

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between need to belong (NTB), defined as the need to feel loved and accepted by other people, and relational aggression in females. When a person's NTB is not met, negative outcomes such as aggression, stress, anxiety, and depression may occur (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In fact, studies have found that children and adolescents who are rejected by peers, lack a sense of belonging, or exhibit insecure attachments are at increased risk for aggression and behavior problems (Gaertner & Iuzzini, 2005; Pepler et al., 2004). These studies suggest that when a person's NTB is thwarted, they are more likely to engage in aggression. To date, most research examining the association between NTB and aggression has focused on forms of aggression typical of males (e.g., physical aggression), to the exclusion of forms that are relatively characteristic of females (e.g., relational aggression). As females tend to engage in more relational forms of aggression (e.g. gossip, social exclusion) rather than physical aggression (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008), this study will examine the association between NTB and relational aggression in a sample of females. In addition, it is possible that NTB only increases the risk for aggressive behavior when this need is thwarted. Thus, this study will investigate whether NTB is more strongly associated with relational aggression among girls who are rejected by others.

Participants included 183 girls (age = 9-16 years) attending a residential summer camp. The results indicated that both rejection and NTB were positively associated with relational aggression. In addition, there was a significant 3-way interaction between NTB, age, and

rejection. Follow-up simple slope analyses indicated that, among older girls who were high in rejection, NTB was positively associated with relational aggression.