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Future Directions for Research on the Development of Relational and Physical Peer Victimization

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Future Directions for Research on the Development of Relational and Physical Peer Victimization

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After several decades of research on peer victimization and associated constructs the field is poised to make a number of important discoveries and advances. More specifically, the study of peer victimization subtypes has rapidly increased since the seminal work of Crick and Grotpeter (1996) on relational and physical victimization. The current state of the field is briefly reviewed, and recommendations for future directions are provided to advance our literature. Critical future directions are discussed and include (a) broaden the range of adjustment outcomes and examine differential pathways associated with physical and relational peer victimization; (b) study peer victimization subtypes at multiple levels of influence including psychophysiological and gene–environment interactions; (c) study physical and relational victimization outside of friendships and links with other close relationship systems; (d) examine the role of culture on peer victimization subtypes; (e) focus on context including but not limited to socioeconomic status; (f) test the role of gender, gender identity, and gender-linked self-construals; (g) explore the impact of peer group processes; and (h) continue to develop evidence-based programs for physical and relational peer victimization. Finally, the adoption of a developmental psychopathology framework is stressed as a means by which we may advance our future study of peer victimization subtypes.

The study of peer victimization has recently grown dramatically with a renewed interest in the study and treatment of bullying behaviors with some of the most well-known initial work in this area occurring within the context of bullying studies (e.g., Olweus, 1978). Peer victimization has been studied for decades in the fields of developmental psychology (e.g., Graham & Juvonen, 1998; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Patterson, Littman, & Bricker, 1967; Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988; Perry & Perry, 1974; Schwartz, Dodge, & Coie, 1993), clinical child and adolescent psychology (e.g., Vernberg, Jacobs, & Hershberger, 1999), and developmental psychopathology (e.g., Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1997; Slee, 1994; Troy & Sroufe, 1987). A number of prior books (e.g., Juvonen & Graham, 2001), review articles, and meta-analyses have been conducted on the development of peer victimization (e.g., Hawker & Boulton, 2000) and associated correlates (e.g., Reijntjes et al., 2011; Reijntjes, Kamphuis, Prinzie, & Telch, 2010). These prior publications are important, and the present article does not attempt to replicate these works. Rather, we discuss the current state of the field with respect to two subtypes of peer victimization (e.g., relational and physical victimization) and offer recommendations for best practices, as well as some critical future directions. We limit our focus to just these two subtypes of peer victimization because they are the focus of the special issue, they are often the factors found in existing measures (e.g., Desjardins, Yeung Thompson, Sukhawathanakul, Leadbeater, & MacDonald, 2013), and they are typically examined by contemporary peer relations researchers (e.g., Hawker & Boulton, 2000).

The study of both relational and physical peer victimization may be attributed to the seminal work of Crick and Grotpeter, who first published a study on relational victimization in 1996 in *Development and Psychopathology*. This initial study of children in third through sixth grade introduced a new peer nomination instrument used

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for assessing multiple subtypes of peer victimization. Furthermore, both forms of victimization were associated with social-psychological adjustment difficulties (e.g., depression and loneliness; Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; see also Craig, 1998; Crick & Bigbee, 1998). Subsequent research extended this work to the study of early childhood (e.g., Bonica, Arnold, Fisher, Zeljo, & Yershova, 2003; Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999), adolescents (Schafer, Werner, & Crick, 2002), and emerging adults (Linder, Crick, & Collins, 2002). The early work also demonstrated that girls were more likely to experience relational victimization than they were to receive physical victimization (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Roecker Phelps, 2001), which has been replicated with relational aggression studies as well (e.g., Ostrov, Kamper, Hart, Godleski, & Blakely-McClure, 2014; Putallaz et al., 2007). This early theoretical and empirical work has been generative with a recent PsycINFO search using the keyword "relational victimization" yielding 259 peer-reviewed publications. For comparison purposes, far more research has been conducted on the study of "relational aggression," with 694 peer-reviewed publications currently reported in PsycINFO. According to web of science figures, there were more than triple the number of citations to Crick and Grotpter (1995), the seminal publication on relational aggression, compared to Crick and Grotpeter's (1996) formative study on relational victimization. It is our hope that this article generates additional interest in the study of relational victimization and peer harassment more broadly so that relatively more attention will be given to the study and prevention of peer victimization subtypes.

DEFINITIONS

The study of physical and relational victimization requires an understanding of various terms and definitions, which we briefly review. Although there are numerous forms of aggression and peer victimization, two that are often studied are physical victimization and relational victimization. Physical victimization has been defined as the receipt of physical aggression or the use or threat of use of physical force to hurt, harm, or injure another person (e.g., hitting, kicking, punching, pushing, taking things away from others). Relational victimization is defined as the receipt of relational aggression, which is the removal or threat of the removal of relationships (e.g., social exclusion, spreading malicious secrets or lies, friendship withdrawal threats). We continue to echo previous calls for the use of the term "physical" rather than "overt" victimization (Godleski, Kamper, Ostrov, Hart, & Blakely-McClure, 2014). Overt victimization was initially used by Crick and Grotpeter (1995, 1996) to denote a composite of physical and verbal aggression/victimization. However, with a greater appreciation for the direct nature of relational aggression/victimization in some developmental periods (e.g., early childhood), the field has been moving away from this term. Moreover, the inclusion of verbal insults and mean names makes it hard to understand what behaviors within the composite (i.e., physical or verbal) are central in associations with salient predictors and outcomes, which makes targeted intervention work more challenging. This is not to say that verbal aggression is not important. We simply argue that there is utility in attempts to disentangle verbal aggression from physical and relational forms of aggression/victimization as we have done in our observational work (e.g., Crick et al., 2006; Ostrov & Keating, 2004), and we call for more research on verbal aggression and victimization as unique constructs. It is also important to point out that researchers also study "direct" and "indirect" victimization as well as "social" victimization. Direct aggression/victimization is most similar to "physical" aggression/victimization, whereas indirect or social aggression/victimization are similar to but not synonymous with relational aggression/victimization. That is, although there are conceptual similarities between relational, social, and indirect forms of victimization, there are notable and important differences. For example, indirect victimization may include property damage that is not part of the relational victimization construct (see Goldstein, Tisak, & Boxer, 2002). Similarly, social victimization includes nonverbal and verbal victimization behaviors (Galen & Underwood, 1997) that are also not included in the relational victimization construct. Relational victimization has also been examined in early childhood where the behaviors are rather direct, overt, based on the "here and now," and the identity of the perpetrator is well known, which may not be the case with regard to the other forms of victimization. For these reasons, we adopt the terms physical victimization and relational victimization in the current article.

As previously mentioned, recent attention has been given to the study of peer victimization within the context of bullying studies (e.g., Bradshaw & Johnson, 2011). Bullying has been recognized as a relationship problem marked by an imbalance of power between the bully and victim, which has resulted in increased attention to the development of peer victimization (e.g., Pepler et al., 2006). Important to our discussion, bullying is a subtype of aggression, and therefore all bullying is aggression but not all aggression is bullying. In order for a behavior to meet the current definition of bullying, it would need to first be an intentional act of aggressive behavior; there would also need to be an imbalance of power broadly defined (e.g., a large group of aggressors and one victim), and the behavior would typically be repeated or there would be a threat of repetition

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(Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014). Moreover, as a field we recognize that individuals may be bully–victims or aggressive–victims, and this category of children represents those at increased risk for experiencing adjustment problems (e.g., Schwartz, 2000). Some theorists and methodologists have argued that we should pay particular attention to the victims of multiple forms (e.g., sexual, physical assault, sibling, property) of victimization (''multiple victims'') as well as children with higher levels of multiple victimization (''polyvictims'') who represent the group of individuals that experience extreme levels of serious victimization and associated consequences (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007). These points are considered in the following discussion, but this article focuses on the specific role of peer victimization given that the majority of past research studies on physical and relational victimization have occurred within the peer context and because peer relations and the formation of positive peer relationships are a salient key developmental task for children and adolescents (Sroufe, 2013).

WHAT DO WE CURRENTLY KNOW?

One of the most frequently examined questions in this field and in the larger study of peer victimization concerns associations with social-psychological maladjustment. This is particularly important given the current focus on school-based prevention and intervention programs designed to avoid the hypothesized negative consequences of peer victimization (Holt, Raczynski, Frey, Hymel, & Limber, 2013). One of the largest known meta-analyses examining the cross-sectional link between peer victimization and adjustment outcomes documented significant associations with internalizing problems (e.g., depression, anxiety problems) as well as associations with loneliness and low self-esteem (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Even though results were still statistically significant and likely clinically significant, the effects were attenuated when multiple informants and measures were used, indicating concern about shared method variance (Hawker & Boulton, 2000, p. 453). Notably, however, the authors of the meta-analysis concluded that ''there is little need now for further cross-sectional studies of peer victimization and psycho-social maladjustment'' (Hawker & Boulton, 2000, p. 453).

More recent meta-analytic work has shown significant bidirectional associations and small to moderate effects between broadband externalizing problems and peer victimization (i.e., both direct and indirect victimization). This meta-analysis identified 14 longitudinal studies ($N = 7{,}821$) that met the adopted criteria suggesting increased attention to the need for prospective designs (Reijntjes et al., 2011). A second meta-analysis by this same research team (Reijntjes et al., 2010) examined peer victimization (i.e., either direct or indirect) and internalizing problems. This study used 18 longitudinal studies ($N = 13{,}978$), and the results similarly revealed small to moderate effects and bidirectional associations between peer victimization and changes in internalizing problems as well as internalizing problems and changes in peer victimization.

Relatedly, several studies have documented factors that promote peer victimization. The sequential social process model of peer harassment (Boivin, Hymel, & Hodges, 2001) posits both direct and indirect pathways to peer victimization. That is, direct paths are hypothesized from aggression to peer victimization, and indirect pathways are hypothesized via peer rejection. Evidence for this model has been growing in recent years (Boivin et al., 2001; Ostrov, 2008; Ostrov & Godleski, 2013). For example, in this special issue, Godleski and colleagues documented that peer rejection was associated with increases in relational victimization in early childhood, whereas low levels of emotion regulation are associated with increases in physical victimization (Godleski et al., 2014).

Our current understanding has also been enhanced by several intervention and prevention studies that have been conducted in recent years. For example, Giesbrecht and colleagues used multilevel modeling to examine the trajectories of victimization in school-aged children participating in an intervention program (walk away, ignore, talk it out, and seek help [WITS]; Leadbeater, Hoglund, & Woods, 2003) and those without the intervention (Giesbrecht, Leadbeater, & MacDonald, 2011). The findings indicated an overall decline in the use of both physical and relational victimization in the total sample. However, children who participated in the WITS program showed a significant reduction in peer victimization relative to those that did not participate in the program. Individual difference factors associated with peer victimization included initial levels of aggression and emotion dysregulation (Giesbrecht et al., 2011), such that initial levels of aggression predicted increases in victimization and inability to regulate emotions weakened the decline of victimization over time.

These manuscripts were selected for the current special issue in part because they all demonstrate state-of-the-art approaches and best practices in the advancement of the study of peer victimization. A thorough review of best practices is beyond the scope of this article, but a few are mentioned, as they should continue to be included in future designs if our field is to continue to advance science and practice. The special issue articles are laudable because hypotheses were theoretically driven, include multiple informants and multiple measures, and many are longitudinal in nature. Hawker and Boulton (2000) demonstrated the potential inflation in effect sizes

when shared method variance concerns are present in peer victimization studies, and future work should strive to avoid these issues with a multi-informant and multi-method approach. As such, the current special issue provides empirically based work incorporating best practices into the study of peer victimization.

CRUCIAL FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study of peer victimization subtypes has grown dramatically in recent years, and as a field we are well positioned to rapidly advance knowledge in the coming years. However, we believe there are several critical future directions that deserve our focus in order to move us forward as a field.

First, as mentioned, one of the most commonly addressed questions concerns links between *peer victimization subtypes* and *adjustment problems*. As we have discussed, these effects appear to be bidirectional such that externalizing and internalizing problems may be both predictors and outcomes of peer victimization (see meta-analyses just mentioned). Certainly future research is needed to examine specific mechanisms that may account for the links between peer victimization subtypes and substance use and delinquency (e.g., Sullivan, Farrell, & Kliewer, 2006) or between peer victimization and depression (Gibb, Stone, & Crossett, 2012). An important future direction is to consider *additional outcomes* beyond internalizing and externalizing problems. For example, several articles have examined links between pediatric obesity and peer victimization (e.g., Gray, Kahhan, & Janicke, 2009; Pearce, Boergers, & Prinstein, 2002), which we believe is a promising area for future inquiry. Pearce et al. (2002) revealed that obese (based on body mass index calculations) boys reported more physical victimization and obese girls reported more relational victimization. Both groups of adolescents also indicated greater dissatisfaction with their romantic relationship status relative to average-weight peers, and obese girls were less likely to date than their peers (Pearce et al., 2002). Related research has documented that peer victimization is negatively associated with physical activity and this direct effect is mediated by depression and loneliness symptoms (Storch et al., 2007). This work has demonstrated the utility and clinical significance of these empirical questions. It is important to highlight that the same processes and mechanisms may not always be present for both physical and relational victimization. We should not make the assumption that the same processes for physical victimization exist for relational victimization. The relational vulnerability model is a good example of one that was developed with a particular emphasis on processes that may be more relevant for relational victimization relative to physical victimization. This model was introduced by Crick and colleagues (Crick, Geiger, & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2003) and recently tested by Mathieson et al. (2011). The model was designed to better understand the pathways and risk factors toward relational aggression. Specifically, it was posited and found that hostile attribution biases for relational provocations would only lead to relational aggression when children (and in particular girls) also displayed other interpersonal relationship vulnerabilities such as emotional sensitivity and peer stress from relational victimization (Mathieson et al., 2011). Thus, greater attention to differential or unique processes are still needed, and further development of theory with particular respect to relational victimization will help guide future health-related research in this field.

Second, consistent with a developmental psychopathology approach (Cicchetti, 2013; see also Prinstein & Giletta, in press), studies of peer victimization should include *multiple levels (e.g., from cells to communities) of influence and multiple domains (social, cognitive, biological) of functioning* to best understand the development of the phenomenon. That is, understanding, for example, biological and cognitive processes associated with peer victimization may elucidate new mechanisms for intervention and might help to better identify associated risk and protective mechanisms. Understanding the links between these different domains and levels of analysis might permit researchers and clinicians the ability to predict long-term psychological and physical health consequences associated with peer victimization. It may not always be feasible to include all levels of analysis, and genetic and physiological processes in particular are complex and may be cost prohibitive, but at a minimum an appreciation for this approach allows the scholar to consider the possible influence of the other levels and domains. A number of excellent tutorials (e.g., Murray-Close, 2013) and examples for using gene–environment interaction designs or psychophysiological methods have recently been introduced to the literature (see also two articles in this special issue: Brendgen, Girard, Vitaro, Dionne, & Boivin, 2015; Lafko, Murray-Close, & Shoulberg, 2013). An illustrative example of this approach includes a seminal publication by Banny and colleagues, which showed that peer victimization subtypes mediated the association between child maltreatment and depressive symptoms (Banny, Cicchetti, Rogosch, Oshri, & Crick, 2013). More specifically, there was evidence of moderated mediation such that genotype moderated the indirect effect of relational and physical victimization on depressive symptomatology in children (Banny et al., 2013). Using indirect effects testing with bootstrapping procedures that are now widely available, they found that children who were victimized and had the long/long variation

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of the serotonin transporter gene (5-HTTLPR) were at an increased risk relative to children who had a short allele of the same gene (Banny et al., 2013). Benjet, Thompson, and Gotlib (2010) tested similar questions and found that the 5-HTTLPR polymorphism did not predict level of depression symptoms but that the interaction between the polymorphism and relational peer victimization did significantly predict self-reported depressive symptomatology in girls. Benjet et al. found that having two 5-HTTLPR short alleles conferred vulnerability to depression in adolescent girls who were relationally victimized. These findings are not entirely consistent with the Banny et al. (2013) findings, but different methodology and design may account for the differential effects and highlight the need for future work. Clearly, these studies demonstrate the important advances that may be made when data on both genetic markers and peer context are known. Additional studies that rely on longitudinal twin designs have shown the benefit of examining gene–environment interaction processes linking peer victimization and various outcomes such as physical health problems (e.g., Brendgen et al., 2014), and future study in this area is needed to replicate and extend these initial findings.

Third, friendships and other *peer* relationships within school contexts are salient developmental contexts for *peer* victimization, and the majority of research will likely be based on these relationships, but future research is also needed to examine links with *other close relationships*. It is not sufficient to examine peer victimization only within school contexts, even though a majority of time is spent in school and a great majority of peer victimization occurs on school property (Turner, Finkelhor, Hamby, Shattuck, & Ormrod, 2011). Rather, the home and neighborhood context should be considered in our studies of peer victimization as well (e.g., Schwartz, Dodge, Pettit, Bates, & The Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2000). If the study of peer victimization and bullying subtypes is truly guided by a larger socioecological model (Espelage & Swearer, 2004), it is imperative that these other contexts and sources of socialization be incorporated into our future research program. To this end, we must have a larger ecological scope when examining friendships and the role of mutual antipathies, and also consider other relationships beyond these (Murray-Close & Crick, 2006; for review, see Card, 2010) to best understand developmental context. The distinction between voluntary or open field and involuntary or close field relationships is an important one (Collins, 2003), which may have implications for future relationship research and victimization subtypes. That is, relational victimization may be more common among voluntary relationships like friendships in which correlates of relational aggression (e.g., self-disclosure and intimacy) are valued, whereas physical victimization may be more likely to be displayed among involuntary familial or perceived involuntary romantic relationships. This recommendation to focus on multiple relationship systems is not new, as Crick and colleagues made a similar recommendation 14 years ago (Crick et al., 2001). Specifically, they stated that future work is "needed that extend this work to include other contexts such family relationships . . . and the workplace" (Crick et al., 2001, p. 211).

There are a number of socializing influences that may impact the development of peer victimization subtypes. Past theoretical models have articulated how multiple socializing agents may influence the development of aggressive behavior subtypes (Ostrov & Godleski, 2010) and presumably these influences also shape the development of peer victimization. These likely include but are not limited to parent–child and sibling relationships, experiences with older peers, teacher–child relationships, romantic relationships, and media exposure (Ostrov & Godleski, 2010), which should be included in future research. A classic study by Troy and Sroufe (1987) is an example of how other close relationship systems and in particular the attachment system may impact the development of peer victimization. Specifically, the authors examined various dyads in free play interactions, and they documented that peer victimization could be reliably linked to attachment security history. That is, the presence of an insecure attachment and in particular an avoidant attachment style was associated with peer victimization, whereas dyads with a securely attached child were associated with a lack of peer victimization. Certainly research on polyvictimization suggests important overlap among different types of victimization and maltreatment and greater focus is needed on how different types of maltreatment (e.g., sexual victimization, intimate partner violence, physical abuse, emotional unavailability) are related to peer victimization (e.g., Espelage, Low, & De La Rue, 2012). In addition, more research is needed exploring how victimization within one domain can generalize to aggression and victimization in other domains. For example, research has shown that sibling relationships may often be a training ground for aggression among peers (Stauffacher & DeHart, 2005). Children who are victimized by older siblings may learn from these experiences and in turn display aggression to peers and receive aggression from peers in future social interactions. There is also evidence that children learn from and model the aggression they initially experience as victims and subsequently display to other peers over time (Ostrov, 2010). However, these effects are likely bidirectional, and some aggressive behavior may increase the likelihood of future victimization. Consistent with this assertion, a recent study showed that reactive (i.e., reactionary, frustration-based) functions of relational aggression promoted increases in relational

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victimization over an academic year, whereas proactive (i.e., goal-driven) relational aggression was associated with decreases in relational victimization (Ostrov et al., 2014). Greater attention is needed to examine the bidirectional links between forms and functions of aggression and peer victimization subtypes across time.

A fourth critical question for future research is the *role of culture in the development of peer victimization*. Although studies certainly exist in numerous cultures and a number of studies have revealed the importance of culture, ethnicity, and context, there are clear directions for future programmatic research in this area. Causadias (2013) recently raised several challenges and suggestions for improving how culture is addressed in developmental psychopathology research, and the interested reader is directed to that publication. However, we mention a few of the recommendations as they have direct relevance to the study of peer victimization subtypes. Causadias argued that culture is often considered as part of a macro or distal source of influence, and alternatively culture may be considered at an individual or microlevel that facilitates changes in development. Further, interactions between culture and biology (i.e., cellular, genetic, physiological, and temperamental levels) should be explicitly examined at the microlevel (Causadias, 2013). For example, understanding how cultural expectations affect the development or trajectory of neurodevelopmental disorders should be more closely examined. Finally, Causadias urged scholars to have a greater appreciation for emic or culturally specific practices and processes that may impact the usefulness and meaning (and by extension the psychometric properties) of our measures. Certainly, although some social processes underlying peer victimization may be consistent across cultures (Schwartz, Chang, & Farver, 2001; Schwartz, Farver, Chang, & Lee-Shin, 2002), it is also conceivable and probable that processes and associations documented in Western cultures will not always transfer to non-Western cultures. For example, recent work in Japan on preadolescents' borderline features documented that physical victimization and physical aggression but not relational forms of victimization and aggression predicted increases in borderline personality features (Kawabata, Youngblood, & Hamaguchi, 2014), whereas prior work in the United States has documented robust associations between borderline features and relational forms of aggression (e.g., Crick, Murray-Close, & Woods, 2005). Thus, to reconcile these seemingly disparate findings, we echo recent calls for peer victimization scholars to work diligently to conceptualize culture in developmental ways (Prinstein & Giletta, in press) using an emic or culturally specific approach and to improve direct cultural assessment rather than assuming etic or culturally universal processes and assessments are valid. It is also the case that there may be some cultural contexts in which physical and overt forms of victimization are not tolerated, but gossip, social exclusion, and other forms of relational victimization are the modal means of harm, and much more attention to these issues are needed in cross-cultural work (e.g., French, Jansen, & Pidada, 2003). Moreover, relational victimization may be more harmful and developmentally salient for those with interdependent self-construals and collectivistic values (Ostrov & Godleski, 2010).

Fifth, in addition to the role of culture and ethnicity (see Dhami, Hoglund, Leadbeater, & Boone, 2005), more attention must be given to contextual differences such as *socioeconomic status* (SES) in the development of peer victimization. In particular, the role of poverty has been examined as a factor in the manifestation of peer victimization. SES may have differential associations with physical forms of aggression and victimization relative to relational forms of aggression and victimization. Prior studies have shown that lower levels of SES are associated with higher levels of physical aggression, but higher levels of SES are associated with higher levels of relational aggression (e.g., Bonica et al., 2003). These effects presumably reflect differences in language development associated with SES, but associations with language development constructs are inconsistent and depend on the type of language (i.e., expressive or receptive) and adopted measures (for a review, see Ostrov & Godleski, 2007). Despite some initial work on SES and relational victimization, more studies are needed to clarify and reconcile the inconsistent literature. In addition, to support the generalizability of our findings and to understand how processes may differ among children and adolescents from various backgrounds, future studies are needed with ethnically diverse samples (e.g., Kliewer, Dibble, Goodman, & Sullivan, 2012; Waasdorp, Bagdi, & Bradshaw, 2010) and among sexual minority youth (e.g., Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005).

Sixth, *gender* has often been examined as a moderator of the association between peer victimization subtypes and various salient outcomes. Gender has typically been conceptualized as a between-subjects factor, and a great deal of attention was given to the presence or absence of between-group gender differences with regard to physical and relational victimization (e.g., Crick et al., 1999; for reviews, see Crick, Casas, & Nelson, 2002; Crick et al., 2001). However, theoretical models have been introduced that suggest that relational aggression and in turn relational victimization are the modal type of aggression/peer victimization for girls across development, whereas physical aggression and victimization is the modal form of behavior for boys (Ostrov & Godleski, 2010). These assertions imply that we should also be accounting for within-group gender differences, and the influence or developmental salience of these behaviors

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may be gender linked given these gender normative patterns. Future work is still needed to examine how gender, gender identity, and gender-based self-construals affect the types of aggression and peer victimization behaviors that children and adolescence experience (Rose & Rudolph, 2006).

Seventh, *group processes should be given greater attention*. Peer victimization is often conceptualized at the dyadic level and within the context of aggressor–victim or bully–victim relationships (e.g., Schwartz, 2000). On the other hand, peer rejection is often conceptualized at the group level. We support this conceptualization and the notion that bullying is a relationship problem (see Pepler, Jiang, Craig, & Connolly, 2008). However, we also echo prior calls for research to examine how peer victimization and in particular peer victimization subtypes may operate within the larger peer group. In 2001, Bukowski and Sippola argued that events that occur within the peer group such as peer victimization (and perhaps more relevant for relational victimization that involves social exclusion and manipulation of group membership) should be conceptualized in accordance with a proper understanding of group processes and group functioning. It is beyond the scope of this article to fully elucidate the postulations of the Bukowski and Sippola (2001) model, but suffice it to say that greater attention is needed to both intrapersonal and interpersonal factors at the dyadic and group level that contribute to peer victimization subtypes. An example of fruitful efforts in this area may be found within studies addressing various aggression/victimization roles (e.g., bully, defender of the victim, outsider, victim) that peers assume in typical bullying contexts (e.g., Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1996) even in preschool (e.g., Camodeca, Caravita, & Coppola, 2014). A second example of rewarding directions include recent studies that have, for example, found associations between adolescents' bullying and likeability as assessed with innovative social network analysis techniques (e.g., Sentse, Kiuru, Veenstra, & Salmivalli, 2014).

Finally, as a field we needed to first establish a rudimentary understanding of the causes, course, and outcomes associated with relational aggression and victimization prior to the development of intervention efforts (Geiger, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Crick, 2004). Initial work has helped to establish the scope of the construct and assessment instruments, as well as the prevalence of the problem (Geiger et al., 2004). Although, we still have some work to do with understanding the prevalence and long-term course of relational aggression and relational victimization, we have come a long way in the last two decades, and we must turn our collective attention to the *development and testing of effective preventive interventions for relational forms of aggression and peer victimization*. There are several promising programs and approaches for addressing relational aggression (see Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010). However, there are comparatively fewer evidenced-based or promising approaches for explicitly addressing relational victimization. One exception is the aforementioned intervention developed by Leadbeater and colleagues called the WITS program (Leadbeater et al., 2003). WITS is a literacy-based and universal program for school-aged children that has shown intriguing effects and moderate levels of reduction for the targeted peer victimization experiences and increases in social competence (Leadbeater & Hoglund, 2006; Leadbeater et al., 2003). Another efficacious approach known as Second Step has been shown to be effective at reducing levels of social exclusion, which is a core component of relational aggression (van Schoiack-Edstrom, Frey, & Beland, 2002). Presumably these effects would also result in reductions in relational victimization, however that was not tested. Of note, a recent trial of Second Step was effective for reducing physical aggression among sixth graders but did not result in significant decreases in relational aggression, which was measured differently relative to the prior trial (Espelage, Low, Polanin, & Brown, 2013). Taken together, more work is needed to evaluate the efficacy of this program for relational aggression and victimization. Recent work using the KiVa antibullying curriculum among Finnish youth (e.g., Karna et al., 2011) has also demonstrated promising findings with regard to multiple subtypes of bullying and peer victimization including electronic forms of victimization (Williford et al., 2013). Finally, the initial trial of the Early Childhood Friendship Project has shown large reductions in relational aggression and physical victimization, moderate reductions in physical aggression, and small effects for relational victimization (Ostrov et al., 2009). The Early Childhood Friendship Project was developed on several principles, which included but was not limited to the following: (a) Social modeling of problem solving and conflict resolution strategies in a developmentally appropriate manner (e.g., puppets and stories) would decrease aggression and victimization, (b) reductions in classroom-level aggressive behavior would result from modifying reinforcement contingencies within the peer context, and (c) social and emotional skills training would reduce aggression/victimization and enhance positive interactions among peers, as well as facilitate friendship formation. Despite these initial promising findings we call for additional programs that are developed specifically for addressing relational victimization with greater attention to understanding the specific mechanisms underlying the aforementioned effective interventions. The assumption that intervention programs geared toward reducing relational aggression will simultaneously reduce relational victimization may be erroneous and targeted efforts are likely needed.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the field has greatly progressed from Olweus's (1978) initial research on bullying behaviors and Crick and Grotpeter's (1996) introduction of relational forms of victimization into the literature. However, even with the expansion of the literature and the current special issue, we have much work left to do in order to further our understanding of physical and relational peer victimization. As can be assumed from the aforementioned future directions, a developmental psychopathology perspective will allow us to broadly understand the developmental trajectories related to peer victimization and recognize the adaptive and maladaptive associations with being victimized. Although peer victimization scholarship is a burgeoning literature, we believe that with a more focused approach that emphasizes our understanding of how the subtypes of peer victimization differ across individuals, our understanding and ability to help those children and adolescents being victimized will continue to improve.

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