

12

Rejection and Victimization by Peers

Social Perception and Social Behavior Mechanisms

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In pioneering research, Olweus (1978) observed that a considerable number of students suffer from harassment by peers in their school classes. He called this phenomenon "bullying" and provided a definition that has guided much of the later research (see review in Schuster, 1996). Bullying, or peer harassment, is said to take place when an individual, unable to defend him- or herself, is exposed repeatedly and over a long period of time to intentional harm by one or several others, either directly (e.g., through physical assaults) or indirectly (e.g., through spreading rumors) (Olweus, 1978, 1992).

Many studies indicate that the phenomenon is quite frequent. Even though the reported prevalence rates vary considerably, possibly because of methodological differences (see Graham & Juvonen, 1998a; Pellegrini, Chapter 5, this volume; Schuster, 1996), it seems a fair estimate that about 5% of students suffer from peer harassment. For instance, Schuster (1997, 1999a) found that in each school class in diverse school types, there is at least one victim, and usually no more than two, summing up to 5% victims in the entire population.

In social groups, individuals may also suffer from other forms of adverse peer experiences, most notably, from rejection by peers. This phenomenon has been studied in a research tradition largely separate from that

investigating bullying (see Schuster, 1996). "Peer rejection" is defined operationally on the basis of sociometric choices. An individual is classified as rejected when many members of the group nominate him or her negatively along a like-dislike dimension and only few nominate this person positively (see Coie, Dodge, & Copotelli, 1982). Peer rejection is also quite prevalent, and figures converge at about 10% of schoolchildren (see, e.g., Asher, 1990; Newcomb & Bukowski, 1983; Schuster, 1999a).

CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN PEER HARASSMENT AND PEER REJECTION

The phenomena of "peer rejection," which has been studied for decades (see Moreno, 1934), and "bullying" (or "peer victimization" or "peer harassment"), which has been investigated only fairly recently, have important conceptual and empirical similarities (see Schuster, 1998). In both phenomena, the individual repeatedly experiences the negative attitudes of others in a social group over a long period of time.

These phenomena are also closely related empirically. For instance, in a study by Schuster (1997, 1999a), peer rejection was determined on the basis of the configuration of positive and negative sociometric nominations, and victimization status was determined on the basis of peer nominations. A substantial correlation was found ($r = .52$) between peer rejection and peer harassment, and almost all victimized students (18 of 22) were simultaneously rejected. Empirical relations between sociometric nominations and peer harassment of about this magnitude have also been reported by Boivin and Hymel (1997), Boulton and Smith (1994), Perry, Kusel, and Perry (1988), and Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, and Kaukiainen (1996). Thus, on both the conceptual and empirical levels, there are similarities between peer harassment and peer rejection. This suggests that theoretical ideas and research findings may be generalized from one to the other. In particular, research in the newer field of peer harassment, may profit from the more elaborate theorizing in the older field of peer rejection.

However, there are also important conceptual differences between the two phenomena. Most notably, a rejected child may not necessarily experience negative actions in addition to negative peer attitude, and negative actions may not have been carried out with the intent of harming the target. It is quite conceivable that peers even pity an individual nobody likes, yet they themselves do not want to spoil their class trip by sitting next to that child.

Accordingly, there are also empirical differences. The correlation between the two phenomena is less than perfect (see the earlier discussion), because not all rejected children are necessarily victimized. Of 48 rejected students in the study by Schuster (1997; 1999a), 30 were not victimized.

That is, two distinct subgroups of rejected students could be distinguished—the victimized–rejected, and the nonvictimized–rejected.

The less-than-perfect overlap between victimized and rejected children suggests that the two phenomena are not the same. How similar they are can be determined only by investigating whether mechanisms found to be central in one phenomenon are also operating in the other. The empirical research described in the following section investigates two possible mechanisms that may be involved in both phenomena: social perception (i.e., attribution) and social behavior processes (cooperative vs. competitive behavioral choices). In investigating the roles of these mechanisms, we focus on whether they are operating in peer rejection and harassment alike, or whether they have a different impact on each phenomenon.

SOCIAL PERCEPTION DETERMINANTS OF PEER HARASSMENT AND PEER REJECTION: THE ROLE OF CAUSAL ATTRIBUTIONS

The first group of processes addressed in this chapter concerns causal attributions, which have been documented to be important determinants of social motivation in general (see Weiner, 1995) and of peer rejection in particular (Juvonen, 1991). Specifically, in a series of studies to be described next, the causal attributions that victimized and/or rejected individuals make for their own behavioral outcomes, as well as the attributions peers make for the outcomes of individuals who suffer from victimization and/or rejection are investigated. In studying these attribution processes, we build both on research concerned with the antecedents of naive psychological explanations and on research addressing attributional consequences (cf. Heider, 1958).

Research investigating the antecedents of causal cognitions focuses on what kind of information determines causal attributions. Kelley (1967) has suggested that covariation information is the central determinant of causal judgments. According to Kelley, individuals attribute an effect to that cause that covaries with it. That is, individuals attribute the effect to that cause that is present when the effect is present and absent when the effect is absent. Further, Kelley maintains that individuals classify the range of possible causes into three broad categories: the person, the entity the person is interacting with, and the circumstances. To determine which of these three classes of causes the effect covaries with, individuals observe whether the effect is also present with other individuals. The information derived from this comparison is called “consensus.” Variations of the effect over diverse entities is also considered, and called “distinctiveness.” Finally, individuals observe whether the effect varies over time, and this is termed “consistency” information.

To illustrate, consider the case in which an effect (e.g., Paula fails to get along with her classmate Mary) covaries with the person (Paula) and

not with the entity (Mary). In this case, the effect occurs with low consensus (i.e., others do get along with Mary), high consistency (Paula never gets along with Mary), and low distinctiveness (Paula also does not get along with other classmates). Given this pattern of information, individuals clearly attribute the effect (i.e., not getting along) to the person (Paula) rather than the entity (i.e., Mary). If the effect, however, covaries with the entity (i.e., Mary) and not with the person (Paula), there would be high consensus (nobody gets along with Mary), high consistency (Paula never gets along with Mary), and high distinctiveness (i.e., Paula gets along with other classmates). Such a pattern of information reliably leads to attributions to the entity (i.e., Mary) and not to the person (Paula) (see, e.g., Försterling, 1989).

Attributions are not only driven by data (i.e., covariation information). They are also influenced by schematic assumptions (see Kelley, 1973). For instance, assume you had a strong expectancy that Mary does not get along with anybody, but you find she is one of the few individuals invited to an attractive social activity. In this case, expectancies may override covariation information (i.e., the low consensus information in this example) and may lead to an attribution of the unexpected success to external causes (e.g., help, such as interference by mother).

In addition to the antecedents of causal judgments, attributional research has identified important motivational and social/psychological consequences of causal ascriptions (see Weiner, 1986, 1995). For instance, when a person attributes failure to attain a goal in the achievement or the social domain to an internal and stable cause (e.g., “inability”) low expectations for future success and negative self-related affects will result. Likewise, if an observer attributes this person’s failure to his or her lack of ability, the observer may feel pity for the person, whereas an attribution of the person’s failure to lack of effort may cause the observer to experience anger toward him or her (see Weiner, 1986, 1995).

Causal explanations may also play an important role in the rejection and victimization processes. For example, with respect to the victimized/rejected individuals themselves, their attributions may influence their persistence in affiliative efforts. If a victimized individual interprets attacks or if a rejected individual interprets repulsions as being caused by his or her own personality instead of the aggressiveness of the attacker or the unfriendliness of the rejecting person, that individual will more likely experience shame rather than anger and give up his or her affiliation attempts. A child’s external attribution to the bully or the rejector will more likely lead to anger and/or attempts to affiliate with other children (Weiner, 1986, 1995).

Regarding peers, including bullies and rejectors, it can be assumed that their attributions may have far-reaching interpersonal consequences and may therefore also be an important part of the rejection and harassment processes. If peers think that a victimized individual has a low level of

is responsible for his or her own plight, they may experience less positive affect (e.g., pity) and be less willing to support the individual in his or her efforts at social contact or in warding off attacks (Weiner, 1986, 1995; Graham & Juvonen, Chapter 2, this volume).

In light of the importance of both target and peer perceptions, two studies were conducted in which the attributions of children who were the targets of rejection and/or harassment and the attributions by their peer groups were assessed (Schuster, 1999b). Also investigated was how these attributions were modifiable by covariation information (i.e., consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency).

Simultaneous assessment of attributions from both peers and targets also allowed a determination of the correspondence between the social perceptions of the victim or rejected individual and his or her peers. More specifically, it was possible to determine whether the affected individuals and their peers had similar or discrepant explanations for an effect. Lack of such correspondence should influence the behavior of both the target of rejection/harassment and his or her peers. Suppose, for instance, that student *R* blames his failure at math on the difficulty of the task, whereas everybody else believes that *R*'s failure was due to low ability. Because of this discrepancy between the student's own attribution and others' attributions for target failure, peers may perceive the target as being unrealistic (as they hold their own opinions to be more valid). This view may reinforce the rejection process. In fact, research by Försterling (e.g., Försterling & Rudolph, 1988) has shown that subjects liked those individuals less whom they believed to be unrealistic.

A discrepancy between self- and peer attributions may also be important from the perspective of the affected targets. Victims who realize that their peers make different attributions for their behavioral outcomes than they do themselves may feel treated unfairly. For instance, if they attribute an attack to the aggressive personality of a bully, but suspect that peers hold them responsible, they may feel hurt and offended. Consequently, they may withdraw instead of asking for help.

The impact of poor correspondence between self- and peer attributions will influence the individual's affects and behavior only inasmuch as an individual realizes that a discrepancy exists. Therefore, we also assessed the attributions peers expected the rejected or victimized targets to make themselves. Thus, perceived correspondence between peers' own attributions for the target's behavior and the attributions they expected from the target could be determined. Likewise, we assessed the attributions the rejected or victimized children expected their peers to make, and again determined the correspondence between their own attributions and those expected from their peers. Finally, some participants were provided with additional causal cues to investigate whether attributions are modifiable by covariation information.

We examined peer and self-attributions of victimized and rejected children in both the social and achievement domains. In the social domain, it was highly likely that participants had observed that social failures indeed covaried with the rejected target, because, by definition, the rejected person was disliked by most classmates. Therefore, experimentally provided covariation information may be overridden by strong preconceptions based on one's own prior experience. In the achievement domain, however, neither a positive nor negative judgment should be suggested a priori, because academic failures do not covary with social status (Boivin & Bégin, 1989).

To summarize, attributions that harassed and/or rejected children made for their own failures were assessed, as well as the attributions made by their peers for such events. In addition, the attributions each party expected from the other were elicited. Further, two domains and different patterns of covariation information were included.

Session 1

A first session served to assess both the social and victimization status of students from a total of 16 classes of grades 5, 7, and 11 (i.e., ages about 11, 13, and 17) in German "gymnasium" (highest school level). This first session was necessary because in Study 1, the status of the targets would be manipulated based on these assessments, and in Study 2 this assessed status served as the participant variable.

Students were asked to indicate the three peers whom they would prefer to sit next to on a bus excursion, and the three whom they would least like to sit next to. Following the procedure presented by Newcomb and Bukowski (1983), social status was determined by the configuration of positive and negative nominations. Rejected individuals, for example, had to receive at least seven negative nominations and, simultaneously, a number of positive nominations that were below the means of their respective grades.

To determine victimization status, students received the definition of peer harassment provided in the Olweus's (1989) Bullying Inventory. They indicated the peers in their classes whom they perceived to be harassed (according to this definition), as well as whether they perceived themselves as victims. Because peer judgments were highly consensual and distinct (see Schuster, 1999a), and correlated highly with teacher judgments ($r = .71$), victims in the present research studies are identified on the basis of the peer data.

Study 1

Study 1 investigated peers' social perceptions of the targets (e.g., victimized vs. non-victimized youth) as well as the attributions that peers expected the

targets themselves to be making. Only participants with an average social status (according to the operational definition by Newcomb and Bukowski, 1983, as mentioned earlier) were included as judges ($n = 242$).

These students read hypothetical scenarios in which they were asked to imagine themselves in a vacation camp, where they accidentally met some of their classmates. One afternoon, they were engaged in a paper chase (a game where at different stations different tasks have to be solved). Here, they could observe that X experienced a social failure, or a failure with the task. X was replaced with the name of a real classmate of varying social or victimization status. By including names of students of differing social and victimization status (for X), the status of the target was varied. For instance, participants read that Michael (a victimized and rejected peer in their own class) experienced difficulties getting in contact with the group at Station 1. They could also observe that Michael experienced failure with the task he had to solve at this station.

Finally, some participants received additional covariation information designed to lead to a person or to an entity attribution, whereas the rest of the participants did not receive such additional information. For instance, in the "person pattern" (discussed earlier), they would learn that others did not have any difficulties with this group and that Michael experienced these difficulties at other stations with other groups as well.

Participants indicated, on rating scales, the extent to which they perceived the failure to be caused by the person himself or by the entity (group/task). They also indicated how they assumed the targets would explain the respective failures themselves (i.e., "expected attributions").

As displayed in Table 12.1, the findings documented a "reputation bias" (cf. Hymel, 1986) with respect to rejected targets. In both the social and achievement domains, the failures of rejected targets were explained more by person causation than were the failures of students classified as average in social status. In real life, rejected individuals are indeed likely to experience more social failures; academic performance, however, does not covary with social status. Thus, the finding of more unfavorable attributions for rejected targets in both domains suggests that the judgments do

TABLE 12.1. Attributions Peers Made for Failures of Targets of Differing Status

Domain	Social status		Victimization status		Subgroups of rejected youth		
	R	A	V	NV	V-R	NV-R	NV-NR
Social	.68	-1.36	.94	-.88	.97	.33	-1.06
Achievement	.12	-.95	.49	-1.06	.44	-.27	-1.18

Note. Scores result from subtracting entity attributions from person attributions (i.e., higher values indicate more person causation). R, rejected; A, average; V, victimized; NV, nonvictimized; V-R, victimized-rejected; NV-R, nonvictimized-rejected; NV-NR, nonvictimized-nonrejected.

not merely reflect the covariation observations peers had themselves collected in the past with this particular target, but rather the operation of a more general bias.

The same reputational bias was found with respect to harassed (i.e., victimized) targets as compared with nonvictimized ones, again in both domains. In addition, the perceptions of the two subgroups of rejected (victimized-rejected and nonvictimized-rejected) targets did not differ from one another in either domain. Attributions for the two groups of rejected targets, however, differed significantly from those made for outcomes of the nonvictimized-nonrejected individuals (Table 12.1).

These data indicate that peers view the rejected targets, and likewise the victimized targets, negatively, perceiving them as personally responsible for their failures. Do they also perceive the target negatively in the sense that they expect him or her not to "acknowledge" what they think is the truth? That is, do peers expect the target to deviate from their own perceptions?

In fact, peers made more negative attributions for target failure than they expected the targets themselves to acknowledge. This held particularly true for the rejected youth. That is, the discrepancy between peers' own attributions and the attributions they expected from the targets themselves was significantly larger for the rejected group than for the average group (see Table 12.2). Similarly, the discrepancy between their own and expected attributions was greater for the victimized as compared with the nonvictimized-rejected and the nonvictimized-rejected) did not differ from one another, but each of them had a higher discrepancy score as the nonvictimized-nonrejected targets. These data suggest that peers have a strong negative bias with regard to rejected and victimized targets: Such targets are not only seen as personally responsible for failure, but also as not acknowledging this responsibility.

To summarize, it was clear that peers viewed the rejected and victimized targets negatively, as they (1) made more unfavorable attributions for their failures as compared with the failures of average, or nonvictimized,

TABLE 12.2. Discrepancy Scores between Peers' Own and Peers' Expected Attributions for Failures of Targets of Differing Status

Domain	Social status		Victimization status		Subgroups of rejected youth		
	R	A	V	NV	V-R	NV-R	NV-NR
Social	3.41	.78	3.17	1.29	3.44	3.37	.98
Achievement	2.57	1.20	2.71	1.18	2.81	2.27	1.02

Note. High scores indicate greater discrepancy between own and expected attributions. Abbreviations as in Table 12.1.

targets and (2) suspected that these target groups differed in their attributions from those the peers themselves made.

Given such an attributional bias, one wonders whether it is modifiable. The next analysis examined whether covariation information modified the causal attributions with respect to rejected targets. For instance, it examined whether the target was held less responsible when all others also failed (high consensus) as compared with the case when only these particular targets experienced difficulties (low consensus).

In fact, peers did use this type of information when judging some of the target groups. Consistent with the logic of the covariation principle, peers held the average person more personally responsible when he or she experienced failure with high consistency (i.e., in repeated trials), low distinctiveness (i.e., with other tasks as well), and low consensus (i.e., others did not fail at this task; person pattern) as compared with the target who experienced failure only with a certain task or social situation with which others also experienced failure (i.e., high consistency, high distinctiveness, and high consensus; entity pattern). When participants judged the rejected target, in contrast, this information did not exert any influence on the attributions made. Participants were negatively biased toward the rejected target and explained his or her failures unfavorably, regardless of person or entity information. The analyses comparing victims versus nonvictims revealed no differential impact of covariation information. However, the analyses for the subgroups of rejected targets again showed that, in the achievement domain, participants correctly used covariation information when judging targets who were neither victimized nor rejected but did not use this information when judging either of the subgroups of rejected targets.

To summarize, both rejected and victimized targets are seen negatively by their peer group (i.e., are held personally responsible for failure). This finding replicates, with very different material, the finding of a reputational bias by Hymel (1986) and extends the bias to peer harassment. Moreover, rejected and harassed targets are believed to deviate in their attributions from those of the observers. In addition, the negative attribution bias toward the rejected youth is not easily modifiable by covariation information, even though this information can be used with respect to average targets with no negative reputation.

Study 2

In a second study, the social and victimization status of participants ($n = 164$), rather than targets, were used as (quasi) independent variables. Hence, in Study 2 the procedure and experimental material of Study 1 were adapted to assess self-attributions (rather than attributions for target [stimulus person] failure as done in Study 1). Otherwise, Study 2 was largely identical to Study 1. Thus, it was assessed how rejected, victimized, and av-

erage individuals themselves explain their own failures, as well as the attributions they expected their peers to make about their failures.

With respect to the attributions made by participants of different status to explain their own behavioral outcomes, previous research has been inconsistent. Whereas Crick and Ladd (1993) found evidence for a self-serving bias in rejected children, the review by Dodge and Feldman (1990) suggested an opposite pattern, with more favorable attributions by popular children. Regarding victims, Graham and Juvonen (1998b) found that victims judged themselves to be more responsible for negative social events (i.e., they blamed themselves) than did nonvictims. There are no previous data concerning the attributions that rejected or victimized children expect from their peers or concerning the actual correspondence between self-attributions and others' attributions.

Reflecting the mixed findings in the rejection literature, the present data revealed no significant effect for social status or for victimization status for an individual's own attributions. That is, there was neither evidence for a self-serving bias or for self-derogation. In the social domain, however, there was a weak tendency for the rejected participants to blame themselves more for their failures than for those of average social status.

The next question was whether rejected and harassed children, as compared with other status groups, expect different attributions from their peers. Rejected and harassed individuals indeed suspected the reputational bias identified in Study 1. That is, rejected children expected peers to perceive them more responsible for both achievement and social failures than did average students. Similarly, harassed participants and the two subgroups of rejected students expected more person causation ascribed by peers than did nonvictimized-nonrejected children.

To summarize, Study 2 revealed no significant differences with regard to self-attributions for the groups differing in social or victimization status, except a nonsignificant tendency for more self-blame of the rejected group in the social domain. However, these groups differed significantly with regard to the attributions they expected their peers to be making about them. Rejected and victimized participants (realistically) were more likely than average and nonvictimized individuals to suspect that they would be held responsible for their social and achievement failures by their peers.

Discussion of the Studies on Social Perception

The studies clearly revealed that the peer group has a strong negative attributional bias toward rejected and victimized individuals. These youngsters are seen as having personally caused their own (hypothetical) social and achievement failures. This negative view may prevent children from experiencing pity for an affected individual, and thereby reduce the likelihood of help in critical situations (see Weiner, 1995).

Rejected and victimized individuals are seen not only as personally responsible, but also as not acknowledging their responsibility. That is, peers perceive the target individual to deviate from their own judgments. Because this deviation is most likely to be attributed to the "fault" of the rejected/harassed person, this person is therefore seen as unrealistic, which, in turn, may reinforce the negative evaluation (see Försterling & Rudolph, 1988).

The reputational bias described here is not easily modifiable. Contradictory covariation information, which participants have been shown to be able to use with respect to average targets, is not used with respect to rejected targets. This finding is consistent with research by Denham and Holt (1993), who demonstrated that once a low status is acquired, behavioral change does not necessarily improve it. The present findings point to the possibility that such behavioral changes may be "explained away" by attributing them to variable circumstances; this may result in a maintenance of the negative view of the acting individual.

Finally, rejected and victimized children do not share this negative view of their peers and do not feel that they are more responsible for failures than average children. However, rejected and victimized individuals realistically suspect that attributional biases are held against them.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOR DETERMINANTS OF PEER REJECTION AND PEER HARASSMENT: THE ROLE OF COMPETITIVE AND COOPERATIVE BEHAVIOR

The studies described earlier addressed the social perception (attribution) of victimized and rejected individuals. They indicated far-reaching similarities with regard to rejection and victimization. The studies to be described next extend the search for similarities and differences between rejected and victimized individuals to aspects of their social behavior. As in the analyses of attributional judgments, the investigation of the social behavior of the different status and victimization groups analyzes both the behavior of the rejected and/or victimized individuals and the corresponding behavior of their peers.

The specific subset of social behaviors addressed here concerns competitiveness and cooperativeness (or aggressiveness vs. submissiveness). These behaviors were selected on several grounds. First, they have anecdotally been claimed to be important by individuals suffering from severe victimization experiences. Jan Philipp Reemtsma, a victim of kidnapping in Germany, described his own behavior toward his captors: "There are two different ways to make people aggressive. One, if you submit too much, the other, if you swear at them and behave aggressively yourself. I tried to avoid both of these extremes, and behaved very politely" (Ein Stück Welt, 1996).

The interaction strategies addressed in this interview have already been

investigated in the literature on peer rejection, as well as in research on victimization. In research on peer rejection, it has been repeatedly documented that a heightened level of aggressiveness (and a lack of cooperativeness) can be found in rejected children. For instance, peers in a study by Coie et al. (1982) rarely named rejected children when they were to indicate for whom it held true that "this person is agreeable and cooperates—pitches in, shares, and gives everyone a turn." And in the study of Dodge (1983), trained observers found more hostile verbalizations, hitting of peers, and inappropriate behavior in rejected individuals. Given that (almost) all victimized children are also rejected, one can deduce that a lack of cooperative behavior and a high level of aggressive behavior may also play a central role in peer harassment.

However, research on victimization indicates, quite to the contrary, that victims tend to be unassertive or even submissive. For instance, Olweus (1978) interviewed victims and their mothers and found the victims to be less assertive as compared with their peers. Moreover, Schwartz, Dodge, and Coie (1993), in a longitudinal observation study, found evidence for the causal role of lack of assertiveness in later victimization. From the very beginning of repeated interactions with strangers, subsequent victims tried less than others to nonaggressively influence the behavior of their playmates or to initiate social conversation.

The discrepancy between the evidence for lack of cooperativeness, or a heightened level of aggressiveness, on one hand (rejection), and too much submissiveness, or lack of assertiveness, on the other hand (victimization), may indicate that despite the outlined conceptual and empirical commonalities, different mechanisms are operating in the phenomena of peer rejection and peer harassment. This discrepancy may also be due to methodological problems of data collection. Observation data are vulnerable to interpretation biases, and self-report data to social desirability tendencies. Neither literature—that on social status, nor that on harassment—has made use of classic social/psychological paradigms that provide standardized procedures for the conceptualization and empirical investigation of interpersonal tendencies (such as cooperation and/or competition), which are less vulnerable to the described types of bias.

One such paradigm that may be useful in the present context is the prisoners' dilemma game (see, e.g., Kelley & Stahelski, 1970). The prisoners' dilemma game is a classic social/psychological paradigm that has been used for decades to assess and investigate social motives and social behavior, including their situational and personal antecedents. It is based on the idea that the central features of interpersonal situations can be captured in a payoff matrix, which, in turn, can be represented within the context of "games." It is further assumed that participants' reactions in such games that are based on certain payoff matrices may be revealing of their strategies and motives within social interaction.

More specifically, in this game two interaction partners have a choice between a cooperative and a competitive strategy. If both interaction partners choose the cooperative strategy, both achieve a moderately positive outcome. If one chooses the cooperative move, but the other a competitive one, the player with the competitive choice gains a very positive outcome, and the player with the cooperative choice a very negative one. If both are competitive, both receive a moderately negative outcome. In other words, a person's own outcome depends on the choice of the interaction partner.

A typical example of the prisoners' dilemma game is provided by Kelley and Stahelski (1970). Here, two players have an opportunity to choose between move *A* and move *B*. If both chose *A* (cooperative choice), both receive \$5. If both chose *B* (competitive choice), both lose \$5. If one chooses *A* and the other *B*, the player with *A* (cooperative choice) loses \$10, whereas the one with the competitive choice (*B*) gains \$10.

This paradigm may be useful in considering interpersonal behaviors in the present discussion for several reasons. First, it should be less amenable to errors due to social desirability or interpretation biases that may be responsible for the contradictory findings with regard to the assertive, aggressive, or submissive behaviors that have been observed to be characteristic of rejected and victimized individuals. Second, it constitutes a well-used research paradigm that has proven fruitful for decades, and provides evidence with respect to the previously discussed concepts. Third, the conceptualization introduced by the prisoners' dilemma paradigm (i.e., cooperative versus competitive moves) may be an alternative to the more value-laden concepts of aggressiveness and submissiveness. For example, "cooperative" moves may reflect a high level of cooperativeness when their choice is dependent on the situation. But they could be interpreted as submissiveness when displayed as a general preference, regardless of the competitive or cooperative behavior of the interaction partner. Likewise, "competitive" moves may be seen as assertive when they are situation contingent. But as a general preference they may be viewed as aggressive, because this strategy by definition brings personal gain only at a cost to the interaction partner. The studies to be described next (see Schuster, 1999c) therefore investigate whether, in a variant of the prisoners' dilemma game, rejected and victimized children in fact display a lack of cooperativeness, as one would predict on the basis of the peer rejection literature, or whether they display, by contrast, too much cooperativeness.

A total of 413 students from grades 5, 7, and 11 from the same sample as in the attribution studies were to imagine playing a game with a peer. As in the studies on social perception processes, sociometric and victimization status was used both as a participant and a stimulus variable. Specifically, participants whose social/victimization status had been assessed in Session 1 (see previous discussion) were presented in Session 2 with a stimulus person of differing social and victimization status. This was done by filling in

the name of a real classmate, known to the participant, as the hypothetical game partner. For instance, in a certain class in their school, Peter has been identified as rejected and Paul as average. To manipulate the social status of the stimulus person, some of the participants in this class had to imagine playing with Peter, and others with Paul.

Participants were informed that the game had the following rules:

There are two *A* and two *B* cards. Each player (e.g., you and Paul) receives one of the *A* cards and one of the *B* cards. Each chooses one of his cards without talking about it with the other player. Each lays the card on the table. How much [money] each player receives depends on the combination of both cards lying on the table. . . . If both (e.g., you and Paul) choose *A*, both have a moderate gain (+5). If one chooses *A* and the other *B*, the one with *B* has a big gain (+10) and the one with *A* a big loss (-10). If both choose *B*, both have a moderate loss (-5).

These rules were explained in three different wordings, and a table visualized the diverse combinations.

Table 12.3 shows the experimental design for this study. One third of the participants did not receive any information about the moves of the interaction partners (no information condition) prior to making their own moves. In this condition, the game consisted of one trial only. Before making his or her move, each participant in this condition was asked which move he or she expected the partner (i.e., the stimulus person) to be making.

In the other two conditions, the participants were informed about the moves their hypothetical partners had made in a previous round before making their own moves in this one. In these conditions, the game consisted of three actual trials. In the "originally cooperative" condition participants were informed that the interaction partner had previously made a cooperative move; participants then had to decide on their first move. Afterward, they were informed that the moves of their partners in that very round had been competitive ones. Participants then had to make their sec-

TABLE 12.3. Design of the Prisoners' Dilemma Game
Experimental condition

Trial	Experimental condition		
	No information provided	Cooperative	Competitive
1	—	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>
2		<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>
3		<i>A</i>	<i>A</i>

Note. *A*, cooperative move from the partner; *B*, competitive move.

ond moves. Finally, they were led to imagine that the next move of the partner had been cooperative before making their third moves themselves (for which they did not know yet the move of the partner). The third group (the "originally competitive" condition) learned that their interaction partners had previously made a competitive move; participants then made their own first move (not knowing what move the partner would chose in this round). After this choice they were informed that the partner had again played competitively, and were now to choose for the second trial. After this, they were informed that the partner had now played cooperatively, and they made their third choice.

First, we ascertained whether the paradigm "worked" with the age group of our participants and analyzed the choices as to whether they were sensitive to the expected or manipulated moves of the partner. We calculated whether the choices (0 = cooperative, 1 = competitive) in the first move were dependent on the provided information, or, in the no-information condition, on the choice expected from the interaction partner. Given no prior information, the cooperative and the competitive choices were equally likely ($M = .52$), whereas in the competitive condition, significantly more competitive choices were made ($M = .69$). Choices in the cooperative condition were in between ($M = .58$) and did not differ from either condition. Given no information, participants who expected their partners to be making a cooperative move more often chose cooperatively (58%) as compared with those who expected a competitive choice (33%).

These findings clearly indicate that the paradigm is able to uncover situational influences. To test whether it is also able to uncover dispositional tendencies (i.e., person-dependent preferences for a certain move), we tested whether the choice in the third trial could be predicted by the choice in the first. Indeed, participants who had chosen cooperatively in the first move were more cooperative in the third move ($M = .39$) as compared with those participants who had chosen competitively in the first move ($M = .55$). Thus, the paradigm can be used with participants of this age, and it uncovers both situational influences and personal preferences.

With respect to our central question, it was found—averaging across the three experimental conditions—that in the first trial more victimized participants preferred cooperative choices as compared with nonvictimized students (see Table 12.4). The finding of more cooperativeness in the victimized students as compared with nonvictimized students may be interpreted as submissiveness, because it was not only found in the first move, regardless of prior information, but even crystallized in the third round ($M = .15$ vs. $.51$) and accordingly was also evident when averaged over the three rounds. That is, in the two conditions with three trials (i.e., the originally cooperative and originally competitive conditions together), more victimized participants generally, over all three rounds, preferred the cooperative choice, as compared with nonvictimized participants ($M = .41$ vs. $.60$).

This finding is consistent with the reasoning presented in the introduction, that victimized children may contribute to their own harassment by behaving too submissively. Yet it stands in stark contrast to the finding that rejected individuals lack cooperativeness, because almost all victimized individuals are simultaneously rejected, and therefore may be expected to also lack cooperativeness.

In the next step, the behavior of rejected children in the prisoners' dilemma game was analyzed. The main effect of social status was not significant for the first choice nor over all three trials. That is, rejected children were no more or less cooperative than average students. To further investigate the discrepancy between the analyses for victimization and for social status, the subgroups of victimized-rejected and nonvictimized-rejected were compared in a planned contrast: Whereas in their first move, the victimized-rejected preferred the cooperative choice, Table 12.4 shows that the nonvictimized-rejected preferred the competitive choice. This difference was also evident in the third move ($M = .18$ vs. $.65$), and again found when averaged over all three rounds ($M = .42$ vs. $.68$).

Finally, we analyzed the role of social and victimization status as to stimulus variables. That is, the moves chosen toward interaction partners of differing status were examined. A comparison of the influence of social status as a participant variable and as stimulus person variable allowed an estimation of whether victimized or nonvictimized participants experienced the same behavior (i.e., cooperative or competitive moves) as they themselves showed. Participants showed toward imagined nonvictimized targets ($M = .59$) roughly the same behavior as they displayed themselves ($M = .61$), whereas victimized students who behaved cooperatively ($M = .37$) were treated competitively ($M = .65$).

Discussion of the Data for Social Behavior

Taken together, the findings suggest that victimized children have a preference for cooperative choices and are reluctant to use competitive choices. Because this preference is a general one, regardless of information on the moves of the partner and across three trials, it may indicate to observers some degree of submissiveness. This may contribute to victimized children's

TABLE 12.4. Moves Chosen by Participants of Differing Status

Trial	Victimization status		Subgroups of rejected youth	
	V	NV	V-R	NV-R
1	.37	.61	.40	.72
Averaged over 3 rounds	.41	.60	.42	.68

Note. Cooperative moves were given a score of 0 and competitive moves were given a score of 1. Abbreviations as in Table 12.1.

being harassed, because peers may infer that they are "easy targets" towards whom they can behave aggressively without risking negative consequences (i.e., competitive moves). In fact, victimized students were treated more competitively, as compared with the nonvictimized group, and they were clearly treated more competitively as compared with the treatment shown in their own moves toward their peers.

Further, these data suggest that the group of rejected children is not homogeneous, but that two subgroups exist who display opposite strategy preferences. Given phenotypically the same rejection, genotypically different mechanisms may be involved. One group of rejected students is particularly competitive, and these children are not victims of harassment. The other group of rejected children are particularly cooperative, and these individuals do experience harassment.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The research program presented in this chapter started with the idea that the phenomena of peer harassment and peer rejection may be related. Far-reaching conceptual and empirical similarities between the two phenomena were uncovered. However, investigating the two simultaneously also led to the discovery of two distinct subgroups of rejected individuals, the victimized-rejected and the nonvictimized-rejected. That is, conceptual and empirical differences are also found between the two phenomena of peer rejection and peer harassment.

The studies on mechanisms suggest that some social perception (attribution) processes operate in the same way in both rejection and victimization, but that there are important differences in the social behavior of the protagonists. It was found, in accordance with previous literature (e.g., Hymel, 1986), that peers devalue the rejected target. In addition, it was shown that this holds true with respect to victims of peer harassment as well. Moving beyond the reputation bias, it was also found that peers expect rejected and harassed individuals to deviate from their own attributions and that, in fact, there was a discrepancy between self- and other attributions. Finally, this attributional bias was shown to be resistant to modifications.

It was also found that certain social behavior patterns covary with victimization and subgroups of rejection. Children who are victims of peer harassment were shown to be highly cooperative, to an extent that may indicate submissiveness. By contrast, children who are rejected but not victimized display the other extreme. They behave very competitively. Children who suffer from neither rejection nor victimization are in between these two extremes.

The different sets of studies may therefore suggest that the peer

group starts to take advantage of that individual from whom no threats of costs are likely. This individual is also devalued and made personally responsible for his or her own lot. Thus, the peer group develops an unfavorable social perception of this person. One may speculate that this unfavorable perception develops, at least in part, in order to justify the exploitative behavior. That is, a derogation of the victim sets in. This derogation may further encourage the exploitation of the target and reinforce the harassment process.

A very different process seems to be responsible for the rejection of members of the nonvictimized subgroup. They are rejected because they are not cooperative in the first place. But the competitive strategy seems at least to have the advantage of signaling to others that one is not an easy target, and therefore the peer group refrains from victimizing this person (as long as he or she is in a position to threaten high costs).

In conclusion, intervention efforts will have to target both rejected and/or harassed children themselves, as well as their peer group. Rejected and/or harassed children may profit from social competence training. This training would have to be very different for the two subgroups of rejected individuals, however. Whereas those children who are harassed and rejected may profit from assertiveness training, nonvictimized-rejected youth may do well to learn more cooperative and prosocial behaviors. Yet both of these behavioral changes may result in changes in their social and victimization status only when peers are explicitly taught to question their old preconceptions and reconsider these children in light of their more recent behaviors.

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