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## Relational and Physical Victimization Within Friendships: Nobody Told Me There'd Be Friends Like These

Nicki R. Crick<sup>1,3</sup> and David A. Nelson<sup>2</sup>

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In past research, relational and physical forms of peer victimization have been identified that have been shown to be significantly associated with social–psychological maladjustment. These forms of victimization, although studied primarily within the group peer context, also occur within dyadic relationships such as friendships. Gender differences in friend victimization and the association between friend victimization and children's social–psychological adjustment were examined. Results showed that boys were more physically victimized by their friends than were girls. Girls were more relationally than physically victimized by their friends. Friend victimization was related to adjustment difficulties for both boys and girls; however, friend physical victimization was particularly related to boys whereas friend relational victimization was particularly related to girls. The implications of these findings for future research and intervention with victimized children are discussed.

**KEY WORDS:** peer victimization; friendship; adjustment.

The plight of victims of childhood aggression has been brought into focus with an increasing amount of empirical attention (e.g., Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Olweus, 1993; Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988). Relevant studies have not only increased in number but also in conceptual sophistication and breadth, with emphasis on the varied experiences and backgrounds of children who are victimized by peers. For example, early studies focused primarily on boys and on the types of victimization most common among boys (i.e., physical victimization), whereas more recent studies have included a relational form of peer maltreatment. In contrast to physical aggression, in which physical damage or physical intimidation serves as the vehicle of harm, relationally aggressive acts are those in which damage to relationships (or the threat of damage) serves as the means of harm (e.g., using social exclusion as a form of retaliation; for a review see Crick et al., 1999). Research conducted within

the United States and other countries has shown that children and adolescents view relational aggression as mean, hostile, and aggressive (e.g., Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996; French, Jansen, & Pidada, 2002). Numerous studies have demonstrated that victimization via either physical or relational aggression is associated with significant adjustment problems including social difficulties, internalizing problems, and externalizing problems (e.g., Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999; Hodges, Malone, & Perry, 1997; Olweus, 1993; Perry et al., 1988).

To date, most of the previous research regarding victimization has focused on the larger peer context (e.g., being the frequent target of classmates' aggressive acts). Few studies have directly examined the possibility that peer victimized children may experience similar treatment in other relationship contexts. Expanding our research focus to include other relationships, especially those that may hold greater significance for children (e.g., dyadic friendships), seems important as these contexts may either diminish or reinforce the peer victimized child's vulnerabilities.

Relatively few studies have specifically considered the friendships of victimized children. Of those that do exist, several have looked at social factors that may either decrease or exacerbate victimization patterns. Most

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typically, friendship has been implicated as a contributor to the well-being of victimized children. For example, Hodges et al. (1997) posited that victimization results not only from the victim's behavioral vulnerabilities but is also due to a compromised social position. Consistent with this hypothesis, results of their study showed that both the number and nature of a child's friends moderated the relation between adjustment (e.g., internalizing problems) and victimization. Specifically, having many friends or having friends who were protective buffered children from the negative effects of peer victimization. Similarly, findings from two additional studies have demonstrated that children with numerous friends are less likely to be victimized than children who lack friends (Bukowski, Sippola, & Boivin, 1995; Malone & Perry, 1995).

In another study, Kochenderfer and Ladd (1997) explored the nature of physically victimized children's responses to peer aggression and their relation to reduced versus continued physical victimization in kindergarten. For boys, "fighting back" strategies were related to continued victimization, whereas "having a friend help" reduced the likelihood of subsequent victimization. These results provide additional evidence that at least some victimized children benefit from friendships. The emphasis in these studies on the importance of supportive friendships is in line with recent peer relations research (not limited to victimization alone) that has suggested that adverse experiences in the peer group (i.e., peer rejection, peer victimization) may be buffered by the rewards of a mutual friendship (Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1993; Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999; Parker & Asher, 1993).

Although the above studies suggest some possible benefits of friendship for victimized children, they provide little information regarding the general quality of victimized children's best friendships or their relative satisfaction with these friendships. Results from several studies indicate that the friendships of victimized children may be troubled. Malone and Perry (1995) found that many victims tend to associate with friends who are weak, have internalizing problems, and are victimized as well, thereby compromising the security that friendships might otherwise provide. Further, findings from two studies indicate that children who are victimized within the larger peer group context (i.e., classrooms) are also exposed to these aversive behaviors within the dyadic, friendship context (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996; Grotmeter, Geiger, Nukulki, & Crick, 2000). The present research was designed to extend past victimization research through the study of peer maltreatment as it occurs within the dyadic context of friendship.

Our first objective was to provide an initial evaluation of gender differences in friend relational and physical

victimization. We were interested in both within-gender comparisons (e.g. the frequency of girls' experience of friend relational vs. friend physical victimization) and between-gender comparisons (e.g., the frequency of boys' vs. girls' experience of friend relational and physical victimization). Past research has shown that during middle childhood, children's friendships are largely with same-gender peers (Parker & Asher, 1993). Thus, if victimized by their friends during this developmental period, boys are most likely to be victimized by male friends and girls by female friends. On the basis of these findings, and given that physical aggression is relatively rare among girls whereas relational aggression is relatively common, we hypothesized that girls would be more likely to experience relational, as opposed to physical, victimization within their friendships. In contrast to girls, there is some evidence that boys experience both relational and physical aggression within the larger peer context (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996). Thus, we hypothesized that boys would either experience higher levels of physical, as opposed to relational, aggression within their friendships (i.e., because, in general, relational aggression is less common among boys than is physical aggression), or they would experience similar levels of physical and relational aggression at the hands of their friends.

The second objective of this study was to determine whether, as has been shown in past studies of peer victimization, friend victimization is associated with significant social-psychological adjustment problems for children. Past studies provide robust evidence that peer victimization within the group context, both relational and physical, is related to numerous serious adjustment difficulties including social problems (e.g., peer rejection), internalizing problems (e.g., depression), and externalizing problems (e.g., lack of self-restraint) (e.g., Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Hodges et al., 1999; Olweus, 1992; Perry et al., 1988). Given the salience of close, dyadic peer relationships for children (Parker & Asher, 1993; Sullivan, 1953), victimization within the friendship context may be particularly damaging and hurtful. In contrast to maltreatment by members of the peer group, in which victimization involves children brought together by external factors (e.g., being assigned to the same classroom at school), friend victimization involves betrayal by a trusted, self-selected companion. Consequently, we hypothesized that friend victimization would be associated with serious and significant adjustment problems.

To address the study objectives, relational and physical victimization were both assessed within the friend context using an instrument developed in past research (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996). Indicators of adjustment assessed were selected on the basis of their demonstrated

association with peer victimization in past research (i.e., social maladjustment, internalizing problems, and externalizing problems; Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Olweus, 1993; Perry et al., 1988). Multiple informants' evaluations of children's adjustment difficulties were obtained including self, peer, and teacher reports.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants included 496 children, 114 in grade three (54 boys and 60 girls), 81 in grade four (47 boys and 34 girls), 148 in grade five (69 boys and 79 girls), and 153 in grade six (74 boys and 79 girls), recruited from their elementary schools located in several small- to moderately sized towns in the Midwest. The sample included 15.3% African Americans, 84.3% European Americans, and 0.4% other ethnicities. All participants had written parental consent to take part in the study (consent rate exceeded 80%).

### Identification of Mutual Friendships

To identify children's mutual friendships, children were provided with class rosters and were asked to nominate up to three classmates they considered to be their first, second, and third best friends. Following procedures used in past research (e.g., Grotzinger & Crick, 1996; Parker & Asher, 1993), children were identified as having a "mutual friendship" if one of the children nominated as a best friend also reciprocally nominated him/her as a "best friend," "second best friend," or "third best friend." Attempts were made to include each child's highest rated friendship. Mutual friendships were identified for 309 children (142 boys and 167 girls). Only these children are included in subsequent analyses. Comparison of the children with mutual friendships and those without revealed that girls were more likely than boys to have mutual friendships. Older and younger children were similar in their rates of mutual friendships. Children with mutual friendships were less likely than those without to experience adjustment problems (e.g., depressive symptoms, peer rejection).

### Assessment of Friend Victimization

Friend relational and physical victimization were assessed with the Friend Relational and Physical Aggression subscales of the Friendship Qualities Measure—Self-Report (FQM-S; Grotzinger & Crick, 1996). The Friend Relational Aggression subscale consists of four items (e.g.,

My friend ignores me when he is mad at me; My friend tells me she won't like me anymore unless I do what she says), and is designed to assess the degree to which children are the targets of their friends' relationally aggressive behaviors. The Friend Physical Aggression subscale consists of three items (e.g., My friend hits and kicks me when he is mad at me; My friend pushes and shoves me when she is mad at me) and is designed to assess the degree to which children are the targets of their friends' physically aggressive behaviors. Children responded to each item on the FQM with respect to their identified mutual friend (i.e., the name of each child's mutual friend was inserted into the questionnaire). Responses to each item can range from 1 (*Not at all true*) to 5 (*Always true*). Children's responses to the items on these subscales were summed to yield total friend relational victimization and physical victimization scores (Cronbach's alphas were .72 and .79, respectively, for the present sample). The correlation between friend relational and physical victimization was  $r = .61, p < .001$ .

### Assessment of Social–Psychological Adjustment

#### *Social Adjustment*

A peer-nomination sociometric was administered that included peer rejection and peer acceptance items (i.e., nominations of disliked and liked peers; Coie & Dodge, 1983) and these were used as peer reports of social adjustment. Children were provided with class rosters and were asked to nominate up to three classmates for each of the two items. The total number of disliked and liked nominations each child received from peers was standardized within classroom and these scores were used in subsequent analyses.

The Franke and Hymel (1984) Social Anxiety Scale, a measure with favorable reliability and validity (Crick & Grotzinger, 1995; Franke & Hymel, 1984), was used to assess self-reports of social anxiety and avoidance. The two subscales included in this instrument each consist of six items, Social Anxiety (e.g., I worry a lot about what other kids think of me), and Social Avoidance (e.g., If I had a choice, I'd rather do something by myself than do it with other kids). Responses to each item can range from 1 (*Not at all true about me*) to 5 (*Always true about me*). Children's responses to the items within each subscale were summed to yield total scores.

To assess loneliness and social dissatisfaction, the Asher and Wheeler (1995) loneliness measure was used. This reliable and valid scale consists of 16 items that assess loneliness (e.g., I have nobody to talk to at school) and 8 filler items (e.g., I like to read). Responses to each

item can range from 1 (*Not at all true about me*) to 5 (*Always true about me*). Children's responses to the loneliness items were summed to yield a total score.

### *Internalizing and Externalizing Problems*

The teacher form of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), an instrument with demonstrated reliability and validity (e.g., Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1981; 1991), was used to assess children's internalizing problems (e.g., fears s/he might do something bad; cries a lot) and externalizing problems (e.g., argues a lot, doesn't seem to feel guilty after misbehaving). Although the complete CBCL consists of 118 items, only the 69 items that assess these two constructs were rated by teachers in this study. The response scale for each item ranges from 0 (*not true of this child*) to 2 (*very true or often true of this child*). For this sample, Cronbach's alpha was .97 for the externalizing scale and .89 for the internalizing scale.

Children's self-reports of internalizing and externalizing problems were assessed with the Psychological Distress and Self Restraint subscales of the short form of the Weinberger Adjustment Inventory (WAI; 37 items), a measure with demonstrated reliability and validity (Crick, 1997; Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Ford, & Feldman, 1989; Tublin, Weinberger). The Psychological Distress subscale assesses anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and low well-being (e.g., I often feel sad or unhappy; I am not very sure of myself) whereas the Self Restraint subscale assesses impulse control problems, inability to suppress anger, lack of consideration for others, and lack of responsibility (e.g., People who get me angry better watch out; I do things without giving them enough thought). Responses to each item can range from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*always true*). Children's responses to the items were summed within subscales to yield total scores. Cronbach's alpha was .81 for the Psychological Distress scale and .85 for the Self Restraint scale for this sample.

### **Administration Procedures**

Children completed the instruments described above during two, 60-min group sessions conducted within their classrooms. During the first session, children completed the peer sociometric, the mutual friends questionnaire, the distress/self restraint measure, and four other measures that are not part of this study. During the second session, children completed the loneliness measure, the Social Anxiety/Avoidance scale, the Friendship Qualities Measure, and one other measure that was not part of the present research. During each group session, each item of each measure was read aloud by a trained administrator, and trained graduate and undergraduate assistants were available to answer questions. Teachers completed the CBCL for each of their participating students concurrently with the administration of the group session within their classrooms.

### **RESULTS**

Preliminary analyses were first conducted to examine the characteristics of the adjustment measures for this sample (see Table I for intercorrelations among the adjustment measures and Table II for descriptive statistics). Next, three sets of analyses were conducted designed to (a) evaluate gender and grade differences in friend victimization, (b) evaluate the association between friend victimization and social-psychological adjustment, and (c) assess the relative contribution of friend relational victimization versus friend physical victimization to the prediction of adjustment.

### **Gender Differences in Friend Victimization**

To evaluate gender- and developmentally related grade differences in friend victimization, a 2 (Gender)  $\times$  2

**Table I.** Intercorrelations Among Measures

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Peer acceptance	1.00	-.31**	.01	-.09	-.09	.01	.03	-.11	-.12
2. Peer rejection		1.00	.10	.19*	.34**	.16*	-.20*	.14	.35**
3. Social anxiety			1.00	.16*	.35**	.38**	.01	-.02	-.06
4. Social avoidance				1.00	.48**	.27**	-.13	.08	.07
5. Loneliness					1.00	.55**	-.23**	.09	.15
6. Psychological distress						1.00	.40**	.12	.07
7. Self-restraint							1.00	-.16*	-.47**
8. Internalizing								1.00	.40**
9. Externalizing									1.00

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table II.** Descriptive Statistics for All Measures by Gender

Variable	Girls		Boys	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Peer acceptance	0.40	0.89	0.35	0.91
Peer rejection	-0.23	0.78	-0.08	0.88
Social anxiety	18.05	4.81	16.50	4.53
Social avoidance	11.56	4.24	11.91	4.68
Loneliness	27.71	9.88	30.23	12.19
Psychological distress	28.58	7.71	28.69	7.55
Self-restraint	47.81	7.51	40.59	8.74
Internalizing	8.85	7.52	10.32	9.57
Externalizing	7.16	11.32	14.46	13.87

(Grade: Third/Fourth vs. Fifth/Sixth) × 2 (Type of Friend Victimization) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted in which children’s average friend relational and average friend physical victimization scores served as the dependent variables. This analysis yielded a significant main effect of friend victimization type,  $F(1, 306) = 48.2, p < .001$ , indicating that children reported significantly higher levels of friend relational victimization ( $M = 1.7, SD = 0.8$ ) than friend physical victimization ( $M = 1.4, SD = 0.8$ ). The gender main effect was also significant,  $F(1, 306) = 14.0, p < .001$ , indicating that boys reported higher levels of friend physical victimization ( $M = 3.4, SD = 1.6$ ) than did girls ( $M = 2.8, SD = 1.8$ ). However, they did not report higher levels of friend relational victimization. The main effect of grade was nonsignificant.

The ANOVA also yielded a significant interaction of gender and friend victimization type,  $F(1, 306) = 27.7, p < .001$ . To investigate this interaction further, simple effects 2 (Friend victimization type) repeated measures ANOVAs were computed separately for boys and girls. For boys, this analysis did not yield a significant effect. However, for girls, the friend victimization main effect reached significance,  $F(1, 166) = 87.1, p < .001$ , indicating that girls reported significantly higher levels of relational aggression within their friendships ( $M = 1.7, SD = 0.8$ ) relative to physical aggression ( $M = 1.2, SD = 0.5$ ).

Gender differences in friend victimization were further explored via descriptive analyses. First, three extreme groups of children victimized by their friends were identified. Specifically, children with friend physical victimization scores greater than 1 *SD* above the sample mean and friend relational victimization scores less than 1 *SD* above the sample mean were considered physically victimized by friends ( $n = 19$ ). Children with friend relational victimization scores greater than 1 *SD* above the mean and friend physical victimization scores less than 1 *SD* above the mean were classified as relationally victimized by friends

( $n = 28$ ). Children with both physical and relational friend victimization scores greater than 1 *SD* above the mean were considered physically plus relationally victimized by their friends ( $n = 19$ ). The percentage of boys versus girls classified into each of these three groups was next computed. Results showed that 11.3% of boys were physically victimized by their friends relative to 1.8% of girls. Further, 5.6% of boys were relationally victimized by friends versus 12.0% of girls. Finally, 9.9% of boys were physically plus relationally victimized by friends compared to 3.0% of girls. These results provide evidence that if relational victimization had not been assessed, in addition to physical victimization, we would have failed to identify 71.4% of victimized girls and 21.1% of victimized boys.

**Association Between Friend Victimization and Adjustment**

The associations among friend physical and relational victimization and social–psychological adjustment were first evaluated with correlation coefficients, computed separately for boys and girls (see Table III). Analyses revealed that, for boys, physical victimization within the friendship context was significantly related to relatively high levels of social anxiety, social avoidance, loneliness, psychological distress, peer rejection, internalizing problems, and externalizing difficulties. For girls, friend physical victimization was significantly associated with relatively high levels of social anxiety, social avoidance, loneliness, and externalizing difficulties.

For friend relational victimization, analyses of associations for boys indicated that relational aggression

**Table III.** Correlations Between Friend Victimization and Social–Psychological Adjustment

Adjustment indices	Friend physical victimization		Friend relational victimization	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Social adjustment				
Peer acceptance	-.15	-.03	-.17	.03
Peer rejection	.25**	.08	.08	.14
Social anxiety	.18*	.20*	.12	.34***
Social avoidance	.24**	.26**	.15	.32***
Loneliness	.40***	.25**	.33***	.41***
Internalizing and externalizing problems				
Psychological distress	.20*	.14	.21**	.30***
Self-restraint	-.12	-.07	-.07	-.23**
Internalizing	.30***	.09	.35***	-.01
Externalizing	.27**	.24**	.18*	.30***

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

within the friendship context was associated with relatively high levels of loneliness, psychological distress, internalizing problems, and externalizing difficulties. For girls, friend relational victimization was related to relatively high levels of social anxiety, social avoidance, loneliness, psychological distress, externalizing difficulties, and relatively low levels of self restraint.

### Relative Contributions of Friend Relational and Friend Physical Victimization to Adjustment

The next step in our assessment of the relation between friend victimization and social-psychological adjustment was to evaluate the relative contribution of friend relational and friend physical victimization to the prediction of concurrent adjustment. Two sets of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted for boys and girls respectively in which the social-psychological adjustment indices served as the dependent variables and children's within-friendship physical and relational victimization scores served as independent variables. In each analysis, grade (two levels: 1 = third and fourth graders; 2 = fifth and sixth graders) was entered at Step 1 to control for developmentally related age differences.

In the first set of equations for boys, friend physical victimization scores were entered at Step 2 and friend relational victimization scores were entered at Step 3. This allowed us to assess the degree to which friend relational victimization uniquely predicted maladjustment beyond the contribution of friend physical victimization (see Table IV for  $R^2$  change values). Results of Step 2 analyses showed that friend physical victimization was significantly related to peer rejection,  $F(2, 127)$  change = 8.4,  $p < .01$ ;

social anxiety,  $F(2, 127)$  change = 4.3,  $p < .05$ ; social avoidance,  $F(2, 127)$  change = 8.3,  $p < .01$ ; loneliness,  $F(2, 127)$  change = 23.3,  $p < .001$ ; psychological distress,  $F(2, 127)$  change = 5.6,  $p < .05$ ; internalizing problems,  $F(2, 127)$  change = 13.4,  $p < .001$ ; and externalizing difficulties,  $F(2, 127)$  change = 10.0,  $p < .01$ . Furthermore, results of Step 3 analyses demonstrated that friend relational victimization added significantly to friend physical victimization in the prediction of internalizing problems,  $F(3, 126)$  change = 6.6,  $p < .05$ . Therefore, for boys, friend relational victimization provided unique information about internalizing problems that was not provided by friend physical victimization alone.

In order to assess the unique contribution of friend physical victimization for boys, friend relational victimization scores were entered at Step 2 and friend physical victimization scores at Step 3 in the second set of equations for boys (see Table IV for  $R^2$  change values). Results of Step 2 analyses showed that friend relational victimization was significantly related to loneliness,  $F(2, 127)$  change = 14.1,  $p < .001$ ; psychological distress,  $F(2, 127)$  change = 6.4,  $p < .05$ ; internalizing problems,  $F(2, 127)$  change = 20.1,  $p < .001$ ; and externalizing difficulties,  $F(2, 127)$  change = 4.0,  $p < .05$ . Furthermore, results of Step 3 analyses showed that friend physical victimization added significantly to friend relational victimization in the prediction of peer rejection,  $F(3, 126)$  change = 11.0,  $p < .01$ ; social avoidance,  $F(3, 126)$  change = 4.9,  $p < .05$ ; loneliness,  $F(3, 126)$  change = 8.6,  $p < .01$ ; and externalizing difficulties,  $F(3, 126)$  change = 5.8,  $p < .05$ . Thus, friend physical victimization among boys provided unique information about several adjustment indices that was not accounted for by friend relational victimization.

**Table IV.**  $R^2$  Change Values for Hierarchical Regression Equations Predicting Boys' Social-Psychological Adjustment from Maltreatment by Friends

Adjustment indices	First set of regressions		Second set of regressions	
	Step 2: $R^2$ change for friend physical victimization	Step 3: $R^2$ change for friend relational victimization	Step 2: $R^2$ change for friend relational victimization	Step 3: $R^2$ change for friend physical victimization
Social adjustment				
Peer acceptance	.02	.01	.03	.00
Peer rejection	.06**	.02	.01	.08**
Social anxiety	.03*	.00	.01	.02
Social avoidance	.06**	.00	.03	.04*
Loneliness	.15***	.00	.10***	.06**
Internalizing and externalizing problems				
Psychological distress	.04*	.01	.05**	.00
Self-restraint	.01	.00	.01	.01
Internalizing	.09***	.04**	.14***	.00
Externalizing	.07**	.00	.03*	.04*

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table V.**  $R^2$  Change Values for Hierarchical Regression Equations Predicting Girls' Social–Psychological Adjustment from Maltreatment by Friends

Adjustment indices	First set of regressions		Second set of regressions	
	Step 2: $R^2$ change for friend physical victimization	Step 3: $R^2$ change for friend relational victimization	Step 2: $R^2$ change for friend relational victimization	Step 3: $R^2$ change for friend physical victimization
Social adjustment				
Peer acceptance	.00	.00	.00	.00
Peer rejection	.00	.02	.02	.00
Social anxiety	.04*	.08***	.12***	.00
Social avoidance	.07**	.04**	.10***	.01
Loneliness	.06**	.12***	.18***	.00
Internalizing and externalizing problems				
Psychological distress	.02	.08***	.09***	.00
Self-restraint	.01	.05**	.05**	.01
Internalizing	.01	.01	.00	.01
Externalizing	.06**	.04**	.09***	.01

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

In the first set of equations for girls, friend physical victimization scores were entered at Step 2 and friend relational victimization scores were entered at Step 3 (see Table V for  $R^2$  change values). Results of Step 2 analyses showed that friend physical victimization was significantly related to social anxiety,  $F(2, 144)$  change = 5.8,  $p < .05$ ; social avoidance,  $F(2, 144)$  change = 10.1,  $p < .01$ ; loneliness,  $F(2, 144)$  change = 9.9,  $p < .01$ ; and externalizing difficulties,  $F(2, 144)$  change = 8.7,  $p < .01$ . In addition, results of Step 3 analyses showed that friend relational victimization added significantly to friend physical victimization in the prediction of social anxiety,  $F(3, 143)$  change = 13.1,  $p < .001$ ; social avoidance,  $F(3, 143)$  change = 7.1,  $p < .01$ ; loneliness,  $F(3, 143)$  change = 23.0,  $p < .001$ ; psychological distress,  $F(3, 143)$  change = 12.3,  $p < .001$ ; self restraint (negatively related),  $F(3, 143)$  change = 7.9,  $p < .01$ ; and externalizing difficulties  $F(3, 143)$  change = 6.2,  $p < .05$ . Therefore, friend relational aggression provided unique information about numerous adjustment indices that was not explained by friend physical victimization.

Finally, in the second set of equations for girls, friend relational victimization scores were entered at Step 2 and friend physical victimization scores were entered at Step 3 (see Table V for  $R^2$  change values). Results of Step 2 analyses showed that friend relational victimization was significantly associated with social anxiety,  $F(2, 144)$  change = 19.5,  $p < .001$ ; social avoidance,  $F(2, 144)$  change = 16.5,  $p < .001$ ; loneliness,  $F(2, 144)$  change = 34.7,  $p < .001$ ; psychological distress,  $F(2, 144)$  change = 14.8,  $p < .001$ ; self restraint (negatively related),  $F(2, 144)$  change = 7.9,  $p < .01$ ; and externalizing difficulties,  $F(2, 144)$  change = 14.2,  $p < .001$ . Results of Step

3 analyses showed that in contrast to the findings obtained for boys, friend physical victimization did not add significantly to friend relational victimization in the prediction of any of the adjustment indices.

**DISCUSSION**

Results of this study provide initial evidence that victimization within the friendship dyad is associated with significant adjustment difficulties for children. Although friend victimization has been overlooked in most past investigations of peer maltreatment, these results demonstrate that maltreatment that occurs within this context warrants serious attention in future research. The present findings also indicate that the salience of specific forms of friend victimization differs from boys versus girls.

Analyses of gender differences in friend physical and relational victimization indicated that the two forms of maltreatment occur with similar frequency in the friendships of boys whereas relational victimization is more typical of girls' friendships. Additionally, identification of children who experienced relatively high levels of friend victimization revealed that the likelihood of exposure to friend relational versus physical maltreatment varied for boys and girls. Physical victims were primarily boys, relational victims were primarily girls, and physical plus relational victims included both boys and girls (but were most likely to be boys). This pattern is similar to that found in past research for gender differences in peer group victimization (Crick & Bigbee, 1998). Taken together, these findings indicated that the focus in past research on physical forms of victimization has greatly limited our



understanding of peer maltreatment for both genders, but particularly for girls. As further illustration of this point, for the present sample, a focus solely on friend physical victimization, to the exclusion of friend relational victimization, would have failed to identify the majority of girls who experienced maltreatment by their friends (more than 70%).

The significance of friend victimization was further highlighted by the evaluation of children's social-psychological adjustment. As hypothesized, victimization within the friend dyad was associated with social difficulties, internalizing problems, and externalizing problems. Evaluation of the unique contribution of specific types of friend victimization to maladjustment revealed that exposure to friend relational versus friend physical victimization was related differentially to adjustment problems for boys and girls. For boys, friend relational victimization contributed little to the prediction of adjustment once physical aggression was taken into account whereas for girls, friend relational victimization added significantly to friend physical victimization in the prediction of adjustment. This pattern is highly consistent with past studies in which relationally aggressive episodes have been shown to be more distressful and upsetting for girls than for boys (Crick, 1995; Crick, Grotpeter, & Bigbee, 2002; Galen & Underwood, 1997). Although causal inferences cannot be drawn from the current data, it is possible that the emotional upset that many girls feel when subjected to relationally aggressive acts contributes to the development of adjustment problems, an hypothesis that is supported by recent theory and research linking interpersonal stress to depressive symptoms for females (see Garber & Flynn, 2001, for a recent review). Further, given the importance that girls place on establishing close, dyadic interactions during middle childhood (Maccoby, 1990), relationally aggressive behaviors may be particularly disturbing for girls when they are initiated by a desired companion or friend (i.e., because they threaten the closeness and possibly even the continuation of the relationship).

One of the most significant outcomes of the present research is the demonstration of the importance of a research focus on maltreatment in dyadic peer relationships, in addition to victimization in the larger peer group. A similar perspective has been offered by Dodge and Coie (1989). In a study of bully-victim dyads, these investigators found that victims submitted to the demands of bullies instead of resisting them. Further, they continued to interact with and mimic the play of their bully counterparts and did not indicate high dislike for them. Dodge and Coie speculated that this behavior is similar to the pattern in an emerging abusive relationship and may serve as a prototype for other relationships, both concurrent and

future. Similarly, our findings indicate that some victimized children may maintain interaction with their tormentors and may actually establish mutual friendships with them. If so, the troubled relationships of these children may prevent them from gaining the social skills and support that participation in friendship ideally provides, and as Dodge and Coie (1989) have proposed, may put them at risk for establishing future relationships that are abusive (e.g., romantic relationships).

Results of this study significantly contribute to our understanding of the overall relationship experiences of victimized children. Unfortunately, it appears that the predicament of peer victimized children extends to mutually chosen, dyadic relationships. Future research should be directed toward understanding the antecedents (e.g., maltreatment within parent-child or sibling relationships) and long-term consequences of friend victimization (e.g., involvement in abusive romantic relationships) as well as focusing on ways in which victimized children can be helped to select and maintain more adaptive, supportive friendships.

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