Relational Aggression and the "Mean Boy": Re-gendering Concepts of Aggressive and Dangerous Behavior

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Abstract

Relational aggression has long been considered the "weapon of choice" for young women seeking to harm others through persistent manipulation or damage to relationships. However, in recent media articles in Australia, young men have been reported to use the same aggressive strategies to target young women. This article explores the themes drawn from a content analysis of 30 newspaper articles that report an Internet website established to "trade" sexual images of teenage girls. We argue that the prevalent forms and functions of girls' relational aggression, as described in the literature, are also evident in the perpetrating behavior of boys. We contend that the expression of such behavior prompts discussion of a gendered alternative to what is considered as "mean". The reported actions of young men can be recognized as aggressive and dangerous. It is damaging to dismiss "mean boys" subjectivities as merely "boys being boys".

Keywords: relational aggression, media, gender

Introduction

In August 2016, the Australian media reported a crisis that triggered a moral panic over youth pornography. An online website was discovered that profiled explicit images of thousands of schoolgirls. Reportedly, students from over 70 schools were implicated with numerous images of nude teenage girls posted online. Many of these young women had their names attached to the images so that the community of social media participants could "rate" them. At the time, the Australian authorities struggled to shut down the website because it was hosted offshore. Over the month that the story was prominent in print media, it appeared that there was little that the young women or the authorities could do to remove the images or close the website.

In this article, we undertake an analysis of media articles to illustrate representations of boys' relational aggression and in particular the constitution of a "mean boy" subjectivity. The Australian Press texts suggest that "mean boys" relational aggression may occur in different contexts and manifest as different behaviors to that of "mean girls", yet they can take effect in equally hurtful ways. We use the term "mean" (Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002) when it is used as a linguistic construction within the literature. Likewise, we use the subjectivities "mean boys" and "mean girls" when these terms are deployed to describe gendered relational aggression. We are mindful, however, that the exclusivity of these two categories is under contestation (Artz, Kassis, & Moldenhauer, 2013; Ringrose, 2006). We, therefore, use the terms "young men" and "young women" rather than "boy" and "girl" and describe behaviors to avoid where possible the perpetuation of potentially problematic subjectivities. Subjectivities highlight the constructed nature of media representations.

The content analysis in this article suggests that young men may deliberately target young women using the Internet as a mode of aggressive action. This technologically enhanced form of relational aggression highlights the need for a reorientation of definition of "mean". In past references, "mean" has been deployed to describe relationally aggressive behaviors, once considered to be simply the domain of girls (Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002). A question is raised whether the notion of "mean girls" is just another stereotype that frames young women in a deficit way, when the notion of "meanness" can apply to both genders.

The article proceeds with an outline of the definitions of relational aggression, the similarities and differences between "girls" and "boys" and a challenge to the notion that relational aggression "belongs" to girls. Secondly, the role that cyberbullying plays in mechanisms of relational aggression is discussed. Consideration is given to gender differences and the significance of relationships. Content analysis of the media articles provides an illustration of how the reported boys' behavior is consistent with the dimensions of relational aggression. Finally, we conclude that the new "meanness" is in many ways less specifically gendered than first articulated by research (Eriksen & Lyng, 2016). It appears that young men are using digital technologies as a mode for relational aggression. Unless the misconception that only "girls" engage in manipulative social games is amended, opportunities can be missed to redress wider gender biases that position young women as vulnerable.

Literature Review

Relational Aggression
In the literature, there is a range of variations of aggression. The term "indirect aggression" refers to behaviors that harm a person through exclusion or rejection, where the target may not be directly confronted (Coyne, Archer, Eslea, & Liechty, 2008). "Social aggression" refers to

the manipulation of group inclusion through character "assassination" (Holland, 2015, p.2). There are rejecting behaviors, and actions taken to damage reputations, self-regard and social position (Underwood, 2003). "Relational aggression" utilizes group exclusion as a means of manipulation. There are similarities between the various forms of aggression. These behaviors are all an attack on real or perceived social relations that avoid confrontation if possible. Both covert and overt relationship manipulation can be designed to damage someone's social position.

Relational aggression has long been regarded as more likely to occur between groups of young women than young men (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008). Perceived as feminine, the postulation that girls are more hurt by acts of relational aggression than boys has never been called into question. This is justified in that young women are considered to place more importance on their relationships, especially during the period of adolescence (James, Lawlor, Murphy, & Flynn, 2013). Young women often use social media to manage their friendships and also, conflict between friends and use Facebook as a space to engage in "the frequently precarious management of both" (Ging & Norman, 2016, p.1).

In contrast, other studies have found little difference in the prevalence of male and female relational aggression (Archer & Coyne, 2005; James et al., 2011). Further, more recent literature has been concerned with the role that young men specifically play which often goes unnoticed. Eriksen and Lyng (2016), for example, provide ample evidence of boys' acts of relational aggression. Their interviews illustrate how boys can participate in "smear campaigns" directed towards individuals, along with other exclusionary behavior "sometimes unapologetically, sometimes with remorse" (Eriksen & Lyng, 2016, p. 6).

Is "mean" gendered?

To reiterate, there is research to challenge the long held view in the literature that "mean" is the popular construction of girls' aggression (Artz, Kassis, & Moldenhauer; 2013; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004). While the term "mean boys" has generally referred to boys who bully other boys (Luzer, 2015), Orpinas, McNicholas, and Nahapetyan (2015) found that significantly more boys than girls exhibited high levels of relational aggression in the early years of their schooling (Grade 6 compared to Grade 12 boys). In other research, James et al. (2013) reported that relational aggression is regarded by boys as being a "girl thing" and that it was associated with having close friendships and "bitching". Boys' methods of exclusion were self-reported to include examples of ignoring people, talking behind someone's back, spreading rumours and gossip. One marked difference between boys' and girls' forms of relational aggression of note in their study was an absence of the subtler forms of relational aggression. These included eye rolling and gestures, which are often characterized as female relational aggression (Besag, 2006). The meaning of "gossiping" can differ by gender. In McAndrew's (2014) study, undergraduate young men regarded gossiping as a way to develop knowledge, be in charge of information, and improve friendship, whereas gossiping was less likely to be perceived as a friendship quality between women. Johnson et al. (2013) has noted that although both genders describe bullying events as "simply drama", it has been argued that boys can minimalize the perpetration of relational aggression more so than girls. Boyd (2014) writes,

> Teens regularly used that word [drama] to describe various forms of interpersonal conflict that ranged from insignificant joking around to serious jealousy-driven relational aggression. Whereas adults might have labelled many of these practices as bullying, the teens saw them as drama. (p. 137)

Technology amplifies the "drama", making it is easier to distribute information through social media and with increased opportunity for viral dissemination. Interestingly, the idea that teenagers "will grow out of it" (Boyd, 2014, p. 137) remains a pervasive theme in the literature (Marwick & Boyd, 2014; Author, 2016). Research into general community attitudes towards stalking behavior, highlights the danger of accepting this stance (McKeon, McEwan, & Luebbers, 2014). Results from this study demonstrate that stalking is more readily endorsed by males than females. This is done through minimizing, justifying and normalizing the stalking behaviors (McKeon et al., 2014). Ultimately, when such behavior is excused, there is the failure to recognize the significance of predatory behavior as dangerous.

Function of relational aggression and the "mean boy"
There are common justifications across the genders for engagement in relational aggression (James et al., 2013). Relational aggression has been used as a punishment with or between groups of young people (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Being valued by the peer group is a second common theme in the general relational aggression literature (Author, 2016). Likewise, relational aggression can serve to facilitate relationships with other group members (Werner & Crick, 2004) or be used to diffuse responsibility (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2013).

Rather than being the sole domain of "mean girls" aggressive behaviors have been similarly recounted by boys (James et al., 2013; Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2013; Nelson, 2003). Functions of relational aggression also include "getting their own way" (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006) with exclusion regarded as being a highly effective tool for controlling the group, and a quicker and more effective way of managing friendship conflict than discussing problems (James et al., 2013). Boys who engage in relationally aggressive behaviors were reported to have greater peer acceptance and popularity (Leadbeater, Boone, Sangster, & Mathieson, 2006). Likewise, peer affiliations can influence whether individuals perpetrate aggression (Orpinas et al., 2015). Jealousy can be another reason boys use to explain relational aggression. This jealousy can be triggered by catalysts such as competition in sport, seeking attention from girls, and the drive to be perceived as popular by peers (James et al., 2013). The results from these research studies may explain why high status boys, or boys seeking high status, are motivated to engage in such behavior.

The visibility of sexual aggression
Very recently, sexual harassment has been measured in a significant research study of bullying behaviors (Shute, Owens, & Slee, 2016). Specifically, Shute, Owens & Slee's study design includes bullying behaviors with scales of sexual harassment. Their results make young men's sexual victimization of young women, visible (Sills, et al., 2016). The study's authors report verbal victimization in the nature of sexual name-calling and remarks about young women's physical appearance. Incidents of abusive comments, spoken loudly and in young women's faces, were found to be common, as well as indirect victimization such as attacks on their sexual reputation (e.g. Spreading rumour about young women sleeping around too much, or conversely, not enough).

Both moral condemnation and the sanctioning of young women's reputations construct girls' sexuality as a problematic, to be surveilled and controlled (Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013), has been called out in recent years as "slut shaming" (Ringrose & Renold, 2012; Ringrose & Renold, 2014). Shute et al.'s (2016) findings provide evidence of "sex rumor mongering" (p. 279) as an integral part of young men's aggression towards young women. Although rumour mongering is often seen as "typical female" behavior, it has been found that adolescent boys participate in rumour spreading to strengthen their status in the peer group

(Juvonen et al., 2013). Likewise, Page, Shute, and McLachlan (2015) explain the notion of sexual bullying as demonstrations of power by young men over young women.

Cyberbullying as a subset of relational aggression
Digital technologies can be used to support hostile behaviors by individuals or groups (Tokunaga, 2010). Teenage boys engage in relational aggression on the Internet in particular ways and for particular reasons. Cyberbullying, as an act of relational aggression, is a process of engaging in behaviors that are harmful and/or harassing via any means of information technology such as social media. Cyberbullying, also known as "electronic bullying or online social cruelty" (Eden, Heiman, & Olenik-Shemesh, 2013, p. 1036), involves "wilful and repeated harm" (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006, p. 5). It is inflicted through technology mediums that includes as web pages, text messaging, online forums, and instant messaging.

Social media support new manifestations of aggressor-victim dyads. Different dimensions of covert aggression are carried out to inflict hurt and "the internet is a perfect conduit to achieve these ends" (Cassidy, Brown, & Jackson, 2013, p. 67). Examples of cyberbullying include actions that attempt to intimidate and control others, or manipulate the recipient of the bullying by humiliating them. To reiterate, the behaviors are intentional, repeated, and antagonistic (Betts, 2016). Additionally, cyberbullying is characterized by its anonymity and solicitation of the involvement of other people online who do not know and are unknown to the person being targeted. This phenomenon, in which others participate in events that promote relational aggression, is known as a *digital pile-on* (Selvi, Sathyavati, & Ramya, 2016).

The characteristics inherent in online technologies (e.g. Perceived anonymity, pace of exchange and anytime, anywhere transcendence) increase the likelihood that individuals can be exploited for purposes more harmful than "traditional" forms of relational aggression. Links have also been made between cyberbullying and stalking in that both forms of abuse can present in online and physical manifestations of the behavior (Starcevic & Aboujaoude, 2015). The majority of cyber targets is female (Li, 2007).

Although there is much written about cyberbullying (Bartlett & Coyne, 2014), it is not a new problem. In a 1994 survey of females who participated in an online community, one-fifth of the women reported online sexual harassment (Brail, 1994). At this time, the types of harassment took on a variety of forms and a new language of sexual harassment emerged, including, "flaming" (overt assaults on an individual), "visual pornography" (Soukup, 1999), "electronic stalking", and "virtual rape" (Herring, 1995). Given that the problem has been around for some time, it seems incongruous that, to date, calls for a dedicated anti-cyberbullying law (Campbell & Zayrsnik, 2013; Young et al., 2016) has gone unanswered. However, it is possible that in these circumstances there would already be laws, non-specific to cyberbullying that could be used. For example, in Australian legislation, there are laws in the area of misuse of telecommunication, criminal defamation, and infringements relating to confidentiality breaches (Young et al., 2016).

Research Questions

If steps are to be taken to ameliorate the harm that is being inflicted on young women using the Internet, there is a need for educators as well as policy makers to recognize the seriousness of online relational aggression by boys towards girls. We must consider the ever-changing nature of adolescent lives and the technological mechanisms that they have embraced and accordingly, make the necessary adjustments to the current understanding of relational

aggression. In doing so, we can then argue for a suitable response to the issue of relational attacks on young women, and ensure it is apportioned the significance it deserves. Girls have traditionally been the focus of studies in relational aggression and this has resulted in political agendas that place this form of aggression within a "girls' world". This knowledge production has contributed to an invisibility of relational aggression amongst boys.

The new "meanness" framed in the research reported in this article leverages content analysis of 28 articles from Australian newspapers in August 2016. These articles reported the revelation of an online website that profiled explicit images of thousands of schoolgirls. The research explored the following questions:

(1) In what ways are relational aggression evidenced/represented in specific settings?
(2) How are the dimensions of relational aggression evident in the representations of the boys described in the Australian Press reports?
(3) In what ways do these representations of relational aggression differ from traditional relational aggression seen in girls?

Method

A qualitative content analysis was conducted using the 28 newspaper articles that were published online in Australia between August 16 to August 20, 2016. The articles were sourced using an Internet search aiming to extract data or "web scrape" with a focus on the unfolding controversy. The samples were sourced utilizing the Google search engine and entering the key search word/s "school scandal, web site". From this search, every article pertaining to the website on the dates mentioned above was analyzed. The complete list of articles is provided in Appendix 1.

These newspaper articles were written to address the primary reference of an offshore website that had been established to post sexually explicit images of teenage young women. The newspaper articles also made references to the messages recorded on the website that d" swapping pictures" that referenced the girls as a sexual economic commodity.

The data analysis was guided by a systematic inductive approach (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The data were imported into QSR International's NVivo 10, an electronic qualitative data analysis package. All newspaper reports were read and interpreted. A coding frame was developed and content coded for analysis. The coding frame was developed by the lead investigator from concepts found in literature pertaining to relational aggression (Crick, 1996; Cuadrado-Gordillo & Fernández-Antelo, 2014; Underwood, Scott, Galperin, Bjornstad, & Sexton, 2004). Newspaper articles were independently reviewed for data by three investigators. The content of the newspaper articles comprised statements made by the reporter, quotes from the website itself, and statements reported by police, parents, women and girls as part of the interview.

Results

Dimensions of relational aggression
The themes emerging from the content analysis of the media articles indicated eight dimensions of relational aggression including: 1. Normalizing of aggressive behavior (NAB); 2. Cyberbullying, cyberstalking and harassment (CCH); 3. Soliciting involvement from others (SFO); 4. In-group and out-group statements soliciting belonging (IOG); 5. Covert actions

(CA); 6. Postings seeking to harm the social standing of a girl (HSS); 7. Making jokes to both minimize the hurtfulness of aggression and to avoid blame (JAB); and, 8. The exercising of control and power (CAP). Table 1 summarizes the results according to each article reviewed online by the themes as coded above.

Table 1
Summary of Relational Aggression Themes from Reviewed Online Articles

Author	Date	Relational aggression theme							
		NAB	CCH	SFO	IOG	CA	HSS	JAB	CAP
Barry	August 17	■							
Branco	August 17		■			■			
Calcino	August 17					■	■		
Carmody	August 17		■				■		
Craw	August 20	■			■		■		
Davey	August 17		■	■					
Davey	August 19		■						
Ford	August 18	■	■	■	■		■	■	
Funnell	August 17	■	■			■	■	■	
Funnell	August 20	■					■	■	
Kims	August 17	■	■						
Hardy	August 17				■		■		
Harper	August 17					■	■		
Higgins	August 20	■	■		■				
Hunt	September 1		■				■		
Langenberg	August 31		■						
Layt	August 18	■							
Margan	August 20			■					■
MacDonald	August 19				■		■		■
McLeay	August 16						■		
McMahon	August 18		■			■			■
Moody	August 20	■	■			■			
Rizvi	August 17		■					■	
Schliebs	August 18					■			
Sigston & Paull	August 17		■			■			
Stephens	August 17						■		■
Tran	August 18				■				
Zautsen	August 17		■						

The young men's behavior described in the Australian Press reports were represented in ways that can be seen as relationally aggressive. Reported were normalizing behaviors among the group who were gathering and disseminating the explicit images. There were assertions of dismissiveness that were designed to make the aggression "typical" of acting "like one of the boys". This normalization is critiqued by Barry (August 19) who stated, there is "an assumption this type of behavior is inevitable and unstoppable, with the discussion focusing around how young women can keep themselves safe, i.e. girls are responsible for what happens to them. Sure, it's terrible, but boys will be boys" (para. 6). Funnell, (August 17) reports that "this group doesn't just normalize the idea that consent is irrelevant and doesn't matter, it actively encourages boys to ignore and violate consent" (para. 32). Likewise, Ford (August 18) points out that "[i]t shouldn't be seen as normal behavior for young boys to be participating in the criminal violation of anyone, let alone the young girls and women who make up their

communities. To defend this as "typical" is to argue that sexual violence is inherent in men's behaviour" (para. 17).

A second relational aggression constructs is predatory cyberbullying, cyberstalking and harassment. The articles reported that social media was used to upload sexualized images of young girls who are "hunted". In some cases, the boys encouraged each other to bombard the targets with the harassment that involved using "technology to track, harass, blackmail and abuse their victims in a way we have not previously seen" (Davey, August 19, para. 23). These actions occurred within a group of on-site users who network with others on the website.

> Young men use the site to nominate the specific high school or region they are phishing for nude photos from, along with the full names of the girls they are "hunting". Hundreds of individual names have appeared on "wanted" lists, including the names of sisters and entire high school friendship circles. (Funnell, August 17, para. 3)

There was ongoing retaliation reported with the young men encouraging others to join in the abuse when the young women requested for the images to be revoked. Davey (August 17) highlights report how "victims had posted to the website pleading for images of themselves to be removed [but] their requests are mostly ignored, laughed at, or in some cases, men retaliate by calling on their 'bros' to unearth and upload even more images of the victim" (para. 7).

In-group, out-group belonging was a further theme reported by the press in terms of behaviors that were akin to "a pack of hyenas hunting their prey" (Funnell, August 17, para. 22). These groups were described in the reports of teenage boys and young men colluding with each other to violently degrade women. The rhetoric can be seen as a move to cultivate belonging to an "in-group". The normative violence can serve to elevate the participants' status in "the decidedly toxic masculine space in which they operate . . . within the homosexual code of brotherhood" (Ford, August 18, para. 7).

Covert actions, a feature of relational aggression, are evidenced in instances where the young woman is unaware of the violence that is being perpetrated against her. The fact that the images were captured and disseminated "behind her back" and without her consent was an important theme in the media articles. Boys employed codes to make it more difficult for girls to detect their names on the website (Calcino, August 17). Much of the content posted is done "in secret" and it is almost impossible to detect the aggressor (Hardy, August 17).

The reportedly anonymous postings suggest an intent to control and exercise power. Underpinning this issue is the lack of consent to upload images of the young women. One report highlights the commodification of young women within a masculine set of market power relations,

> The thrill is not just that they might see the girl who sits next to them in maths class, it's also that they can put in an order for the girl from maths class. What these boys are really getting off on is the sense of power they feel over these girls, and the idea that they can own and obtain them like objects. (Harper, August 17, para. 7)

Additionally, there is a coercive gendered element to the practice of sharing the visual media among young people. The articles highlighted the pressure on young women to send explicit images. Studies show "up to a third of young people have been asked to send naked images of themselves and more than half of teenage girls who did so said they felt pressure from a boy" (MacDonald, August 19, para. 15).

A further theme characteristic of relational aggression, which became apparent in the articles, was that of deploying humour to minimize the appearance of aggression and avoid blame. This strategy serves to elicit diminished responsibility and accountability for actions associated with relational aggression. One comment in an article by Ford, (August 18) describes this positioning.

> When punished for this behavior, these boys and men (and their supporters, of which there are sadly many) claim their actions were taken in good humour and not abuse. How dare they be accused of violence – these things are jokes. And besides, if those girls didn't want their photographs paraded around for men to laugh at and use to vilify them, they shouldn't have taken them in the first place. Because boys must never, ever be forced to account for their actions. Especially not if a girl is there to take responsibility instead. (para. 13)

The media articles in the public sphere attract a similar response from readers who may not recognize the power relations nor find the abusive material problematic. As an illustration, Funnell (August 17, para. 20) reports that "one website user…comments that he finds the matter—including the exploitation of primary school girls—hilariously entertaining".

Finally, a further dimension of relational aggression in the texts highlight harm to young women's social standing. This was evident in the reports of uploaded sexual images and/or postings that comprised sexual put-downs, such as dismissing girls as "sluts and bitches" (Ford, August 18, para. 5). Photographs that were designed to shame were often accompanied by degrading descriptions of the girls (Ford, August 18).

Gender differences in relational aggression
The second research question investigated the ways that reports of boys' relationally aggressive acts differed from that of girls' as outlined in the literature to date. The distinctions were evident in the media reports, which referred to statements that were clearly the dimensions of relationally aggressive behaviors, but were exhibited in different ways to that of girls. Examples included the theme of boys who went about collecting "friends" to perpetrate sexual harassment online based solely on gender. Ford (August 18, para. 5), for example, reported, "the context of a group made up of literally thousands of their male peers". MacDonald reiterated the notion of the gendered, dualistic nature of the aggression, "because the fact is that the rating of girls, the trawling and lewd conversations about them, the "slut shaming" that accompany the sharing of the sites means the gap is not generational, but gender based" (August 19, para. 14).

The finding that relational aggression in the "mean boy" can be a gendered act highlights another form of sexual bullying and illuminates a further example of boys' relational aggression. This form of gendered aggression pertains to the manner in which "mean boys" appropriate the Internet and a range of social media applications to cyberbully and stalk young women and girls using repeated and hostile sexualized attacks (Davey, August 19). This

appropriation exists because "what is new is young men now have the technology to share their upskirt snaps with the world" (Barry, August 19, para. 4).

Discussion

This content analysis set out to identify the dimensions of relational aggression evident in the representations of young men described in the Australian Press reports. The newspaper articles were written in response to an offshore website that had been established to post sexually explicit pictures of young women. This article also sought to identify the means by which the young men's behavior was different from female forms of relational aggression described in the current literature as, the "mean girl".

Overall, there emerged evidence to support eight dimensions relevant to relationally aggressive behaviors. These aspects were statements related to normalizing of the behavior, predatory cyberstalking and harassment behaviors that included getting others to join in a *digital pile-on* (Selvi, Sathyavati, & Ramya, 2016), in and out group statements, covert actions, postings seeking to harm a girls' social standing, making jokes to minimize the aggression and avoid blame, and control and power.

Of note, some of the dimensions are intertextual in that they occur in relationship with another. This intertextuality is evident in our results where reports have indicated for example, that power and control is operationalized using covert means where methods of anonymity are deployed and invisibility enables girls' harassment. Further, power and control can manifest through laughter and the use of humour or predatory cyberbullying, cyberstalking and harassment. What may be read as "boyish hijinks" devoid of any political effect can also serve to further undermine the target. Referring to Ahmed's (2004) work, Gannon et al. (2015) observe that "[e]motions circulate unevenly so that particular emotions 'stick' to certain bodies, marking them as inferior, dangerous, pathological, or anachronistic" (p. 202). To take abusive humour seriously may be to evoke the "feminist killjoy" (Ahmed, 2010) and this stance can evoke derision from those seeking to sustain uneven power relations.

While there is an interconnection between all of the dimensions, cyberbullying and harassment binds all these aggressive acts together. Ringrose and colleagues (2012) highlight how technology can play a role in aggression through its capacity to support coercion and gendered power relations.

> "Visual scrutiny, and bodily objectification was ubiquitous and was a slippery slope between consensual forms of playing that could easily veer into on-going technologically mediated harassment, such as being repeatedly asked for photos. Even when girls refused to participate in the sending of photos (as most girls in the study claimed), this did not mean they were safe from the implications of this practice and routine forms of sexism." (Ringrose et al., 2012, p. 36)

The findings in the study concur with previous literature regarding boys' relational aggression. Like Eriksen and Lyng (2016), the research suggests that "mean boys" can conduct relationally aggressive smear campaigns and other exclusionary behaviors. It appears from the media reports canvassed in this study, young men may not only minimize and excuse aggressive behaviors towards young women, but also that social media can amplify these power imbalances. This finding has potentially dangerous implications for young women, as the failure to identify the seriousness of such predatory behavior could impact on future

victimization (McKeon et al., 2014). Further research could be conducted to look at the influence of social media on young people – the role of young men, the positioning of young women, and the influence on policy makers and law enforcement.

The results also showed differences between the reported relationally aggressive behavior of "mean boys", and "mean girls". The behaviors that were specific to the "mean boys", reported in this study, indicate that "friends" can be networked with, and accumulated in order to harass females in online spaces. Thus a sense of belonging is constituted around the central purpose of harassment. Mayeux (2014) concurs with these findings, reporting that typically measured popularity such as "in-group" and "out-group" status is not usually based on gender binaries.

A further difference between "mean boys" and "mean girls" engagement in relational aggression pertains to "mean boys" participation in repeated and hostile sexualized attacks. Gendered aggression appears to have been maximized through boys' appropriation of the Internet where they cyberbully and stalk young women and girls. The young men reported in the media texts were highly aggressive in the online context. This disputes Orpinas et al. (2015) findings that relational aggression can diminish in prevalence in later years; it is not simply the domain of young boys. The results in the current study may be explained from qualitative studies that shed light on the similarities and differences between young men' and young women's perceptions of relational aggression (McAndrew, 2014; Wyatt, 2010). It is a well-documented tenet, that adolescents value peer relationships and both genders identify similar motives of power, popularity, and a desire to fit in with peer groups for RA (Pronk & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2010). It has however also been documented that young men can consider being excluded from groups, due to not demonstrating stereotypical masculine behavior can be an important element in RA (Orpinas et al., 2015). Thus young men may be motivated to engage in online predatory behavior if it is perceived as an in-group masculine norm/ expectation?

The importance of including sexual aggression perpetrated by young men in the constructs of relational aggression is that this domain has not typically been central to discussions regarding aggressive acts. A changing focus in the field of cyberbullying is impacting on current research, in particular, the inclusion of scales that measure sexual harassment and make boys' victimization of girls visible (Shute et al., 2016). The anonymous nature associated with technology facilitates cyberbullying behaviors, and makes it more difficult to prevent. The question of how to prevent online relational aggression or develop appropriate interventions remains to be answered (Li, 2007).

Limitations and Further Research

There are limitations associated with the content analysis, research design. The findings and conclusions drawn in this article are based on textual analysis. Media texts are themselves social constructs, positing arguments for a specific demographic who purchase the media. As texts they do not convey the real world, but rather frame a specific construction of it. Moreover, the texts report events in Australian culture and therefore have limited application to other countries where gender relations may be different, and young people may have limited access to digital technologies. The value of the study is in its explication of dimensions of relational aggression and the consideration of the "mean boy" subjectivity. As with any gender categories, these are co-constituted within particular socio-material frameworks.

Further research could be conducted into the relational aggression of the "mean boy" construction. There is scope for fieldwork with young people to map the terrain and determine

both how these coercive networks function and how the various dimensions of the aggression can be resisted. We suggest the following questions:

- What factors support "mean boy" subjectivities?
- How can young women resist the victimization associating with being positioned as a recipient of "mean boy" aggression?
- To what extent and in what ways are young men targets of "mean boy" aggression?

Ford (August 18) states that "we are approaching a crisis point with the way masculinity is being constructed and excused, particularly the burgeoning kind that is formed in school playgrounds and the hallways of cyberspace" (para. 12). In this new space, the covert and anonymous exclusionary in-group tactics of "mean boys" lends itself to a new understanding of the term "mean". Discourse constructs social values and legitimates practices. We note that the term "victim" positions women and girls as helpless and it is important that there is critique when this term is used in the media.

Conclusion

The current paper attempts to broaden the empirical and analytical scope to include boys' relational aggression that may also provide a basis for developing and further enhancing our understanding of relational aggression among girls. It is noted that the gender blindness that marred earlier research in this area has turned into essentializing the differences of gender (Ringrose & Renold, 2012). The impact of viewing the world through the lens of gender-essentializing theories of aggression influences not only research and policies, but legal guidelines. This is no more evident than in the dismissive, normalizing, excusing positioning of responses to the current Internet "scandal". Including young men as well as young women in future research on relational aggression provides opportunities for exploring gender similarities as well as differences in methods, machineries, dynamics and sources (Eriksen & Lyng, 2016).

Further, it is pertinent to consider the usefulness of deploying the term "mean" for either gender. The previous labelling of girls "mean behaviour" and then broadening this, may limit the potential to focus on the complexities of the issues and associated behaviors of all involved. Such a connotation has a perpetrator and victim subjectivity binary. Critiques of binary subjectivities in both research and media may support more complex readings of relational aggression. With further research, we may facilitate the amelioration relational aggression among both young men and young women.

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