hare, 2001) was used to assess adverse consequences of alcohol use among college students. Unlike many previous measures of alcohol dependence, the original 20-item CAPS was developed to be sensitive to the sort of alcohol problems common to college drinkers (O'Hare, 1997, 1998). Respondents rate the frequency

with which they have experienced each consequence of alcohol use during the past year from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*10 or more times*). The CAPS-R was created by reducing the number of original CAPS items through factor analytic methods. It provides two 4-item subscales: Personal Problems (PP) and

Social Problems (SP). Internal consistencies of .79 for PP and .75 for SP were reported, and evidence of construct validity has been provided in the form of correlations with other measures of alcohol consumption and adverse consequences of alcohol use (Maddock et al., 2001).

TABLE 1.
Alpha Coefficients, Means, and Standard Deviations by Race and Gender

	α	Black		White	
		Men	Women	Men	Women
<i>Relational Aggression</i>					
Peer/General	.83	19.63 (11.19)	15.22 (6.45)	14.98 (6.89)	13.84 (6.46)
Romantic	.72	10.67 (5.54)	11.06 (4.68)	7.48 (3.82)	8.91 (4.75)
<i>Relational Victimization</i>					
Peer/General	.78	12.75 (6.07)	12.63 (6.18)	14.02 (5.54)	13.81 (5.98)
Romantic	.79	11.13 (5.54)	9.12 (4.31)	9.09 (5.04)	7.76 (4.60)
<i>SS-B–Friends</i>					
Emotional	.96	33.13 (11.23)	42.84 (8.78)	39.84 (7.92)	45.66 (6.52)
Socializing	.94	22.75 (8.64)	29.76 (6.39)	28.41 (5.58)	31.76 (4.70)
Practical Assistance	.93	26.50 (8.81)	33.37 (6.70)	30.36 (6.31)	33.74 (6.70)
Financial Assistance	.94	26.75 (8.27)	31.22 (7.99)	27.14 (7.00)	30.08 (7.37)
Advice/Guidance	.97	40.67 (14.24)	51.96 (10.46)	46.18 (9.46)	53.27 (9.62)
<i>UCLA Loneliness</i>	.91	48.13 (8.67)	42.67 (10.11)	42.41 (11.46)	38.74 (10.25)
<i>MBA</i>	.74	13.71 (4.60)	10.51 (4.52)	10.84 (3.90)	11.41 (4.49)
<i>CAPS-R</i>					
Personal Problems	.87	4.96 (3.95)	2.16 (3.48)	3.30 (4.33)	2.24 (3.44)
Social Problems	.77	4.96 (5.22)	2.59 (3.71)	3.25 (3.64)	4.17 (4.99)
<i>DASS</i>					
Depression	.88	9.17 (7.71)	8.82 (9.82)	6.86 (8.17)	9.05 (8.98)
Anxiety	.85	9.17 (7.60)	6.86 (8.53)	5.23 (6.31)	5.77 (7.24)
Stress	.85	13.00 (7.10)	11.35 (9.54)	9.73 (7.43)	13.16 (10.23)
<i>Trait Anger Scale</i>	.88	18.39 (5.38)	16.47 (5.77)	18.60 (5.52)	18.43 (6.32)

Note. SS-B = Social Support Behavior Scale; UCLA-3 = UCLA Loneliness Scale–Version 3; MBA = Meier Burnout Assessment; CAPS-R = College Alcohol Problem Scale–Revised; DASS = Depression Anxiety Stress Scales.

* $p < .01$.

Procedure

When potential participants signed up for the study on the departmental research website, they were provided with a brief description of the study and a URL to a secure website hosting a detailed description of the study and consent form. After reading and electronically signing the consent form, those who opted to participate were permitted to access a brief demographic questionnaire and all instruments online. The order in which questionnaires were presented to participants was counterbalanced in order to control for possible order effects.

RESULTS

Alpha coefficients and descriptive data were computed for all variables (see Table 1).

Group Differences in Relational Aggression and Relational Victimization

To examine potential gender or race differences in relational aggression and/or relational victimization, we conducted a 2×2 (Gender \times Race) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) where the four SRASBM subscales served as dependent variables. It should be noted that because the SRASBM instructs respondents who have not been in a romantic relationship for the past year to skip the romantic relational aggression and victimization items, the *df* for analyses that included these variables will reflect missing data.

Due to the small numbers of participants who reported their ethnic background as anything other than White or Black (i.e., no other group had more than 4 members), 13 participants were excluded from these analyses. The multivariate Gender \times Race interaction was not significant, $F(4, 221) = .92$, $p = .46$. There were multivariate main effects for both gender, $F(4, 219) = 8.50$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2 = .13$, and race, $F(4, 219) = 6.37$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2 = .10$.

Univariate tests revealed gender differences on General/Peer Relational Aggression, $F(1, 222) = 9.07$, $p = .00$, $d = .34$, and Romantic Relational Victimization, $F(1, 222) = 6.39$, $p = .01$, $d = .21$. Men reported engaging in more general/peer relational aggression ($M = 16.89$, $SD = 8.84$) than did women ($M = 14.23$, $SD = 6.55$). In addition, men were more likely to report being victims of romantic relational aggression ($M = 9.78$, $SD = 5.09$) than were women ($M = 8.72$, $SD = 4.80$).

Race differences were found on both General/Peer Relational Aggression, $F(1, 222) = 4.19$, $p = .04$, $d = .19$, and Romantic Relational Aggression, $F(1, 222) = 10.68$, $p = .00$, $d = .45$. Black students reported being more likely to engage in general/peer relational aggression ($M = 16.01$, $SD = 8.32$) than White students ($M = 14.58$, $SD = 6.90$). Similarly, Black students reported being more likely to use romantic relational aggression ($M = 10.70$, $SD = 5.03$) than White students ($M = 8.54$, $SD = 4.59$).

Correlates of Relational Aggression and Relational Victimization

To examine the possible correlates of relational aggression and victimization, bivariate correlations were computed between each of the four SRASBM subscales and the variables of interest for the full sample (see Table 2). Scores on both the General/Peer Relational Aggression and the Romantic Relational Aggression subscales of the SRASBM were positively correlated with both CAPS-R subscales, each of the three DASS scales, and the Trait Anger Scale. The General/Peer Relational Aggression subscale was also positively associated with the UCLA-3 and MBA. Both the General/Peer and Romantic Relational Victimization subscales were positively correlated with the UCLA-3, MBA, the three DASS scales, and the Social Problems subscale of the CAPS-R. Romantic Relational Victimization was also positively

related to the Personal Problems subscale of the CAPS-R and inversely related to both the Emotional and Socializing scales of the SS-B.

Prediction of Relational Aggression

In order to determine whether emotional problems (i.e., anxiety, depression, and trait anger) and/or problems related to the misuse of alcohol would predict relational aggression, we conducted two hierarchical multiple regressions, examining general/peer relational aggression and romantic relational aggression separately. First, we regressed emotional

problems and alcohol misuse on the General/Peer Relational Aggression subscale of the SRASBM. Respondent gender and reported racial group membership were entered on Step 1 to control for their effects. The General/Peer Relational Victimization subscale of the SRASBM was entered on Step 2, because we wanted to isolate the possible contribution of emotional problems and alcohol misuse independent of relational victimization. Lastly, scores from the following measures were entered on Step 3: the Anxiety and Depression scales of the DASS, the Trait Anger subscale of

TABLE 2.
Bivariate Correlations of Relational Aggression and Victimization
With Variables of Interest

	Relational Aggression		Relational Victimization	
	General/Peer	Romantic	General/Peer	Romantic
<i>SS-B–Friends</i>				
Emotional	-.15	-.10	-.01	-.17*
Socializing	-.14	-.11	.01	-.21*
Practical Assistance	-.11	-.05	-.06	-.14
Financial Assistance	-.05	.03	-.11	-.08
Advice/Guidance	-.13	-.07	.01	-.12
<i>UCLA-3</i>	.22*	.15	.20*	.24*
<i>MBA</i>	.23*	.15	.24*	.23*
<i>CAPS-R</i>				
Personal Problems	.24*	.24*	.09	.21*
Social Problems	.19*	.21*	.16*	.21*
<i>DASS</i>				
Depression	.25*	.19*	.27*	.19*
Anxiety	.37*	.26*	.26*	.29*
Stress	.23*	.21*	.27*	.20*
<i>Trait Anger Scale</i>	.45*	.30*	.38*	.25*

Note. SS-B = Social Support Behavior Scale; UCLA-3 = UCLA Loneliness Scale–Version 3; MBA = Meier Burnout Assessment; CAPS-R = College Alcohol Problem Scale–Revised; DASS = Depression Anxiety Stress Scales.

* $p < .01$.

TABLE 3.
Standardized Beta Coefficients and Change in R2 for the Associations Among
Anxiety, Depression, Trait Anger, Alcohol Problems,
and General/Peer Relational Aggression

	Standardized Beta					
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	Beta	ΔR^2	Beta	ΔR^2	Beta	ΔR^2
Gender ^a	-.16**	.03*	-.16**	.32**	-.11**	.10**
Race ^b	-.05		-.13*		-.12*	
RV Peer/General			.57**		.45**	
Anxiety					.18*	
Depression					-.10	
Trait Anger					.23**	
CAPS-R Social					-.01	
CAPS-R Personal					.12*	

Note. RV = relational victimization; CAPS-R = College Alcohol Problem Scale–Revised.

^a Gender coded: 0 = female, 1 = male.

^b Race coded: 0 = Black, 1 = White.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

the STAXI-2, and the Personal Problems and Social Problems subscales from the CAPSR.

The full model explained 44% of the variance in general/peer relational aggression, $R = .66$, $F(8, 266) = 25.32$, $p < .001$. Anxiety, trait anger, and personal problems related to alcohol use predicted general/peer relational aggression, independent of general/peer relational victimization (see Table 3).

Next, with one exception, we regressed the same variables in the same order on the Romantic Relational Aggression subscale of the SRASBM. The only difference in predictor variables was that the Romantic Relational Victimization subscale from the SRASBM was entered on Step 2 instead of the General/Peer Relational Aggression subscale. That is, this regression tested the ability of emotional problems and alcohol misuse to predict romantic relational aggression, independent of romantic relational victimization.

The full model explained 40% of the variance in romantic relational aggression, $R = .63$, $F(8, 227) = 17.85$, $p < .001$. Trait anger and personal problems related to the misuse of alcohol predicted romantic relational aggression, independent of romantic relational victimization (see Table 4).

DISCUSSION

In the present study, both gender and race differences were observed on some forms of relational aggression and victimization. Men reported engaging in more general/peer relational aggression and indicated that they were more likely to experience relational victimization in their intimate partnerships than did women. Additionally, Black students reported engaging in more of both types of relational aggression (i.e., general/peer and romantic) than did White

TABLE 4.
Standardized Beta Coefficients and Change in R^2 for the Associations Among Anxiety, Depression, Trait Anger, Alcohol Problems, and Romantic Relational Aggression

	Standardized Beta					
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	Beta	ΔR^2	Beta	ΔR^2	Beta	ΔR^2
Gender ^a	.08	.06**	.16**	.28**	.19**	.06**
Race ^b	-.22**		-.14*		-.17**	
RV Romantic			.54**		.47**	
Anxiety					.01	
Depression					-.02	
Trait Anger					.19**	
CAPS-R Social					.01	
CAPS-R Personal					.14*	

Note. RV = relational victimization; CAPS-R = College Alcohol Problem Scale–Revised.

^a Gender coded: 0 = female, 1 = male.

^b Race coded: 0 = Black, 1 = White.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

students. Findings also demonstrated that both relational aggression and victimization have many adverse correlates among college students. Lastly, emotional problems and alcohol misuse predicted both general/peer and romantic relational aggression, independent of their respective forms of victimization. These findings are considered in the context of the growing literature on relational aggression, and implications for university personnel are addressed.

Gender and Race in Relational Aggression

The nature and meaning of cultural differences in relational aggression are poorly understood; however, there is reason to believe that culture may play a role (Tomada & Schneider, 1997). In an effort to clarify the inconsistent findings in the literature with regard to gender and relational aggression as well as to provide

information about the potential role of race, we compared college students by gender and race on both forms of relational aggression and victimization: general/peer and romantic. Consistent with previous studies of relational aggression using older adolescent and adult samples (Bailey & Ostrov, 2008; Czar et al., 2011; Verona et al., 2008), we found little basis for the common depiction of relational aggression as a female form of aggression. The commonly reported finding that girls are more likely to engage in relationally aggressive behaviors than boys does not appear to persist into late adolescence. In fact, our data suggest that this pattern may reverse for general/peer relational aggression (i.e., college men report more of this form of relational aggression than women). Thus, there appears to be little basis for university personnel to aim efforts to prevent or treat relational aggression exclusively at women.

As one of the first studies to examine race and relational aggression among college students, our finding that Black students reported engaging in more relational aggression than White students must be considered tentatively. This is particularly important given the size of these differences (i.e., race explained 2–5% of the variance in general/peer and romantic relational aggression). One clear implication is that race should be considered in future research on relational aggression/victimization among college students. In doing so, it may be helpful to incorporate measures of racial identity and consider including potential correlates that may be particularly important for various cultural groups (e.g., spirituality or experiences with racism for Black students). Another implication, closely related to a point made by Gomes et al. (2009), involves the importance of recognizing that relational aggression/victimization does indeed occur among Black students and this population should not be neglected when university prevention or intervention programs are developed.

Correlates of Relational Aggression and Victimization Among College Students

We found clear support for many adverse correlates of relational aggression and victimization. Although the correlates were not identical for peer versus romantic relational aggression/victimization, there was considerable overlap. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Ellis et al., 2009; Storch et al., 2003; Werner & Crick, 1999), college students who committed more acts of relational aggression in their peer relationships were more likely to report problems with anxiety, depression, loneliness, and alcohol misuse. Moreover, these students also reported higher levels of stress, trait anger, and academic burnout, suggesting a wider range of maladaptive correlates than previously examined. Similarly, students who engaged more in romantic relational aggression also

reported more anxiety, depression, alcohol misuse, stress, and trait anger than their peers. Thus, peer and romantic relational aggression had most of the same correlates.

Theoretical explanations for the link between the perpetration of relational aggression and emotional problems tend to emphasize the adverse consequences of relational aggression on the relationships in which it occurs. For example, students who frequently engage in relational aggression may put such a strain on their peer or romantic relationships that these degrade, eliciting fears of abandonment and leading to the development of emotional problems. As intuitively appealing as this is, most studies to date have not sufficiently established the direction of the relationship. Thus, it is equally possible that emotionally maladjusted students may resort to relationally aggressive behaviors because they lack the adaptive skills necessary to regulate, affect, or maintain healthy relationships. And of course, it is also possible that a third variable is behind both peer relational aggression and emotional maladjustment (e.g., poor social skills, impulsiveness, etc.).

The correlates of relational victimization were also similar for peer and romantic contexts; students who reported higher levels of both forms reported greater depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, academic burnout, and alcohol-related social problems. This was consistent with previous studies linking relational victimization and social exclusion to depression, anxiety, and a variety of self-defeating behaviors (e.g., Ellis et al., 2009; Twenge et al., 2002). In addition, romantic relational victimization was positively associated with alcohol-related personal problems and inversely related to two forms of social support from peers (i.e., emotional and social). As suggested by Bagner et al. (2007), romantic relational victimization appears to be particularly toxic among college students.

Predicting Relational Aggression

As noted by Czar et al. (2011), using relational aggression as a dependent variable allows researchers to identify the dispositional and environmental factors that predict its occurrence. Regardless of their experiences with relational victimization by peers, we found that college students with higher anxiety, trait anger, and personal problems related to alcohol misuse were more likely to engage in relational aggression in their peer relationships. Similarly, students with higher trait anger and personal problems related to alcohol misuse were more likely to engage in romantic relational aggression, regardless of their experience with romantic relational victimization. Thus, it appears that some forms of emotional maladjustment are associated with the perpetration of relationally aggressive behaviors, independent of one's experience of relational victimization.

The role of trait anger in relational aggression is not well understood, but the connection appears quite promising. Among college students, a number of adverse social correlates of trait anger have been identified, including social skill deficits, reduced social support, and a tendency to misinterpret their social environments (Dahlen & Martin, 2005; Deffenbacher, 1992). It makes sense that students who scored high in trait anger would be more likely to engage in relational aggression in much the same way they are more likely to engage in overt forms of aggression. This suggests that anger is likely to be an important part of relational aggression, perhaps even serving to motivate it, and raises the possibility that anger reduction strategies may be one useful way of addressing relational aggression.

Limitations

The correlational nature of this study means that it is not possible to determine whether

relational aggression or victimization causes social and emotional problems. While our findings are certainly consistent with such an interpretation, it is also possible that maladjusted students are more vulnerable to relational aggression and victimization. Once the correlates of relationally aggressive behaviors are better understood, future studies using longitudinal and experimental designs can determine what are likely to be complex pathways involving aggression, victimization, and emotional maladjustment. Second, it is possible that respondents' reporting of relationally aggressive behaviors was incomplete or affected by response styles. Many of the more popular methods for assessing relational aggression in child and early adolescent samples (e.g., peer nomination) can be applied to subgroups of college students such as athletic teams or Greek organizations; however, these methods are not feasible in a general college population (Crothers, Schreiber, Field, & Kolbert, 2009). Still, the results of future studies would be strengthened by supplementing self-report data with informant ratings. Third, data were not collected on participants' social class or the nature and length of their romantic relationships. Having such data might have facilitated interpretation of our findings regarding romantic relational aggression and victimization and would help determine the degree to which relationally aggressive behaviors might be related to social class. Finally, it should be recognized that the present sample was predominately female: men were underrepresented, and this highlights the need for more diverse samples to more fully explore the role of cultural variables in relational aggression.

Implications

As evidence mounts that relational aggression can disrupt the social and emotional functioning of college students, it is becoming clear that

university personnel have a compelling interest in preventing relational aggression on campus and addressing its impact among students. Students who are frequently involved in relational aggression—as either the aggressor or the victim—are at an increased risk of experiencing a number of social, emotional, and behavioral problems (e.g., loneliness, depression, anxiety, stress, academic burnout, anger, and alcohol-related problems). The links to loneliness, stress, and academic burnout were particularly interesting because they suggest that student retention efforts may be informed by considering relational aggression as a possible barrier. Perhaps student retention efforts would benefit from closer connections with university counseling and health services. In addition, our findings suggest that troubled students, especially those with a heightened propensity to experience angry feelings and/

or experience problems related to alcohol use, should be considered at increased risk for engaging in relationally aggressive behaviors, regardless of whether they have been the victims of relational aggression. This appears to suggest an expanded role for campus mental health care providers in working with student affairs offices where such students may be more likely to come for disciplinary referrals. Collectively, it is hoped that such findings will help college student personnel make the case to administrators that relational aggression is worthy of attention in the form of prevention and intervention efforts.

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