Bullying Amongst Girls

Presented by
Shirley C. Malove, Ph.D., LCSW

Through the years, aggression has been viewed as a predominantly male characteristic, unbecoming, unacceptable and inapplicable to women. As a result, female aggression was seen in terms of covert behaviors that were not recognized as aggression, but rather described as “catty” or “cliquish” and often dismissed as “girls just being girls.” Over the past two decades, interest in female aggression has increased dramatically, resulting in such behaviors being defined as social aggression and recognized as an insidious form of bullying, where victim, victimizer and by-stander are all understood to play a role in the bullying.

In this presentation, Dr. Malove will address the problem of bullying amongst girls, the difficulties that arise for the therapists who treat them and specific treatment recommendations.

Dr. Malove will further address therapists’ difficulty in treating these patients – either victim or victimizer - because of the intense countertransference feelings of anger, frustration and helplessness, as well as feeling silenced, manipulated, controlled, and rejected. Countertransference reactions are heightened for clinicians who themselves had a personal history of bullying. Factors identified as contributing to bullying included parenting styles, such as a conflictual mother-daughter relationship and traditional gender roles in which women were expected to be passive and non-aggressive.

Treatment recommendations include the establishment of safety, boundaries and empathic attunement, as well as processing with patients the interpersonal dynamics of bullying as they are reenacted in the treatment situation. Systemic interventions with families and schools are also addressed.

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Shirley Malove, Ph.D., LCSW earned her Master’s in Social Work from Barry University and her doctorate from Smith College. She is an adjunct professor for Smith College School for Social Work and a faculty instructor for the Psychodynamic Psychotherapy Courses at Florida Psychoanalytic Center. She has studied female social aggression extensively and published, “Using Relational Theory to Treat Adolescent Girls Victimized by Social Aggression.”

Dr. Malove has served on the Board of Directors for Florida Psychoanalytic Center and SEFAPP. From 2005-2011 her mental health column, “What’s On Your Mind?” was featured in The Miami Herald. Dr. Malove is currently a candidate completing Psychoanalytic Training at the Florida Psychoanalytic Center. She has a private practice in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. Describe how the concept of aggression in females has changed over the past two decades.
2. Discuss the way in which bullying is affected by victim, victimizer and by-stander.
3. Discuss the difficulty therapists have in treating patients who are either bullying or bullied.

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SEFAPP Administrative Office
765 SE Mt. Hood Hwy., #241
Gresham, OR 97080