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Self-Blame and Peer Victimization in Middle School: An Attributional Analysis

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Relations between characterological versus behavioral self-blaming attributions for victimization and maladjustment were examined in middle school students. Respondents completed a questionnaire that assessed self-perceptions of victim status, attributions for hypothetical incidents of victimization, and feelings of loneliness, social anxiety, and low self-worth. They also completed peer nomination procedures measuring perceptions of victimization in others, as well as peer acceptance and rejection. Self-perceived victimization was associated with characterological self-blame, loneliness, anxiety, and low self-worth. Peer-perceived victimization, in contrast, was related to acceptance and rejection. The data suggest that self-views are more predictive of the intrapersonal consequences of victimization (loneliness, anxiety, low self-worth), whereas peer views are more predictive of interpersonal consequences (peer acceptance and rejection).

In her acclaimed autobiographical novel about growing up in the rural South, *Bastard Out of Carolina,* Dorothy Allison (1992) recounted the following incident from the brief and tormented life of her childhood friend Shannon Pearl:

> Shannon got on the [school] bus two stops after Reese and me, walking stolidly past a dozen hooting boys and another dozen flushed and whispering girls. As she made her way up the aisle, I watched each boy slide to the end of his seat to block her sitting with him and every girl flinch away as if whatever Shannon had might be catching. In the seat ahead of us Danny Yarboro leaned far over into the aisle and began to make retching noises. "Cootie train! Cootie train" somebody yelled as the bus lurched into motion and Shannon still hadn't found a seat. (pp. 153–154)

Shannon's encounter with the cruelty of her schoolmates provides a graphic literary exemplar of a growing psychological literature that focuses on children who are victimized by their peers. By victimization, we mean the kind of bullying, terrorizing, and intimidation of targeted children that takes place in and around school. Such harassment may be either direct, entailing face-to-face physical or verbal confrontation; or indirect, usually involving a third party and some form of social ostracism (e.g., Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Crick & Grotpeter, 1996). Longitudinal and cross-sectional data from European studies indicate that about 10% of school children are chronically victimized according to the above definition (Olweus, 1994). Comparable prevalence rates have also been reported in American research (e.g., Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988).

Studies on the correlates of victim status indicate that victims tend to have low self-esteem and feel more lonely, anxious, unhappy, and insecure than their nonvictimized counterparts (see reviews in Hodges & Perry, 1996; Olweus, 1978, 1994). Furthermore, many victims tend to display passivity and submissiveness when confronted with others' aggression, being unwilling or unable to defend themselves (Schwartz, Dodge, & Coie, 1993). Victimization has also been related to academic adjustment problems, such as avoidance and dislike of school, and these linkages have been documented as early as kindergarten (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Dorothy Allison's fictionalized heroine, Shannon Pearl, suffered a troubled adolescence, followed by a tragic and early death, presumably at her own hand. This is consistent with longitudinal studies of Swedish and Norwegian children documenting that chronic victimization at 6th or 9th grade predicted depression, negative self-views, and suicide attempts in young adulthood (Olweus, 1993).

Compounding their own self-perceived adjustment problems is the prevalent finding that victimized children are quite rejected by the general peer group, especially in early adolescence (Juvonen & Murdock, 1997; see also Graham & Juvonen, 1998). Moreover, studies on peer attitudes reveal that preadolescents express little concern that victimization might cause pain and suffering for the recipients of such behavior (Perry, Willard, & Perry, 1990) and that they are reluctant to come to the aid of a victim (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996). In general, early adolescents appear to be unsympathetic toward victims and to endorse the belief that these

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children bring their problems on themselves (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992; Rigby & Slee, 1991).

Although the studies reviewed above have documented the correlates and consequences of peer victimization, the processes relating perceptions of victim status and maladjustment have yet to be fully explored. Why, for example, do victimized youngsters tend to withdraw and feel lonely, unhappy, anxious, and depressed? That is, what mediating mechanisms might account for the known relationships between victimization and poor adjustment outcomes?

One such mechanism might relate to how victims construe the reasons for their plight. For example, a history of peer abuse and the perception of being singled out for such harassment may lead a child to ask, "Why me?" In the absence of disconfirming evidence, some victims might come to blame themselves for their peer relationship problems. Such a child may conclude, for example, that "I'm the kind of person who deserves to be picked on." Self-blame and accompanying negative affect can then lead to maladaptive outcomes such as passivity and withdrawal (e.g., Nolen-Hoksema, Girgus, & Seligman, 1986).

In this article, we elaborate on the role of causal beliefs about negative social outcomes as we propose an attributional analysis of peer victimization. It is argued that particular kinds of self-blaming attributions characterize how victims interpret their encounters with peer harassment and that these self-ascriptions have distinct motivational consequences. Because attributions have received little attention in the peer victimization literature, we turn first to a brief overview of principles from the theory that are most pertinent to the proposed analysis.

Attribution Theory

Attribution theory is concerned with the perceived reasons why a particular (negative) event has occurred (see reviews in Weiner, 1986, 1995). For example, a student who does poorly in school possibly will ask himself: "Why did I fail the exam?", just as a victimized child like Shannon Pearl might ask herself: "Why was I ridiculed in front of everybody?"

The perceived causes of negative events (e.g., victimization) share certain conceptually meaningful properties, labeled causal dimensions. These are locus, or whether a cause is internal or external to the person; stability, which designates a cause as constant or varying over time; and controllability, whether a cause is subject to volitional influence. For example, low aptitude as a cause for achievement failure or a physical handicap as a cause for victimization typically are perceived as internal to the individual, stable over time, and beyond his or her control. This is in contrast to lack of effort as a cause for failure, which is also internal but more often perceived as unstable and under one's personal control.

Each causal dimension is linked to particular psychological consequences. Here we focus on the consequences of causal stability and controllability. Causal stability influences subjective expectancy about future outcomes. A child who attributes his or her harassment to a physical disability (stable over time) is more likely to anticipate getting harassed again than one who believes that he or she was merely a random (unstable) target of peer ridicule. The controllability dimension is related to a number of social emotions that have motivational significance. For example, when failures are attributed to uncontrollable causes such as low aptitude or physical handicaps, individuals feel greater shame and are prone to withdraw or give up. In contrast, negative events ascribed to controllable factors such as low effort elicit feelings akin to guilt and the motivation to redress past wrongs (see Weiner, 1986, 1995).

Behavioral Versus Characterological Self-Blame

Although most research on the consequences of particular attributions has been conducted in the achievement domain, self-ascriptions to stable versus unstable or controllable versus uncontrollable causes should have similar motivational consequences in other domains as well. Thus, for example, if victimization is attributed to a stable, uncontrollable cause (e.g., "It's something about the way I am") rather than to an unstable and controllable cause ("It's something about what I did in this situation"), then we would predict particularly maladaptive motivational consequences because the victimization episode would be expected to happen again and the person would believe that he or she lacked control over the outcome.

Relevant to this analysis in adult research, Janoff-Bulman (1979) made a distinction between behavioral and characterological self-blame as explanations for rape (another obvious form of victimization). Janoff-Bulman described the two types of self-blame as follows:

> Behavioral self-blame is control related, involves attributions to a modifiable source (one's behavior), and is associated with a belief in the future avoidability of a negative outcome. Characterological self-blame is esteem related, involves attributions to a relatively nonmodifiable source (one's character), and is associated with a belief in personal deservingness for past negative outcomes. (p. 1798)

In a causal dimension framework, behavioral self-blame is internal, unstable, and controllable (akin to lack of effort for achievement failure), whereas characterological self-blame is internal, stable, and uncontrollable (akin to low aptitude). We have already suggested how these two self-ascriptions have different psychological consequences. Thus, two motivational sequences hypothesized by attribution theorists pertinent to victimization are:

Negative outcome (victimization) →	Characterological self-blame (perceived as uncontrollable by self and stable) →	Maladaptive responses (e.g., social anxiety, loneliness, passivity)
Negative outcome (victimization) →	Behavioral self-blame (perceived as controllable by self and unstable) →	Less maladaptive responses (e.g., less anxiety, loneliness, passivity)

Consistent with this analysis, a number of researchers have documented that individuals who make characterological attributions for negative outcomes cope more poorly, feel worse about themselves, and are more depressed than individuals who make behavioral self-attributions (see reviews in Anderson, Miller, Riger, Dill, & Sedikides, 1994; Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

The characterological versus behavioral self-blame distinction in children has only recently begun to be investigated. Cole, Peeke, and Ingold (1996) measured third, sixth, and ninth

graders' characterological and behavioral attributions for a series of hypothetical negative outcomes in both the academic (e.g., getting bad grades on a test) and social domains (e.g., being left out or rejected by other kids). Also assessed was each respondent's level of depression. For older children, Cole et al. reported findings consistent with the adult literature. Among ninth graders, there were positive correlations between depression and characterological self-blame in situations of both academic and social failure. Behavioral self-blame, in contrast, was unrelated to depression in any age group. Such findings also are compatible with the learned helplessness literature documenting that children with pessimistic explanatory styles (i.e., failures attributed to internal, stable, and global factors) show elevated levels of depression (Nolen-Hoksema et al., 1986, 1992).

The relatively small literature on children's more general attributions about social failure is also compatible with the hypothesis that characterological self-ascriptions for failure might have particularly negative consequences. For example, there is evidence that rejected children tend to attribute their social failures to internal and stable factors (Toner & Munro, 1996) and that such attributional patterns are related to increased loneliness in middle childhood (Renshaw & Brown, 1993). Because victimized children also tend to be rejected by their peers, it seems likely that they too would endorse such maladaptive attributional patterns. In sum, on the basis of predictions from attribution theory as well as extant research on children's causal interpretations of negative social encounters, we anticipated that victimized youngsters are likely to blame themselves for their abusive experiences and that stable and uncontrollable causes (i.e., characterological self-blame) will be related to more serious maladjustment.

Identifying Victimized Children: Self-Perceptions or Reputational Status?

Our analysis of the attributional beliefs of victimized children is based on the premise that victim status can be accurately assessed. However, there is little consistency in the peer relations literature on how victimized children are identified (see Schuster, 1996). Some studies have relied on peer nomination procedures where children name classmates who fit behavioral descriptions of victimization (e.g., Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995; Parkhurst & Asher, 1992; Perry et al., 1988), whereas other studies have used self-reports of victimization frequency (e.g., Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Olweus, 1994). This may be problematic in that nomination totals and self-reported frequency rates are difficult to equate for purposes of identifying extreme groups. The two procedures also appear to yield different prevalence rates, with the self-report instruments resulting in higher estimates of victimization than peer reports (see Graham & Juvonen, 1998). In one study that actually compared self- and peer-estimates in the same sample, children's self-nominations of victim status were significantly higher than their peer nominations (Österman et al., 1994). Documenting similar discrepancies, Perry et al. (1988) identified a small group of children who perceived themselves as victims but were not classified as such according to peer- and teacher nomination procedures. Perry et al. labeled these children as "paranoids." However, because that study focused on victims and nonvictims identified with reputation measures, the data on paranoids were not included in the analyses.

We believe that both reputation and subjective self-appraisal are important facets of victim status. Hence, studies that use only one method may be under- or overidentifying children who are truly victimized. Such procedures may also overlook important differences between groups of victimized youngsters for whom self- and peer views are discrepant. For example, one might expect more characterological self-blame and feelings of loneliness for children who are high in self-perceived victimization but who have not acquired this reputation among their peers (the paranoids in Perry et al., 1988), than for children who are judged by their peers to be victims but do not perceive themselves as such. That is, subjective appraisals of victim status might be more closely tied to the intrapsychological consequences of victimization than reputational status. However, youngsters who have reputations as victims but who deny this status in self-reports, might be more rejected by their peers than children who resemble paranoids. That is, reputational status might be more closely associated with the interpersonal consequences of victimization than subjective self-appraisals. If these speculations are correct, they might have important implications both for how victims are identified and for understanding whether specific adjustment difficulties might be more (or less) prevalent in particular groups of victimized children.

The Present Research

Guided by attributional analyses and the issues surrounding identification of victim status groups, the present study had two goals, both of which examined questions not previously addressed in the peer victimization literature. The primary goal was to investigate victims' subjective appraisals of the causes of peer harassment, focusing particularly on characterological versus behavioral self-blaming tendencies. Also of interest was how these attributions were related to the types of maladjustment known to be linked to victimization—in this case, loneliness, social anxiety, and low self-worth. It was hypothesized that victims would endorse more characterological self-blaming attributions than would nonvictims, and that characterological self-blame would be related to more loneliness, social anxiety, and negative self-views. Victims were also hypothesized to be less accepted and more rejected by their peers than nonvictims.

The above hypotheses apply to respondents who might be labeled "true" victims—that is, children for whom there is agreement between self- and peer perceptions of victim status. A second and more exploratory goal of this study was to investigate attributions and their correlates in respondents for whom self- and peer views were discrepant. We have suggested that self-perceptions and peer-perceptions might be related to different consequences of victimization. Victim groups were therefore identified that allowed us to examine this question.

The study was conducted with a sample of middle school students in 6th and 7th grade. We selected this age group because victimization and other forms of social distress are known to be quite prevalent in middle school (Hoover et al., 1992; Parkhurst & Asher, 1992) and because early adolescents have the cognitive maturity to report on the kinds of attributional judg-

ments examined here. Participants completed a nomination instrument that measured peer perceptions of victims and a self-report measure of perceived victimization. They also completed measures of loneliness, social anxiety, and self-worth, as well as a standard sociometric instrument that assessed peer acceptance and rejection. Finally, a new instrument was designed that assessed children's subjective reactions to hypothetical incidents of peer harassment, including characterological and behavioral self-blame.

Method

Participants

Participants were 418 sixth and 7th graders (206 boys and 212 girls, M age = 12.4 years) attending an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse public middle school in Los Angeles. According to their self-identified ethnic affiliation, the sample was about one third Latino and one third African American, with the remaining third composed of Whites, Persians (Middle Easterners), Asians, and children with multiracial backgrounds. Only students who had the written consent of a parent or guardian (about 85% of eligible children) were included.

Peer Nominations

Participants were given a roster with the names of all the students in their class, arranged alphabetically and by gender. With the aid of this roster, children were instructed to nominate up to three classmates of either gender who fit each of seven behavioral descriptions. Two of these descriptors portrayed victimization (e.g., "gets picked on or pushed around," "gets put down or made fun of by others"). Because victimization may overlap with aggressiveness, two nomination questions described aggressive behavior (e.g., "starts fights or pushes other kids around," "puts other kids down"). Both sets of descriptors were adapted from instruments used in prior studies of both victimized (e.g., Perry et al., 1988) and aggressive children (e.g., Graham, Hudley, & Williams, 1992). Respondents also nominated up to three classmates whom they "liked to hang out with" and three whom they did not "like to hang out with." These descriptors were intended to measure peer acceptance and rejection respectively. Finally, a distractor question asked children to nominate the three "coolest kids" in the classroom, for which self-nominations also were allowed.

Attributional Questionnaire

The attributional questionnaire designed for this study measured students' subjective appraisals of hypothetical victimizing incidents. We created two scenarios that depicted the respondent as the target of peer harassment at school. One scenario described respondents as humiliated in the locker room by classmates who took their uniform and the other portrayed the respondent as physically threatened by peers seen smoking in the bathroom. For example, in the bathroom scenario, students were instructed to: "Imagine that when you are in the restroom in your school, you see a couple of kids smoking. When they see you, one of them blocks the door so you can't get out, while the other presses you against the wall."

For each scenario, respondents rated how much they agreed with 32 statements that captured their thoughts, feelings, and behavioral reactions to the victimizing incident. The thoughts included attributions designed to capture characterological self-blame (e.g., "If I were a cooler kid, I wouldn't get picked on"), behavioral self-blame (e.g., "I should have been more careful"), as well as external attributions pertaining to others (e.g., "These kinds of kids pick on everybody") and the school environment (e.g., "Nobody is safe in this school anymore"). The affective and behavioral items also included responses known to be associated with particular attributions (e.g., "I would feel mad at the kids who did it"; "I would feel that there is nothing I can do"). Each statement was rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *definitely would not think [feel] this way;* 5 = *definitely would think [feel] this way*). The 32 items were subjected to a factor analysis, described in the *Results* section, that examined the underlying causal structure of reactions to victimization.

Adjustment Indexes

Loneliness. Children's feelings of loneliness were assessed with a 16-item scale developed by Asher and Wheeler (1985). Some of the items were slightly modified from the original scale to make them more appropriate for a middle school sample. Students responded on 5-point scales (1 = *not at all true* and 5 = *always true*) to questions such as "I feel left out of things" and "I have nobody to talk to." Scores could range from 16 to 80, with high scores indicating more loneliness. The internal consistency of the items for this sample was good (Cronbach's α = .81).

Social anxiety. A 7-item measure of social anxiety at school was adapted from one of the subscales (concern about rejection) of an instrument developed by Parkhurst and Asher (1992) to measure social concerns among middle school students. Respondents were asked how often they thought, for example, "that other kids think you're weird" or "that you'll say something dumb in front of other kids." Answers were recorded on 5-point scales (1 = *never* and 5 = *almost all the time*). With seven items, scores could range from 7 to 35, where high scores indicated greater social anxiety in school (Cronbach's α = .79).

Self-worth. Students' self-worth was assessed with the 6-item general subscale of Harter's Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC; Harter, 1985). The SPPC uses a response format that is designed to minimize social desirability effects. Students were presented with two statements separated by the word "but," with each statement reflecting high or low self-worth. An example item was: "Some kids like the kind of person they are *but* other kids often wish they were someone else." Students choose one of the two statements and then respond whether the selected alternative is "really true for me" or "sort of true for me." This creates a 4-point scale for each item. The ratings for the six items were averaged to create a single self-worth score ranging from 1 to 4, with high numbers indicating greater self-worth (α = .77 for this sample).

Self-Perceived Victim Status

Embedded in the self-worth measure were 4 items from an instrument developed by Neary and Joseph (1994) to assess self-perceived victim status. For example, children select one of the following two alternatives: "Some kids are often called bad names by others *but* other kids are not called bad names by others." They then indicate whether that description is "really true for me" or "sort of true for me." This creates a 4-point rating scale, similar to the self-worth subscale. The other three items on the self-perceived victimization scale tapped perceptions of being picked on, laughed at, and pushed around by others (α = .77 for the 4-item scale).

Procedure

Approximately two weeks prior to data collection, a parent consent form describing the research was sent home with the students. Students were requested to return the signed form, granting or not granting permission to participate in the research, within 1 week. To increase compliance, children were informed that a raffle would be conducted on the day of data collection for all students who returned their signed forms, with or without parental permission to participate. In each classroom,

the prizes were three $10 gift certificates to a music store. This proved to be a successful incentive inasmuch as over 90% of the students returned their signed parent consent forms (with 85% granting permission).

The data were collected in 18 classrooms of 6th and 7th graders during their homeroom periods in the spring semester of the academic year. Within grade level, students were divided into teams whereby they remained with the same classmates for the first four periods of the day. Thus the students knew one another well enough by this time in the school year to complete peer nomination measures. All of the instruments were assembled as a questionnaire. Peer nomination measures were always administered first and these response sheets were collected immediately after they were completed. The order of administering the other instruments was varied to create four questionnaire orders. Questionnaires were group-administered by one of the authors (female faculty members at University of California, Los Angeles) and two graduate students who were present in the classroom to assist individual children as needed. All instructions and questionnaire items were read aloud by the primary experimenter as students followed along and responded on their own questionnaires. On completion of the questionnaires, the raffle was conducted. Students were quite engaged in the raffle and we found this to be a good procedure for alleviating some of the discomfort that may have been elicited from both the peer nominations and self-reports. The entire procedure lasted about 1 hour.

Results

Factor Analysis of Victim Scenario Ratings

We first conducted a factor analysis of children's responses to the attribution questionnaire. The purpose of this analysis was to identify underlying constructs that might describe different response patterns to potential victimization. Specifically, we wanted to test whether characterological and behavioral self-blame would emerge as separate factors. Because children's responses to the two hypothetical victimization incidents were highly correlated, the ratings were averaged across the two scenarios. These 32 ratings were then subjected to an exploratory factor analysis, using principal factors extraction with oblique rotation. Following initial inspection of the factor patterns, three items that had low commonalities were dropped. The main analyses were therefore carried out on 29 item ratings. Six conceptually meaningful factors were extracted, accounting for 49% of the variance in children's ratings. The variables comprising each factor and their factor loadings are shown in Table 1. Variables are ordered and grouped by size of loading to facilitate interpretation.

The first factor accounted for 26.8% of the variance (eigenvalue = 7.77) and included agreement with eight statements such as "This sort of thing is more likely to happen to me than to other kids"; "Why do I always get into these situations?" and "If I were a cooler kid, I wouldn't get picked on." These items connote uncontrollability and temporal stability; hence we labeled this factor *Characterological Self-Blame.* The second factor, labeled *Hostility,* accounted for 8% of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.31) and included three items related to feeling angry and wanting to get even. Three items labeled as *Insecurity* (e.g., feeling scared or wanting to cry) loaded highly on the third factor which accounted for 5.5% of the variance (eigenvalue = 1.60). The fourth factor, labeled *Threat From Others,* accounted for 2.9% of the variance (eigenvalue = .85) and described perceptions of aggressors and the school environment. The fifth factor accounted for 2.7% of the variance (eigenvalue = .79) and loaded highly on three items: "I should have been more careful," "It's my fault," and "I shouldn't have been here at this time." These items connote personal controllability and temporal instability; hence we labeled this factor *Behavioral Self-Blame.* Lastly, the sixth factor, labeled *Passivity,* accounted for 1.7% of the variance (eigenvalue = .49) and consisted of three items connoting avoidance or feeling helpless.

In the remaining analyses, we focus only on the two self-blame factors. Scale scores were created from the variables with loadings of .40 and greater for each factor. We deleted the one item ("I should have known this would happen") that cross-loaded at .40 on both factors. Scores were derived by first standardardizing the relevant item ratings and then computing average scores. Both scales had adequate internal consistency: Characterological Self-Blame (8 items, α = .86) and Behavioral Self-Blame (3 items, α = .67).[1]

Relationships Among Variables

The next set of analyses examined relations among the two self-blame scores, the three adjustment indexes (loneliness, social anxiety, and self-worth), the peer status measures (acceptance and rejection), and peer- and self-perceived victimization. A measure of peer-perceived victimization was created by summing the number of nominations each participant received on the two questions that described being victimized (i.e., "Who gets picked on or pushed around?" "Who gets put down or made fun of by others?"). To assess self-perceptions, we averaged each participant's ratings on the four self-perceived victimization items. Peer acceptance and rejection were measured by summing the number of nominations participants received on the "like to hang out with" and "do not like to hang out with" questions. To adjust for class size, we standardized each of these measures within classroom.

Correlational analysis. Table 2 shows the correlations among all the variables. We hypothesized that characterological self-blame might be related to the kind of anxiety and negative self-appraisals associated with perceiving oneself as a victim. The correlations in Table 2 are consistent with this hypothesis. Characterological self-blame was significantly related to the three adjustment indices—positively to general feelings of loneliness and social anxiety, and negatively to self-worth. These three adjustment variables also were systematically interrelated in a manner consistent with prior research (e.g., Parkhurst & Asher, 1992). Blaming one's character also was more strongly related to self- than peer-perception of victim status. The correlation between characterological and behavioral self-blame was relatively high (r = .58), indicating that the two types of self-

[1] Inasmuch as the two self-blame factor scores were correlated (r = .58), it could be argued that they actually comprise a single self-blame factor. To rule out this possibility, we reran the factor analysis with only the 11 items that comprise the two factors identified in Table 1. Two separate factors were still extracted, accounting for 45.9% of the variance in children's ratings. The item loadings indicated that these two factors conformed to our theoretical distinctions between characterological and behavioral self-blame.

Table 1
Factor Loadings of the Items Ratings for Reactions to Hypothetical Victimization

Items	Factor loadings					
	Factor 1: Characterological Self-Blame	Factor 2: Hostility	Factor 3: Insecurity	Factor 4: Threat	Factor 5: Behavioral Self-Blame	Factor 6: Passivity
Happens to me, not other kids.	**.794**	.012	−.096	−.094	.011	.063
Happens to me because I won't cause trouble.	**.756**	−.070	.101	.127	−.098	−.018
They do this to me because I won't fight back.	**.670**	−.134	.270	.174	−.058	−.080
Happens to me because other kids treat me this way.	**.660**	−.074	.017	.015	.156	−.082
Why me and not other kids?	**.610**	.097	−.095	.107	.044	.115
Always get into situations like this.	**.493**	−.083	−.085	.096	.193	.139
This will happen to me again.	**.478**	−.004	.074	−.053	.230	.087
If I were a cooler kid, I wouldn't get picked on.	**.402**	.135	.124	.044	.086	.088
Should've known this would happen.	.402	−.116	−.042	−.010	.400	−.046
I would feel mad.	−.035	**.586**	.074	.093	−.095	.013
I would feel furious.	−.013	**.560**	.056	.068	−.013	−.092
I would get even with these kids.	.019	**.415**	−.250	−.234	.169	−.314
I would feel scared.	.084	.089	**.757**	−.075	.021	.152
I would feel like crying.	.228	.060	**.601**	−.145	.099	−.015
I would tell an adult.	−.184	−.069	**.606**	.273	.071	−.080
There are too many tough kids.	.156	.201	−.081	**.575**	−.046	.088
These kids pick on everybody.	.221	.175	.130	**.435**	.011	.039
I shouldn't have been here.	.035	.090	.139	−.082	**.665**	.177
I should've been more careful.	−.004	−.059	.162	.305	**.564**	.018
It's my fault, I shouldn't have been in the restroom/locker room.	.188	−.069	−.048	−.140	**.478**	.159
I would ignore them.	−.116	−.098	−.097	.053	.065	**.744**
I would be quiet.	.066	−.094	−.042	.094	.120	**.588**
I would feel helpless.	.148	.086	.223	−.143	.025	**.423**
Nobody is safe in this school.	.227	.260	.130	.329	.085	.063
Last time this will happen to me.	−.115	.356	−.224	.147	.183	−.209
In wrong place at the wrong time.	.148	.083	.038	.368	.263	.075
These kids want to beat me up.	.326	.130	.287	.049	.205	−.007
I would feel humiliated.	.185	.219	.334	−.008	.118	.292
Have it out right then and there.	.016	.348	−.264	−.281	.179	−.294

Note. Values in boldface represent the highest loadings for each factor.

Table 2
Correlations Between Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. CSB	—								
2. BSB	.58	—							
3. Loneliness	.32	.18	—						
4. Anxiety	.49	.25	.36	—					
5. Self-worth	−.20	−.15	−.38	−.34	—				
6. Acceptance	.00	.00	−.24	−.12	.11	—			
7. Rejection	−.09	−.07	.04	−.00	−.06	−.32	—		
8. Self-vict	.26	.20	.24	.35	−.28	−.12	.12	—	
9. Peer-vict	.13	−.06	.18	.12	−.02	−.32	.41	.31	—

Note. CSB = characterological self-blame; BSB = behavioral self-blame; Self-vict = Self-perceived victimization; and Peer-vict = peer-perceived victimization. Correlations greater than ±.12 are significant at $p < .01$.

ascriptions covary. Behavioral self-blame also was related to the adjustment indexes and self-perceived victimization, although the magnitude of the correlations was somewhat weaker than for characterological self-blame. Note that neither attribution variable was strongly related to either peer-perceived victimization or peer acceptance and rejection. Rejection, moreover, was unrelated to any of the adjustment outcomes. These findings support our contention that the determinants of rejection (an interpersonal consequence of victim status) and the determinants of loneliness, anxiety, and self-worth (intrapersonal consequences of victim status) might be different.

Regression analyses. This hypothesis of different determinants of intrapersonal versus interpersonal consequences of victimization was further investigated in a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses. The goal of these analyses was to examine the main and interactive effects of self-perceived victimization and peer-perceived victimization as predictors of intrapersonal adjustment (loneliness, anxiety, self-worth) and peer reactions (acceptance and rejection). Also examined were the effects of the two types of self-blame on the same outcome variables.

The three adjustment indexes and the two peer reaction measures were treated as dependent variables in separate hierarchical regression analyses consisting of five steps. In hierarchical regression, predictor variables are entered into a regression equation in a predetermined order so that changes in variance accounted for (R^2) can be determined as each predictor or set of predictors joins those that have preceded it (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). At Step 1 in our analysis, respondent gender and peer-perceived aggression were entered as control variables inasmuch as these measures may be related to both adjustment and peer reactions (e.g., adolescent girls may be lower in self-worth than boys and the youngsters perceived as most aggressive are likely to be most rejected). Gender was coded as a dichotomous variable (1 = *male* and 2 = *female*), and the aggression variable was created by summing and standardizing within classroom the two peer nomination questions describing aggressive behavior (i.e., starts fights, puts others down). At Step 2, self-perceived and peer-perceived victimization were entered simultaneously, with the interaction between these variables entering at Step 3. The main effects of characterological and behavioral self-blame were simultaneously entered at Step 4 and their interaction at Step 5. The ordering of main effects reflects our hypotheses about the temporal relations between these predictors. That is, after controlling for gender and aggressive status, we presume that perceptions of victimization precede self-blaming attributions.

The results of the regression analyses predicting the three adjustment indexes are shown in Table 3. For each adjustment outcome, Table 3 displays the increment in the variance accounted for by the variables that enter at each step of the analysis (R^2 change) and the standardized regression coefficients (β) after all variables have entered the regression equation at the final step. The findings are quite consistent across all three adjustment indexes. After controlling for gender and aggressive status at Step 1, there were significant increments in R^2 when the main effects of self- and peer-perceived victimization were entered at Step 2. In accord with our hypothesis, self-perceived victimization was a significant predictor of loneliness (β = .21), social anxiety (β = .36), and low self-worth (β = −.29), where β equals the standardized regression coefficient at Step 2 of the analysis. (These betas vary slightly from those reported in Table 3, which were computed at the last step of the analysis.) At Step 2, however, peer-perceived victimization was unrelated to anxiety and self-worth (βs = −.02 and .02, respectively), and only marginally related to loneliness (β = .11, p = .04). The interaction term that entered at the third step was a nonsignificant predictor of adjustment in all three analyses. Thus, the more respondents perceived themselves to be victims, the more lonely and socially anxious they felt and the lower their self-worth, irrespective of their reputations as victims.

At Step 4, when characterological and behavioral self-blame entered the analysis, Table 3 shows significant increments in R^2

Table 3
Hierarchical Regressions Predicting the Psychological Adjustment Variables

	Psychological adjustment					
	Loneliness		Anxiety		Self-worth	
Predictor	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.03**		.01		.00	
Gender		−.07		.04		−.07
Aggression		−.12		−.05		−.04
Step 2	.07***		.13***		.08***	
Self-vict		.13**		.25***		−.25***
Peer-vict		.11		−.02		.02
Step 3	.00		.00		.00	
Self × Peer		−.02		.02		.05
Step 4	.08***		.17***		.02**	
CSB		.31***		.47***		−.15
BSB		−.07		−.12		−.03
Step 5	.01		.02**		.00	
CSB × BSB		.10		.13**		−.03
Total R^2	.18***		.33***		.10***	

Note. β = standardized regression coefficients at the final step of the analysis; CSB = characterological self-blame; BSB = behavioral self-blame; Self-vict = self-perceived victimization; and Peer-perceived victimization.
** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

for all three adjustment variables. Furthermore, characterological self-blame was the stronger predictor in all three cases, but particularly for loneliness (β = .31) and social anxiety (β = .47; both $ps < .001$). The path coefficients reveal that behavioral self-blame did not significantly predict loneliness, social anxiety, or low self-worth.[2]

Finally, Table 3 shows a significant interaction between the two self-blame variables for social anxiety. Following the procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991) for analyzing interaction effects in multiple regression, we examined differences in the simple slopes of the regression of anxiety on characterological self-blame at different levels of behavioral self-blame (i.e., at the mean of 0 and 1 standard deviation above and below the mean). The path coefficients at low, average, and high levels of behavioral self-blame were .34, .53, and .72, respectively (all $ps < .001$). Thus, characterological self-blame was a stronger predictor of social anxiety when behavioral self-blame was high than when it was low.

In the next set of analyses, we turn from self-judgments as the dependent variable to peer judgments, where the regressions of peer acceptance and rejection on the same sets of predictor variables were examimed. These analyses are displayed in Table 4 and they show quite a different pattern of relations. One clear difference is the importance of aggressive status as a predictor of rejection, which is consistent with much prior research (e.g., Parker & Asher, 1987). However, and more central to our analysis, after controlling for gender and aggressive status at Step 2 in the analysis, peer-perceived victimization was a significant negative predictor of acceptance (β = −.33) and a positive predictor of rejection (β = .44), whereas self-perceived victimization was unrelated to either outcome. The interaction terms were nonsignificant in both analyses and did not add to the variance accounted for. Similarly, neither characterological self-blame, behavioral self-blame, nor their interaction significantly added to this variance. Thus, the greater one's reputation as a victim, the less accepted and more rejected they were, irrespective of their self-perceived victim status or self-blaming tendencies.

Table 4
Hierarchical Regressions Predicting the Peer Reaction Variables

	Acceptance		Rejection	
Predictor	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.01		.21***	
Gender		.02		.17***
Aggression		−.01		.50***
Step 2	.09***		.17***	
Self-vict		−.02		−.01
Peer-vict		−.33***		.47***
Step 3	.00		.00	
Self × Peer		.07		−.06
Step 4	.00		.01	
CSB		.02		−.09
BSB		.04		.01
Step 5	.01		.00	
CSB × BSB		−.12		−.01
Total R^2	.11***		.39***	

Note. β = standardized regression coefficients at the final step of the analysis; CSB = characterological self-blame; BSB = behavioral self-blame; Self-vict = self-perceived victimization; and Peer-vict = peer-perceived victimization.
*** $p < .001$.

Testing mediation. The above analyses document that self-perceived victimization, moreso than peer-perceived victimization, and characterological self-blame, moreso than behavioral self-blame, are predictors of maladjustment. In the final stage of the analysis of relationships between variables, we examined the hypothesis that characterological self-blame mediates the association between self-perceived victimization and maladjustment, such that:

victimization → characterological self-blame → adjustment problems.

To test the most parsimonious model derived from these data, we combined respondents' loneliness and social anxiety scores to create a single index of adjustment problems. The self-perceived victimization and characterological self-blame variables were the same as in the prior analyses. With this simple three-variable model, we followed the procedure outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) for testing mediation using multiple regression. This procedure requires the estimation of three regression equations: (a) the regression of the mediator (self-blame) on the independent variable (self-perceived victimization), (b) the regression of the dependent variable (adjustment problems) on the independent variable, and (c) the regression of the dependent variable on both the independent variable and the mediator. Mediation is documented if victimization influences self-blame in the first equation, victimization affects adjustment in the second equation, and self-blame (the mediator) also affects adjustment in the third equation. Furthermore, the effects of victimization on adjustment problems should be smaller in the third equation (controlling for the mediator) than in the second equation.

The analyses revealed that all three conditions for documenting mediation were met. In the first analysis, the path from self-perceived victimization to characterological self-blame was significant (β = .26, $p < .001$). In the second analysis, victimization was a significant predictor of adjustment problems, β = .38, $p < .001$. In the third equation, the path from characterological self-blame to maladjustment was significant (β = .46) as was the path from victimization to the outcome measure (β = .25; both $ps < .001$). More importantly for documenting mediation, the path coefficient from victimization to maladjustment decreased from .38 to .25 once the effect of the mediator was taken into account. Note also that in the third equation, the size of the path from characterological self-blame to adjustment

[2] Given the problems associated with correlated independent variables in multiple regression analysis, we acknowledge the need for caution when interpreting main effects of the two self-blame variables. Other analyses not reported in the article that used a partial correlation approach supported our finding that the relations between behavioral self-blame and the adjustment indexes were substantially reduced once the effect of characterological self-blame was taken into account. In contrast, the correlations between characterological self-blame and each adjustment indice remained strong even when the effects of behavioral self-blame were partialed out.

Table 5
Mean Differences on the Dependent Variables as a Function of Victim Status Group

Variable	Victims (n = 40)	Paranoids (n = 69)	Deniers (n = 21)	Nonvictims (n = 165)	$F(3, 291)^a$	p
Attributions						
Characterological self-blame	$.30_a$	$.23_a$	$-.17_b$	$-.12_b$	6.64	.000
Behavioral self-blame	$.03_{a,b}$	$.26_b$	$.07_{a,b}$	$-.11_a$	3.69	.013
Adjustment indexes						
Loneliness	35.53_a	31.90_b	$31.57_{a,b,c}$	29.13_c	6.28	.000
Social anxiety	18.23_a	17.49_a	14.14_b	14.36_b	9.82	.000
Self-worth	$2.88_{a,b}$	2.80_a	$3.19_{b,c}$	3.24_c	7.00	.000
Peer reactions						
Acceptance	$-.65_a$	$.18_b$	$-.54_a$	$.17_b$	10.57	.000
Rejection	$.62_a$	$-.15_b$	$.55_a$	$-.24_b$	12.80	.000

Note. The attributions and peer reactions are standard scores. Row means with different subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$ using Duncan's Multiple Range Test.
[a] Denominator degrees of freedom vary somewhat for the different analyses because of missing data for some variables.

problems is stronger than that from the more distal victimization variable (βs = .46 vs. .25). A very similar pattern of findings was documented when we carried out the same analyses on the loneliness and social anxiety variables separately. Thus there is evidence that characterological self-blame partly mediates the relationship between self-perceived victim status and adjustment problems.

Analyses by Victim Subgroup

Our hypotheses about the maladaptive consequences of victimization imply comparisons between "true" victims and nonvictims (i.e., individuals for whom self- and peer views are congruent). However, children's self- and peer perceptions of victim status were only moderately correlated (r = .31), suggesting that there are both congruencies and discrepancies in these two assessment procedures. It was therefore of interest to examine differences on the dependent variables in a subsample of respondents for whom self- and peer views were both congruent and discrepant.

Four victim groups were identified using respondents' standardized self-perceived victimization scores and peer-nominated victim scores. Children who were at or above the 70th percentile on both self-ratings and peer nominations were labeled as "true" victims. Close to 10% of the sample (n = 40; 29 boys and 11 girls) could be classified in this manner, which is consistent with the prevalence rates documented in previous studies (e.g., Perry et al., 1988). Nonvictims (n = 165; 66 boys and 99 girls) were children whose peer- and self-scores both fell below the 50th percentile. Some children, like those labeled as paranoids in Perry et al., tend to view themselves as victims, yet do not have this reputation among their peers. We identified paranoids (n = 69; 30 boys and 39 girls) as respondents whose self-ratings were at or above the 70th percentile but whose peer nominations were below the 50th percentile cutoff. Finally, children who had a reputation for being victims (peer nominations at or above the 70th percentile) but who did not perceive themselves as such (self-ratings below the 50th percentile) also were identified and labeled as deniers (n = 21; 17 boys and 4 girls).

One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) by victim status group were conducted on the two self-blame scales, three adjustment indices, and the two peer reaction measures.[3] The means on each variable as a function of victim group and the F tests for main effects are shown in Table 5. Turning first to comparisons of victims and nonvictims, Table 5 shows that victims endorsed significantly more characterological self-blaming attributions than nonvictims; they also were more lonely, socially anxious, lower in self-worth, and they were less accepted and more rejected than their nonvictimized counterparts. Interestingly, the two groups did not differ on the theoretically less maladaptive behavioral self-blame.

We turn next to those groups for whom self- and peer-perceptions were discrepant (paranoids and deniers). On characterological self-blame, social anxiety, and self-worth, respondents classified as paranoids did not differ significantly from victims, whereas deniers did not differ from nonvictims. In other words, the two groups who perceived themselves as victims reported similar levels of intrapersonal maladjustment, whereas the two groups who did not view themselves as victims showed relatively better adjustment. For peer acceptance and rejection, Table 5 shows that deniers did not differ from victims, whereas para-

[3] Because gender and aggressive status were examined as control variables in the hierarchical regressions, preliminary analyses examining group differences in the ANOVA framework also included these other factors. First, each of the dependent variables was examined in an analysis of covariance where respondents' aggression score was the covariate. The results were almost identical to those reported from the ANOVA. Second, preliminary ANOVAs on each of the dependent variables included gender as a between-subjects factor. There were only three significant effects involving gender, each suggesting greater adjustment difficulties for girls than boys. However, these gender effects did not alter the general pattern of victim group differences reported in Table 5.

noids did not differ from nonvictims. That is, the two groups perceived by peers as victims tended to be rejected, while the two groups who did not have this reputation were relatively accepted. In sum, for victim groups in whom self- and peer views were discrepant the negative consequences of victimization appear to be specific: paranoids may be vulnerable to psychological maladjustment but not rejection, whereas deniers may be at risk for rejection but not maladjustment.

Discussion

The present findings provide new insights into the dynamics of peer victimization. Middle school students who perceive themselves as victimized are vulnerable to adjustment difficulties such as loneliness, social anxiety, and low self-worth. Furthermore, these relations between self-perceived victimization and maladjustment are partly mediated by self-blaming attributions that implicate one's character. The maladaptive consequences of characterological self-blame relate back to its presumed causal properties as an attribution for failure. From an attributional perspective, characterological self-blame is internal and therefore reflects on the self; it appears to be stable and therefore leads to an expectation of chronic victimization; and it is likely to be perceived as uncontrollable, which suggests that there is no response in the victim's repertoire to alter the course of future abusive encounters. In contrast, attributing victimization to one's specific behavior, an attribution presumed to be unstable and controllable, was unrelated to adjustment problems as a main effect in the regression analyses (Table 3) and it was no more highly endorsed by victims than nonvictims in the ANOVA procedures (Table 5). Our results therefore suggest that it would be too simplistic to conclude that victimized early adolescents blame themselves for their victim status, or that self-blame always has negative consequences. Rather, specific kinds of self-blaming tendencies are particularly maladaptive, whereas others may be relatively benign.

Is Self-Blame Ever Adaptive?

Our findings were not consistent with Janoff-Bulman's (1979) initial argument that behavioral self-blame is an adaptive attribution for coping with victimization. Other researchers also have questioned whether blaming one's own behavior is positively related to recovery from traumatic life events (e.g., Frazier & Schauben, 1994; Meyer & Taylor, 1986). Like these other studies, we found behavioral and characterological self-blame to be highly correlated. This might be expected in that youngsters who blame their victimization on perceived personal deficiencies also are likely to blame their behavior to some extent. As in other studies, we also documented that both types of self-blame correlated with maladjustment. However, our analytic approach was different from that of prior research in that we attempted to examine the independent and shared effects of behavioral and characterological self-blame on maladjustment. The regression analysis leads us to believe that behavioral self-blame exerted little direct and independent effect on the adjustment indexes. Thus, although we cannot conclude, as Janoff-Bulman (1979) did, that blaming one's behavior is an adaptive attribution for victimization, neither can we conclude, as some other researchers have, that it is maladaptive.

It may well be that some forms of self-blame relate to positive coping with victimization. As attribution theorists, we prefer to conceptualize these causal beliefs in terms of their underlying structure. From our perspective, the most adaptive self-ascriptions following negative outcomes should be perceived as internal, unstable, and controllable—akin to lack of effort for achievement failure, which has well-documented positive consequences (see Försterling, 1985). Behavioral self-blame as operationalized in our research and in other studies may have uncertain placements on some of these dimensions, given its overlap with characterological self-blaming tendencies. That is, we do not know to what extent potential victims in our study viewed their behavioral choices as unstable or completely within their control. Furthermore, at times the "best" attribution for coping with victimization may be one that implies externality, instability, and uncontrollability (e.g., "being in the wrong place at the wrong time"—akin to bad luck). In light of these complexities, a task for future research is to not only create more theoretically coherent measures of behavioral self-blame but also to devise methodologies that allow respondents to report directly on the perceived underlying dimensions of their explanations for peer victimization.

Relationship to Other Process Models of Peer Victimization

Our model of the mediational role of characterological self-blame adds to a growing literature seeking to identify processes that might explain the deleterious consequences of peer victimization. For example, Boivin and Hymel (1997) recently advanced a model of the social processes linking victimization to self-perceived loneliness and low acceptance by peers. Their model is similar to ours in that victimization was hypothesized to be an antecedent of loneliness (see also Boivin et al., 1995). However, whereas we focus on what mediates the subjective experience of victimization and loneliness (i.e., characterological self-blame), the Boivin and Hymel model is temporally more complex and also incorporates processes that function as antecedents of victimization, such as social withdrawal and peer rejection. Similarly, recent research by Egan and Perry (in press) documents that low self-worth in the social domain is both an antecedent and consequence of victimization over time. That is, children who view themselves as socially incompetent behave in ways that promote abuse by others (the antecedent function of low self-worth) and they feel worse about themselves as victimization escalates over the school year (the consequence function). Our findings are also compatible with the Egan and Perry model inasmuch as characterological self-blame might partly explain the documented linkage between victimization and later decrements in social self-esteem.

These prior studies of process underscore perhaps more cogently than ours the complexity of peer victimization and its cyclical nature. At any single point in time characterological self-blame might predict loneliness and low self-worth as well as mediate the relation between victim status and these adjustment outcomes. Yet the processes no doubt are cumulative over time such that new cycles of "victimization–self-blame–malad-

justment" relations are predicted by those that precede them. Thus, depending on how far back or where in a causal chain one chooses to focus, the adjustment variables that we study may be conceptualized as either antecedents or consequences of victimization. Longitudinal studies of attributional process are needed to address these sequence issues and to further refine the concurrent assessment procedures of the present study.

Developmental Implications

Acknowledging the cyclical nature of victimization and the importance of longitudinal research also raises issues about development. Although we examined relations between self-blame and victimization in a middle school sample, it is known that victimization begins much earlier in some children's school experiences. For example, Kochenderfer and Ladd (1996) recently documented that peer harassment is already present by kindergarten, it is related to loneliness and dislike of school, and that for close to 10% of this young sample, self-perceived victimization was stable across the kindergarten year. At what point, then, do children become vulnerable to maladaptive causal interpretations of victimization?

On the one hand, some developmental research guided by attributional analyses might argue for the relative invulnerability of young children. It has been argued that children do not have fully developed concepts of attributional dimensions such as controllability and stability before the late elementary grades (e.g., Graham, Doubleday, & Guarino, 1984; Nicholls, 1978) and that they are not vulnerable to helpless belief patterns before that time (Miller, 1985; Rholes, Blackwell, Jordan, & Walters, 1980). On the other hand, more recent research by Dweck, Stipek, and others reveals that when failure is manipulated to be quite salient, even preschoolers report negative affect and disparaging self-appraisals, and they display passive behavior—in other words, they endorse cognitions and behaviors indicative of self-blame and vulnerability to helplessness (Heyman, Dweck, & Cain, 1992; Smiley & Dweck, 1994; Stipek, Recchia, & McClintic, 1992).

Although the developmental findings reviewed above have focused on achievement failure, we believe that they also have implications for young children's reactions to social "failure," such as victimization. When experiences with peer harassment are salient and impactful (as they often are), even children in the earliest grades may be vulnerable to self-ascriptions that implicate their character. Thus the rudiments for chronic maladjustment in response to victimization are already in place by the time youngsters begin to negotiate the demands of formal schooling.

When Self- and Peer Views Diverged

Some of our most intriguing findings concerned the children we labeled as paranoids and deniers—that is, the victimized youngsters for whom self- and peer perceptions were discrepant. Paranoids had elevated self-perceptions of being the targets of others' harassment but were not perceived as victims by peers. Deniers had reputations as victims but did not view themselves as such. On characterological self-blame and the maladjustment indexes (loneliness, anxiety, low self-worth), paranoids were consistently more similar to "true" victims, whereas deniers responded more like nonvictims. Regarding peer-focused consequences of victimization, deniers were just as rejected as true victims, whereas paranoids were no more disliked than nonvictims.

These data are consistent with the multiple regression findings and lead us to believe that self-appraisals and reputational status might be two independent risk factors for the kinds of negative consequences associated with victimization. Self-views, or the subjective experience of feeling like a victim, appear to predict the intrapsychological consequences of victim status, including loneliness, social anxiety, and low self-worth. Peer views, in contrast, appear to predict interpersonal consequences such as acceptance and rejection.

Of course, caution must accompany this differential risk hypothesis since the findings are confounded by shared method variance. That is, the reputation and acceptance–rejection measures were based on peer reports, whereas subjective experiences of victimization and the adjustment indexes were derived from self-reports. It is therefore not surprising that the peer and the self-measures were more highly intercorrelated because the same respondents reported on each. We have no definitive rebuttal to this methodological limitation of the present study. However, we believe that distinguishing between the correlates of subjective appraisals and reputational status is both meaningful and important because most victimization studies describe a cluster of interrelated adjustment difficulties—including loneliness, low self-esteem, and rejection—without considering whether particular adjustment problems might have different antecedents.

Our selection procedures identified more paranoids than true victims (*n*s = 69 vs. 40, or 17% vs. 10% of the sample), suggesting that this is a group in need of further study. We borrowed the label of *paranoid* from Perry et al. (1988). However, we do not wish this classification to imply that we believe that these children are oversensitive to feeling victimized. We suspect that there are multiple (and legitimate) reasons why some youngsters' self-views diverge from peer views. For example, indirect forms of perceived abuse (e.g., social ostracism) may be quite subtle or covert, and hence difficult to detect by peers not directly involved in the incident. Relevant to this analysis, Crick and Grotpeter (1996) recently documented a group of relationally victimized elementary age students who were identified based on self-reports of, for example, being "left out on purpose." Therefore, it may be that the so-called paranoids in our research are more relationally than overtly victimized. Our methodology did not allow for this more fine-grained differentiation of victimization type.

Our labeling of deniers may also be misleading, for we do not wish to imply that these children are defensively self-protective or unrealistic about their victim status. Some interactions that are salient to observers and perceived as victimizing, such as someone being picked on or pushed around, may not be subjectively interpreted as such. It is noteworthy that 17 of the 21 deniers were boys. These early adolescent boys may have a high threshold for viewing themselves as victims (e.g., as someone unable to defend himself). Thus there may be important differences between boys and girls in how actual victimizing

events are experienced and interpreted. This is a topic that merits further study.

Broadening the study of victimization to include children for whom self- and peer-perceptions diverge also has important implications for intervention. If identification procedures rely only on the reports of others, such as peer nominations or teacher ratings, then many children who feel vulnerable to victimization and are suffering from intrapsychological difficulties (i.e., paranoids) might inadvertently be excluded. Similarly, relying only on self-appraisals may ignore children whose reputation as a victim has led them to be rejected by their peers (i.e., deniers). This would be a serious oversight, given the well-documented status of peer rejection as a risk factor for a whole host of negative outcomes (see Parker & Asher, 1987). Our findings therefore underscore the need for further development of methods to identify victim status, and for focused intervention strategies that address the specific adjustment difficulties of particular victimized children.

A Final Note

We began this article by recounting one victimization experience of a fictional early adolescent named Shannon Pearl. Sadly, there are all too many real-life Shannon Pearls in American schools today. They are found in rural and urban schools, across the full grade spectrum, and with few known boundaries along race, class, and gender lines. Because the peer relations literature has tended to focus on the perpetrators of hostility (i.e., aggressors) rather than their targets, the risks associated with chronic victimization are just beginning to be recognized. Thus, studies on the dynamics of victimization, including the role of self-appraisals and the complex interplay between self- and other perception, represent uncharted research territories. In light of the present findings, we believe that attributional analyses provide a useful conceptual framework for exploring both the nature of victimization and how children cope with victim status.

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