

# ADULTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE: THE PROTECTIVE EFFECTS OF PARENT AND TEACHER EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ON EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS OF PEER-VICTIMIZED ADOLESCENTS

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*This longitudinal study investigated the associations between peer victimization and maladaptive outcomes (emotional and behavioral problems) among 580 adolescents concurrently and across a 2-year period, and proposed that adult emotional support moderated this association. Peer victimization and maladaptive outcomes were assessed from adolescents' self-reports. Adult emotional support was measured from adolescents' ratings of parent and teacher emotional support. Adolescents who were physically or relationally victimized by their peers were at risk of emotional and behavioral problems. Higher levels of father and teacher emotional support were associated with lower levels of adolescents' emotional and behavioral problems concurrently and across time. Higher levels of mother emotional support were associated with lower levels of emotional problems and moderated the effects of physical victimization on maladjustment for concurrent assessments only. Teacher emotional support moderated the association between relational victimization and emotional and behavioral problems across time. © 2009 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.*

Although interest is increasing in engaging adults' help in reducing the negative effects of peer bullying on adolescent's adjustment, little is known about the strategies of

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adults that protect children from peer victimization, particularly in adolescence. Ample research shows that positive parenting, and adolescent's perceptions of supportive and warm relationships with parents lay a foundation for adolescent wellbeing; whereas high family conflict, authoritarian parenting or hostile control, and disparagement along with adolescent's perceptions of low family support are associated with maladjustment (see reviews by Collins & Laursen, 2004; Steinberg & Silk, 2002). However, peer victimization often occurs in school settings and almost no research has focused on the protective effects of relationships with parents and teachers in reducing peer victimization. Reviewing the extensive literature on the influences of parenting on adolescent adjustment, Collins and Laursen (2004) argue that a better understanding of the interrelated contributions of both extrafamilial and familial influences on adolescents' adjustment is needed.

Although connections to competent and caring adults in the community appear to operate in multiple ways to enhance resilience in adverse contexts (Masten, 2001; Masten et al., 2004), stable emotional support may be particularly important for adolescents seeking help against victimization (Leadbeater, Hoglund, & Woods, 2003). This short-term longitudinal study investigates the moderating effects of mothers', fathers', and teachers' emotional support on the association between relational and physical victimization by peers and youth maladjustment. Are youth with high levels of support from parents and teachers less likely to experience maladjustment as a result of experiences of peer victimization than youth with low levels of support?

Substantial cross-sectional and longitudinal research demonstrates that peer victimization, the experience of being a target of a peer's hurtful teasing and aggressive behavior, is related to maladjustment in childhood and adolescence (see review by Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Research estimates that 15–27% of children and adolescents are victimized by their peers (Pepler, Craig, Yuile, & Connolly, 2004; Whitney & Smith, 1993), and approximately one tenth of children face severe or chronic victimization by peers (Hanish & Guerra, 2000). Two types of peer victimization have been identified (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Hawker & Boulton, 2000): *Physical victimization* involves actual harm through physical damage by their peers (e.g., victims are kicked, pushed, hit, or have their belongings taken from them). *Relational victimization* involves the peer's threat to damage the victim's relationships through hurtful measures (e.g., victims are excluded or kept out from a group, or are told that their peer won't like them unless they do what the peer says). Both physical and relational victimization predict maladaptive outcomes including emotional (e.g., anxiety and depression) and behavioral problems (e.g., aggression) among victims (Hanish & Guerra, 2002; Hodges & Perry, 1999; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000; Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2002; Lopez & DuBois, 2005; Neary & Joseph, 1994; Rigby, 2003; Schwartz, McFadyen-Ketchum, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1998; Smith & Brain, 2000). However, less is known about the protective factors that mitigate the relation between peer victimization and its maladaptive outcomes.

Considerable research with large samples of school or community-based youth shows that high levels of family emotional support that include listening, providing praise, affection, empathizing, trust, and respect, are protective factors for emotional and behavioral problems among adolescents (Amato, 1994; Gorman-Smith, Henry, & Tolan, 2004; Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Henry, & Florsheim, 2000; Harter & Whitesell, 1996; Seidman et al., 1999), whereas negative perceptions of family support are associated with depression and conduct disorder (Garnefski & Diekstra, 1996). Social support is a complex, multifaceted concept (Helsen, Vollebergh, & Meeus, 1999) and

measures of support used in past research frequently do not specify the type of support that is important; however, each appears to assess aspects of emotional support defined as the provision of caring, empathy, love, trust, respect, and acceptance (Langford, Bowsher, Maloney, & Lillis, 1997). Seidman et al.'s (1999) concurrent study used self-reports of parent support (i.e., emotional and instrumental forms considered together), depressive symptoms, and antisocial behavior among adolescents aged 11 to 14 years. They reported that adolescents with high parent emotional and instrumental support exhibited lower levels of depression and antisocial behavior. Licitra-Kleckler and Waas (1993) examined the moderating effect of adolescents' perceived family emotional support on self-reports of emotional (i.e., depression) and behavioral problems (i.e., delinquency) among adolescents in grades 11 and 12. Results indicated that adolescents with high levels of perceived family emotional support exhibited lower levels of depression and fewer delinquent behaviors (including fewer minor delinquent acts and serious crimes) than adolescents with low levels of family emotional support.

Longitudinal studies also show compelling evidence that adolescents' perceived parent emotional support is negatively and significantly associated with adolescents' clinical maladjustment (e.g., anxiety, social stress, and somatization) and emotional symptoms (e.g., depression, sense of inadequacy, and low self-esteem) over time (Demaray, Malecki, & Davidson, 2005). For example, Cornwell (2003) examined the effects of changes in social support on depressive symptoms among adolescents in grades 7 to 12 over a one-year period. Adolescents rated how often each of the items assessing depressive feelings were true during the past week, and also rated how much they agreed or disagreed to statements about their mother's and father's emotional support. Higher levels of parent emotional support were associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms one year later, such that a 25% increase in initial levels of parental emotional support resulted in a 2.7% decrease in depressive symptoms one year later. Moreover, growth in parent emotional support over time was significantly associated with declines in depressive symptoms, whereas decreases in parent emotional support over time were related to increases in symptoms.

Emotional support from adults outside of the family environment also appears to be important. Adolescents' perceptions of teacher emotional support (e.g., encouragement and respect from teachers) are consistently associated with their academic success, commitment to learning, and feelings of wellbeing (see Becker & Luthar, 2002 for review; Murdock & Miller, 2003). Adolescents who feel emotionally secure with teachers, and use teachers as a source of emotional help and school support (e.g., by relying on or going to a teacher when they feel bad about themselves or need a boost) also have a greater sense of control, autonomy, and engagement in school (Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994). Furthermore, longitudinal studies that examine the differential effects of teacher, parent, and peer emotional support (e.g., let them know that they care about them, value and listen to their ideas, treat them with respect, help them, or give advice) on adolescents' adjustment demonstrate that teacher and friend emotional support had larger positive effects on adolescents' self-esteem over time when compared to parent emotional support (Colarossi & Eccles, 2003).

Teacher support appears particularly important for adolescents experiencing changes or transitions within the school environment. For instance, Barber and Olsen (2004) investigated patterns in perceived changes in the school climate and in teacher support on adolescent psychological functioning by following fifth-grade students over

a 4-year period, two of which involved a transition to a new school. Self-reports were used to assess perceptions on school climate (e.g., classroom autonomy), teacher support (e.g., helpfulness, monitoring, and respect), and psychological functioning (i.e., self-esteem, depression, loneliness, interpersonal competence, and problem behaviors). Overall, change in teacher support significantly explained changes in levels of adolescents' psychological functioning and interpersonal competence such that the less decrease in perceived teacher support, either the higher the gain in positive functioning (e.g., social initiative with teachers and peers) or the lower the increase in negative functioning (e.g., deviant peer association, parent-child conflict, and depression). Findings demonstrated the effect of teacher support on levels of adolescents' psychological and interpersonal functioning.

Together, past research clearly illustrates parents and teachers as significant sources in reducing levels of emotional and behavioral problems among adolescents, and yet fewer studies have specifically examined the effects of parent and teacher emotional support on peer victimization experiences. Emotional support from parents and teachers may be important in reducing peer victimization and maladaptive outcomes because adults who are perceived as emotionally supportive can be approached for help in solving peer conflicts. Teacher emotional support may be particularly salient given that peer victimization often occurs in school contexts. Rates of bullying have been observed at a rate of approximately 4.5 episodes per hour on the playground and 2.4 episodes per hour in the classroom (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000).

Existing work on peer victimization and adult emotional support has focused typically on elementary school children, rather than adolescents. For example, Beran and Tutty (2002) used self-reports of peer victimization, bullying, and perceptions of availability of teacher support in a study involving children in grades 1 to 6. More teacher support was associated with less verbal bullying for children in grades 4 to 6. Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner (2002) examined self-reports of social support (e.g., "I talk to somebody about how it made me feel") as a moderator between self-reports of peer victimization and teacher-reports of children's adjustment (including anxious-depressed behaviors and social problems) among children in the fourth grade. Findings revealed that overall levels of social support buffered levels of social problems in victimized girls. Specific sources of social support were not examined separately.

Past research with adolescents suggests that emotional support is important in the prevention of victimization, but does not differentiate between sources of adult emotional support. For example, Rigby (2000) investigated the association between peer victimization, perceived overall social support, and mental health among 845 adolescents aged 12–16 years. Peer victimization was measured by self-reports on four subtypes of victimization: verbal (e.g., being teased or called hurtful names), relational (e.g., being left out of things on purpose), physical (e.g., being kicked or hit), and being threatened with harm. Overall levels of social support were assessed using adolescents' reports of how much help they thought they would receive from teachers, a best friend, their mother, and their father if they were experiencing serious problems at school. Mental health was assessed using self-reports on somatic symptoms, anxiety, social dysfunction, and depression. Findings showed that adolescents who experienced peer victimization frequently and who also had low overall levels of social support were at risk of poor mental health. Adolescents also indicated that support was more likely to be available from parents than from teachers and classmates, and from mothers compared to fathers. However, types of support were not differentiated so it was

unclear how the various sources of social support were associated with each subtype of victimization (i.e., verbal, relational, physical, and being threatened).

### ***Summary and Research Questions***

The present study contributes to existing literature by examining the specific relations among peer victimization, three types of adult emotional support (i.e., father, mother, and teacher), and maladaptive outcomes (emotional and behavioral problems) among adolescents concurrently and across time. The study also differentiates between each source of adult support and investigates whether emotional support from fathers, mothers, and teachers independently moderate the relation between peer victimization and adolescents' maladaptive outcomes across a 2-year period.

The study explores the following research questions: (a) Do parent and teacher emotional support moderate the effects of peer victimization on emotional and behavioral problems concurrently and across a 2-year period? (b) Is one type of adult emotional support more significant in protecting peer victimized adolescents from maladaptive outcomes? We predicted that (1) peer-victimized adolescents with high levels of parent and teacher emotional support would experience lower levels of emotional and behavioral problems across a 2-year period than with low levels of parent and teacher support, and (2) teacher emotional support would be the most salient type of adult emotional support in reducing levels of emotional and behavioral problems associated with peer victimization given that peer victimization often occurs in the school context and teachers may be the first available adult to respond.

## **METHOD**

### ***Participants***

Data used for the present study were from the Healthy Youth Survey (HYS), a collaborative project between an interdisciplinary group of university-based researchers. The HYS was administered in the spring of 2003 (T1) and of 2005 (T2) in a medium-sized urban community. Participants were obtained from a random sample of 9,500 telephone listings where 1,036 households with an eligible adolescent (aged 12–18) were identified. Of these, 185 parents or guardians refused the participation of the adolescent in their care and 187 adolescents refused participation. Six hundred sixty-four adolescents (322 boys and 342 girls) completed the HYS at T1, and 87.3% of the original sample ( $N = 580$ ; 273 boys and 307 girls) completed the HYS at T2. Adolescents ranged in age from 12 to 19 years ( $M = 15.5$  years,  $SD = 1.9$  years) at T1 and from 14 to 21 years ( $M = 17.6$  years,  $SD = 1.9$  years) at T2. Thirty-two percent of adolescents were in middle school (i.e., grades 6–8), 65% of adolescents were in high school (i.e., grades 9–12), and 3% of adolescents were in college or university at T1. By T2, 5% of adolescents were in middle school (i.e., grade 8), and 95% of adolescents were in high school (i.e., grades 9–12).

Demographic information for adolescents' living situation, mothers' and fathers' employment, levels of education, ethnicity, and welfare assistance was gathered from adolescents at T1. Reports indicated that 68.1% of adolescents lived in a two-parent household, 20.2% lived with their mother only, 7.6% lived back and forth between their mother's and father's households, 2.1% lived with their father only, and 2% had other arrangements (e.g., lived with siblings or grandparents). Reports by adolescents

also revealed that 90% of fathers and 76% of mothers were employed at a part-time or fulltime job. Ninety percent of the fathers and 49% of mothers completed college or university, and 78% of fathers and 19% of mothers completed vocational training or some postsecondary education. Adolescents' ethnicity was identified as the following: 86% Caucasian, 4% Asian, 2% Aboriginal, 1% Hispanic, 1% African, 1% East Indian, 1% Middle Eastern, and 4% Other (e.g., Aboriginal European, Aboriginal Black, and Biracial). Most adolescents lived in middle-class families, with 83.3% of adolescents indicating that their families never experienced financial difficulties, 13.4% sometimes experienced financial difficulties, and 3% of adolescents indicating that their families often faced financial problems. Eight percent of adolescents indicated that their family had previously received welfare assistance.

### **Procedures**

Informed and written consent was obtained from parents (or guardians) and adolescents. A trained interviewer administered the HYS through individual interviews with the adolescent in his or her home or another private place. The interviewer read the questions aloud and the adolescent recorded his or her own answers. All responses were placed in an envelope and sealed to maintain confidentiality. On average, it took adolescents 1 hour 15 minutes to complete the survey. Adolescents received a \$25.00 gift certificate for a music or food store for their participation at each interview.

### **Measures**

Peer victimization was measured from adolescents' self-reports using the Social Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Peer victimization experiences were evaluated by two subscales of the SEQ: relational victimization and physical victimization. Each subscale contained five items. Adolescents rated how often they experienced relational victimization (e.g., "How often do your peers tell lies about you to make others not like you anymore?"), and physical victimization (e.g., "How often do you get pushed or shoved by your peers?") on a 3-point Likert scale (*never*, *sometimes*, or *almost all the time*). Total scores were computed by summing each adolescent's scores for the items within the relational victimization scale and the physical victimization scale, respectively. Total scores could range from 5 to 15 for both scales. Average scores were also computed to compare the adolescent's scores across the two scales in the analyses. In past research, the reliability for the items on the SEQ was adequate for each of the two scales with Cronbach's alpha = .80 for relational victimization and .78 for physical victimization (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996). This measure has not been commonly used among adolescents (aged 12–18), so a principal components analysis with Varimax factor rotation was conducted to test the validity of the scale structure. For physical victimization, principal components analysis extracted two components that accounted for 64% of the variance at T1 and 66% of the variance at T2. One factor included items that represented severe forms of physical victimization (e.g., "How often do your peers say they will beat you up if you don't do what they want you to do?"); the second factor included items that represented less severe forms of physical victimization (e.g., "How often do your peers yell at you or call you mean names?"). However, all items were included in the analyses to understand both severe and less severe forms of victimization that may be typical of this age group. For relational victimization, principal components analysis extracted one factor that

**Table 1. Percentage of Types of Victimization by Items Reported by Adolescents at T1 and T2**

| Type of victimization<br>(and items)             | T1           |                  |                            | T2           |                  |                            |
|--|--------------|------------------|----------------------------|--------------|------------------|----------------------------|
|  | Never<br>(%) | Sometimes<br>(%) | Almost all<br>the time (%) | Never<br>(%) | Sometimes<br>(%) | Almost all<br>the time (%) |
| <b>Physical victimization</b>                    |              |                  |                            |              |                  |                            |
| 1. Hit me  | 85.2         | 13.8             | 1.0                        | 91.7         | 7.9              | 0.3                        |
| 2. Call me mean names                            | 73.6         | 23.4             | 2.9                        | 82.4         | 16.0             | 1.6                        |
| 3. Push or shove me                              | 81.6         | 17.6             | 0.9                        | 89.7         | 9.5              | 0.9                        |
| 4. Kick me or pull my hair                       | 97.2         | 2.6              | 0.2                        | 98.6         | 1.0              | 0.3                        |
| 5. Threaten to beat me                           | 97.2         | 2.6              | 0.2                        | 98.4         | 1.2              | 0.3                        |
| <b>Relational victimization</b>                  |              |                  |                            |              |                  |                            |
| 1. Leave me out on purpose                       | 74.0         | 24.1             | 1.9                        | 81.7         | 17.9             | 0.3                        |
| 2. Exclude me because peer<br>was mad at me      | 78.9         | 18.3             | 2.8                        | 86.2         | 13.3             | 0.5                        |
| 3. Tell lies about me                            | 79.7         | 17.9             | 2.4                        | 83.3         | 15.3             | 1.4                        |
| 4. Won't like me if I don't do<br>what they want | 94.6         | 5.2              | 0.2                        | 95.9         | 3.6              | 0.5                        |
| 5. Say mean things about me                      | 80.9         | 17.8             | 1.4                        | 85.2         | 13.8             | 1.0                        |

accounted for 50% of the variance at T1 and 48% at T2. Cronbach's alphas for each of the subscales in the current study were  $\alpha = .73$  and  $.72$  for relational victimization at T1 and T2, respectively, and  $\alpha = .66$  and  $.63$  for physical victimization at T1 and T2, respectively. Reliabilities for physical victimization were lower than expected. Adolescents in this sample were less likely to report experiences of physical victimization, and severe items were rarely endorsed (see Table 1). This is consistent with previous research suggesting that physically aggressive behaviors are less likely to be exhibited by older elementary school children (NICHD Early Child Care Network, 2004; Tremblay et al., 1999); however, relationally aggressive behaviors may become more prevalent among older children and adolescents over time (Côté, Vaillancourt, Barker, & Nagin, 2007; Craig, 1998).

Father and mother emotional support (ES) was assessed using Schaefer's (1965) inventory on parental behaviors. Adolescents rated how much they felt that the statements were like their father (e.g., "My father is a person who understands my problems and worries"), and like their mother (e.g., "My mother is a person who is able to make me feel better when I am upset") on a 3-point Likert scale (*not like him/her*, *somewhat like him/her*, or *like him/her*). Total scores were computed by summing each adolescent's scores for the items within the father emotional support scale and the mother emotional support scale, respectively. Total scores could range from 5 to 15 for both scales. Average scores were also computed to compare the adolescent's scores across the two scales in the analyses. Cronbach's alphas were adequate at T1 ( $\alpha = .77$  and  $.75$  for father emotional support and mother emotional support, respectively) and at T2 ( $\alpha = .79$  and  $.76$  for father emotional support and mother emotional support, respectively).

Teacher emotional support (ES) was tapped using questions that reflect positive and reciprocal teacher-student relations (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). Adolescents responded to three questions: "My teachers care about how I'm doing," "I care what most of my teachers think of me," and "Most teachers like me," on a 5-point Likert scale (*strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *agree*, or

*strongly agree*). Total scores were computed by summing the scores for the three questions (range = 3–15). Average scores were also computed to compare scores. Cronbach's alphas were moderate for teacher ES ( $\alpha = .69$  for T1 and  $.63$  for T2). The sample at T2 consists mainly of high school and college students and questions may be less appropriate for older students. However, the items in the scale were used in the analyses to remain consistent across time.

Emotional and behavioral problems were measured from adolescents' responses to the Brief Child and Family Phone Interview (BCFPI; Cunningham, Pettingill, & Boyle, 2001). Two scales were used from the BCFPI. The emotional problems scale contains 18 items that tap into separation anxiety (e.g., "Do you notice that you feel sick before being separated from those you are close to?"), general anxiety (e.g., "Do you notice that you worry about doing better at things?"), and depressed mood (e.g., "Do you notice that you have trouble enjoying yourself?"). The behavioral problems scale contains 18 items that tap into attention regulation (e.g., "Do you notice that you have difficulty following directions or instructions?"), defiance (e.g., "Do you notice that you are easily annoyed with others?"), and conduct problems (e.g., "How often do you destroy things that belong to others?"). Adolescents rated how often the experiences described in these 36 items occurred on a 3-point Likert-type scale (*never*, *sometimes*, or *often*). Total scores were computed by summing each adolescent's scores for the items within the emotional and behavioral problems scales, respectively (range = 18–54). Reliabilities for each of the scales in the current study were strong ( $\alpha = .85$  and  $.79$  for emotional and behavioral problem scales at T1, respectively, and  $\alpha = .80$  and  $.87$  for emotional and behavioral problem scales at T2, respectively).

## RESULTS

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 2, and Pearson's correlations between all variables are shown in Table 3. Pearson's correlations show the expected relations among the variables, except that physical victimization was not significantly associated with father support at T1, nor was it concurrently associated with teacher support at T2. In addition, relational victimization was not significantly correlated with father or mother support at T1.

**Table 2.** Means (and Standard Deviations) of Variables at T1 and T2

| Measure                  | T1   |     | T2   |     |
|--------------------------|------|-----|------|-----|
|                          | M    | SD  | M    | SD  |
| Physical victimization   | 1.14 | .24 | 1.09 | .19 |
| Relational victimization | 1.20 | .30 | 1.19 | .25 |
| Father ES                | 2.61 | .42 | 2.58 | .41 |
| Mother ES                | 2.79 | .31 | 2.75 | .35 |
| Teacher ES               | 3.82 | .72 | 3.78 | .66 |
| Emotional problems       | 1.69 | .33 | 1.50 | .24 |
| Behavioral problems      | 1.52 | .25 | 1.52 | .25 |

Note. ES = Emotional support.

Table 3. Intercorrelations of Variables at T1 and T2

| Variable          | 1      |        | 2     |        | 3      |        | 4      |        | 5      |        | 6     |       | 7     |      | 8  |    |  |
|-------------------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|------|----|----|--|
|                   | T1     | T2     | T1    | T2     | T1     | T2     | T1     | T2     | T1     | T2     | T1    | T2    | T1    | T2   | T1 | T2 |  |
| 1. Physical (V)   |        |        |       |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| T1                | -      |        |       |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| T2                | .39**  | -      |       |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| 2. Relational (V) |        |        |       |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| T1                | .47**  | .27**  | -     |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| T2                | .30**  | .42**  | .42** | -      |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| 3. Father ES      |        |        |       |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| T1                | -.06   | -.11*  | -.08  | -.09*  | -      |        |        |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| T2                | -.04   | -.14** | -.05  | -.12** | .58**  | -      |        |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| 4. Mother ES      |        |        |       |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| T1                | -.09*  | -.00   | -.07  | -.14** | .25**  | .10*   | -      |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| T2                | -.13** | -.11*  | -.07  | -.20** | .09*   | .18**  | .47**  | -      |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| 5. Teacher ES     |        |        |       |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| T1                | -.20** | -.15** | -.10* | -.08   | .20**  | .13**  | .29**  | .25**  | -      |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| T2                | -.13*  | -.07   | -.09  | -.14*  | .11*   | .26**  | .17**  | .29**  | .40**  | -      |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| 6. Emotional      |        |        |       |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| T1                | .18**  | .17**  | .34** | .23**  | -.16** | -.07   | -.12** | -.13** | -.07   | -.01   | -     |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| T2                | .17**  | .32**  | .29** | .27**  | -.22** | -.26** | -.20** | -.28** | -.31** | -.38** | .30** | -     |       |      |    |    |  |
| 7. Behavioral     |        |        |       |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| T1                | .32**  | .28**  | .29** | .22**  | -.24** | -.13** | -.18** | -.19** | -.34** | -.23** | .47** | .59** | -     |      |    |    |  |
| T2                | .17**  | .32**  | .23** | .28**  | -.22** | -.25** | -.19** | -.26** | -.28** | -.36** | .30** | .99** | .58** | -    |    |    |  |
| 8. Gender         |        |        |       |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |    |    |  |
| T1                | -.19** | -.10*  | .09*  | .07    | -.10*  | -.06   | .00    | .11*   | .09*   | .16*   | .15*  | -.05  | -.08  | -.06 | -  |    |  |

Note. V = Victimization; ES = emotional support.  
\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

The percentage of the types of victimization experiences reported by adolescents is presented in Table 1. For physical victimization, adolescents reported experiencing “peers yelling at or calling them mean names” the most (i.e., at levels of *sometimes* and *almost all the time*) compared to other items at T1 and T2. For relational victimization, adolescents reported experiencing “peers leaving them out on purpose” the most (i.e., at levels of *sometimes* and *almost all the time*) compared to other items at T1 and T2.

### **Moderating Role of Adult Emotional Support**

Although physical and relational victimization tend to be highly correlated, there is theoretical interest in looking at the moderation models separately. Hierarchical regression analyses were used with victimization (physical or relational) as the predictor variable, emotional support (father, mother, and teacher) as the moderator, and emotional or behavioral problems as the outcome variable. In all concurrent and longitudinal analyses, gender and victimization (physical or relational) were controlled in step 1. Father, mother, and teacher ES were entered in step 2, and their interactions with victimization were tested in step 3. Moderation effects were tested by computing slopes for high, medium (or average), and low levels of support, using the criteria by Aiken and West (1991). The percentage of adolescents reporting high, medium, and low levels of support at both time points are presented in Table 4.

Concurrent hierarchical regression analyses at T1 revealed that father ES was directly associated with lower levels of emotional and behavioral problems, and teacher ES was directly associated with lower levels of behavioral problems. Furthermore, father ES moderated the relation between physical victimization and behavioral problems (see Table 5), and the simple slope was significantly different from zero for adolescents reporting high levels,  $b = 0.24$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t(576) = 4.12$ ,  $p < .001$ , of father ES. Adolescents with high father ES were less likely to experience behavioral problems associated with physical victimization compared to adolescents with low father ES. Similarly, teacher ES moderated the association between relational victimization and behavioral problems, and the simple slope was significantly different from zero for adolescents reporting high levels,  $b = 0.15$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t(576) = 3.88$ ,  $p < .001$ , of teacher ES. Adolescents with high teacher ES were less likely to experience behavioral problems associated with relational victimization compared to adolescents with low teacher ES.

Concurrent hierarchical regression analyses at T2 revealed that father and teacher ES were directly associated with lower levels of emotional and behavioral problems. Mother ES was directly associated with lower levels of emotional problems for physical

**Table 4. Percentage of Adolescents Reporting High, Medium, and Low Levels of Emotional Support at T1 and T2**

| Type of emotional support | T1       |            |         | T2       |            |         |
|---------------------------|----------|------------|---------|----------|------------|---------|
|                           | High (%) | Medium (%) | Low (%) | High (%) | Medium (%) | Low (%) |
| Father ES                 | 29.7     | 52.8       | 17.5    | 22.6     | 58.9       | 18.5    |
| Mother ES                 | 54.8     | 29.4       | 15.8    | 48.2     | 31.8       | 20.0    |
| Teacher ES                | 17.2     | 67.4       | 15.4    | 13.1     | 69.5       | 17.4    |

Note. ES = Emotional support. Low score = 1 standard deviation below the mean; high score = 1 standard deviation above the mean; Medium score = Mean.

**Table 5. Moderating Effects of Adult Support on the Concurrent Relations Between Victimization and Maladjustment at T1**

| Variable                                    | T1 Emotional problems |       |          |       | T1 Behavioral problems |       |          |       |
|---|-----------------------|-------|----------|-------|------------------------|-------|----------|-------|
|   | $\beta^a$             | $R^2$ | F        | df    | $\beta^a$              | $R^2$ | F        | df    |
| Physical victimization                      |                       |       |          |       |                        |       |          |       |
| Gender (1 = male, 2 = female)               | .18***                | .10   | 6.92***  | 8,527 | -.02                   | .23   | 19.77*** | 8,527 |
| T1 Physical victimization                   | .23***                |       |          |       | .27***                 |       |          |       |
| T1 Father ES                                | -.15*                 |       |          |       | -.26***                |       |          |       |
| T1 Mother ES                                | -.04                  |       |          |       | .02                    |       |          |       |
| T1 Teacher ES                               | .04                   |       |          |       | -.24***                |       |          |       |
| T1 Physical Victimization ×<br>Father ES    | -.06                  |       |          |       | -.11*                  |       |          |       |
| T1 Physical Victimization ×<br>Mother ES    | .05                   |       |          |       | .09                    |       |          |       |
| T1 Physical Victimization ×<br>Teacher ES   | .08                   |       |          |       | -.01                   |       |          |       |
| Relational victimization                    |                       |       |          |       |                        |       |          |       |
| Gender (1 = male, 2 = female)               | .10*                  | .17   | 12.81*** | 8,527 | -.11*                  | .26   | 22.19*** | 8,527 |
| T1 Relational Victimization                 | .34***                |       |          |       | .28***                 |       |          |       |
| T1 Father ES                                | -.09*                 |       |          |       | -.16***                |       |          |       |
| T1 Mother ES                                | -.08 <sup>t</sup>     |       |          |       | -.06                   |       |          |       |
| T1 Teacher ES                               | -.01                  |       |          |       | -.24***                |       |          |       |
| T1 Relational Victimization ×<br>Father ES  | -.05                  |       |          |       | -.07                   |       |          |       |
| T1 Relational Victimization ×<br>Mother ES  | .02                   |       |          |       | -.00                   |       |          |       |
| T1 Relational Victimization ×<br>Teacher ES | -.04                  |       |          |       | -.12**                 |       |          |       |

Note.  $t = p < .10$ . ES = Emotional support.  
<sup>a</sup> $\beta$  are standardized values at the final step.  
<sup>\*</sup> $p < .05$ ; <sup>\*\*</sup> $p < .01$ ; <sup>\*\*\*</sup> $p < .001$ .

victimization only. Furthermore, mother ES moderated the relation between physical victimization and emotional and behavioral problems (see Table 6). The simple slopes of the regression lines were significantly different from zero for adolescents who reported high levels of mother ES for emotional problems,  $b = 0.27$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t(576) = 3.85$ ,  $p < .001$ , and for behavioral problems,  $b = 0.29$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t(576) = 4.08$ ,  $p < .001$ . Adolescents with high mother ES were less likely to experience emotional and behavioral problems associated with physical victimization compared to adolescents with low mother ES.

The interaction between relational victimization and mother ES was significant for emotional and behavioral problems, respectively; however, when moderation was tested the simple slopes of the regression lines were not significantly different from zero.

Longitudinal hierarchical regression analyses revealed that T1 father and teacher ES significantly predicted reduced levels of T2 emotional and T2 behavioral problems. Moreover, T1 teacher ES moderated the association between T1 relational victimization and T2 emotional problems across a 2-year period (see Table 7). The simple slopes for adolescents reporting both low levels,  $b = 0.21$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t(576) = 5.40$ ,  $p < .001$ , and high levels,  $b = 0.10$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t(576) = 2.66$ ,  $p < .01$ , of teacher ES were significant (see Figure 1). Similarly, T1 teacher ES moderated the association between T1

**Table 6. Moderating Effects of Adult Support on the Concurrent Relations Between Victimization and Maladjustment at T2**

| Variable  | T2 Emotional problems |       |          |       | T2 Behavioral problems |       |          |       |
|---|-----------------------|-------|----------|-------|------------------------|-------|----------|-------|
|   | $\beta^a$             | $R^2$ | $F$      | $df$  | $\beta^a$              | $R^2$ | $F$      | $df$  |
| Physical victimization                          |                       |       |          |       |                        |       |          |       |
| Gender (1 = male, 2 = female)                   | .04                   | .34   | 21.30    | 8,337 | .03                    | .32   | 19.15*** | 8,337 |
| T2 Physical victimization                       | .22***                |       |          |       | .22***                 |       |          |       |
| T2 Father ES                                    | -.20***               |       |          |       | -.20***                |       |          |       |
| T2 Mother ES                                    | -.12*                 |       |          |       | -.10t                  |       |          |       |
| T2 Teacher ES                                   | -.29***               |       |          |       | -.27***                |       |          |       |
| T2 Physical Victimization $\times$ Father ES    | .03                   |       |          |       | .02                    |       |          |       |
| T2 Physical Victimization $\times$ Mother ES    | -.19**                |       |          |       | -.18**                 |       |          |       |
| T2 Physical Victimization $\times$ Teacher ES   | .03                   |       |          |       | .03                    |       |          |       |
| Relational victimization                        |                       |       |          |       |                        |       |          |       |
| Gender (1 = male, 2 = female)                   | .00                   | .31   | 18.29*** | 8,337 | -.01                   | .29   | 16.62*** | 8,337 |
| T2 Relational victimization                     | .16**                 |       |          |       | .17**                  |       |          |       |
| T2 Father ES                                    | -.21***               |       |          |       | -.22***                |       |          |       |
| T2 Mother ES                                    | -.10t                 |       |          |       | -.08                   |       |          |       |
| T2 Teacher ES                                   | -.27***               |       |          |       | -.25***                |       |          |       |
| T2 Relational Victimization $\times$ Father ES  | .05                   |       |          |       | .05                    |       |          |       |
| T2 Relational Victimization $\times$ Mother ES  | -.21***               |       |          |       | -.21***                |       |          |       |
| T2 Relational Victimization $\times$ Teacher ES | .07                   |       |          |       | .06                    |       |          |       |

Note.  $t = p < .10$ . ES = Emotional support.

<sup>a</sup> $\beta$  are standardized values at the final step.

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

relational victimization and T2 behavioral problems across time. The simple slopes for adolescents reporting both low levels,  $b = 0.23$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t(576) = 5.06$ ,  $p < .001$ , and high levels,  $b = 0.11$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t(576) = 2.51$ ,  $p < .05$ , of teacher ES were significant (see Figure 2). Hence, adolescents with high teacher ES were less likely to experience emotional and behavioral problems associated with relational victimization across a 2-year period compared to adolescents with low teacher ES. Interactions with gender were examined for concurrent and longitudinal analyses, but these were not significant so they were not included in the final models.

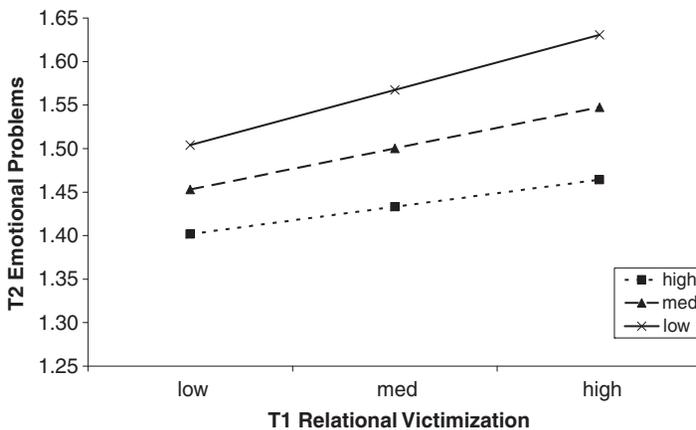
## DISCUSSION

The present study builds upon previous research by investigating the moderating effect of father, mother, and teacher emotional support on the relations between peer victimization and emotional and behavioral problems among adolescents. Findings replicate previous work demonstrating a consistent positive association between peer victimization and emotional and behavioral problems, concurrently and across a two-year period (Hanish & Guerra, 2002; Juvonen et al., 2000; Lopez & DuBois, 2005; Rigby, 2003). Adolescents who are physically or relationally victimized by their peers are at risk of experiencing emotional and behavioral problems over time. Higher levels of father and teacher emotional support are also consistently related to lower levels of emotional and behavioral problems among adolescents concurrently and across a 2-year period. The salient role of teachers is also supported by the finding that teacher emotional support moderated the association between *relational victimization* (but not

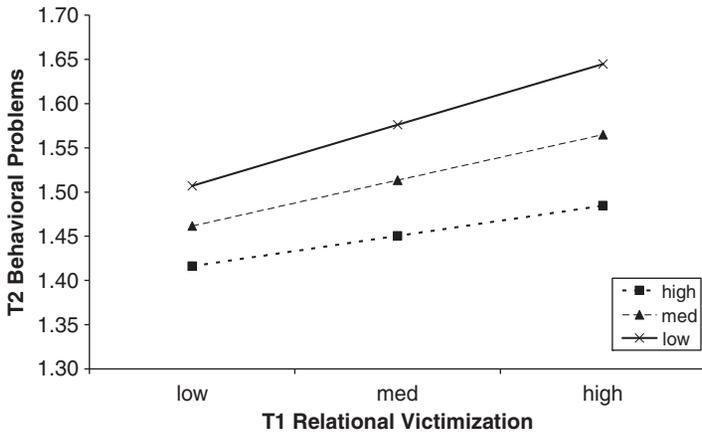
**Table 7. Moderating Effects of Adult Support on the Longitudinal Relations Between Victimization and Maladjustment**

| Variable  | T2 Emotional problems |       |          |       | T2 Behavioral problems |       |          |       |
|---|-----------------------|-------|----------|-------|------------------------|-------|----------|-------|
|   | $\beta^a$             | $R^2$ | $F$      | $df$  | $\beta^a$              | $R^2$ | $F$      | $df$  |
| <b>Physical victimization</b>                   |                       |       |          |       |                        |       |          |       |
| Gender (1 = male, 2 = female)                   | -.03                  | .17   | 12.78*** | 8,526 | -.04                   | .15   | 11.49*** | 8,526 |
| T1 Physical victimization                       | .13**                 |       |          |       | .13**                  |       |          |       |
| T1 Father ES                                    | -.27***               |       |          |       | -.26***                |       |          |       |
| T1 Mother ES                                    | -.01                  |       |          |       | -.01                   |       |          |       |
| T1 Teacher ES                                   | -.23***               |       |          |       | -.21***                |       |          |       |
| T1 Physical Victimization $\times$ Father ES    | -.10                  |       |          |       | -.10                   |       |          |       |
| T1 Physical Victimization $\times$ Mother ES    | .08                   |       |          |       | .09                    |       |          |       |
| T1 Physical Victimization $\times$ Teacher ES   | -.04                  |       |          |       | -.04                   |       |          |       |
| <b>Relational victimization</b>                 |                       |       |          |       |                        |       |          |       |
| Gender (1 = male, 2 = female)                   | -.09*                 | .20   | 16.00*** | 8,526 | -.09*                  | .19   | 14.80*** | 8,526 |
| T1 Relational victimization                     | .21***                |       |          |       | .22***                 |       |          |       |
| T1 Father ES                                    | -.18***               |       |          |       | -.18***                |       |          |       |
| T1 Mother ES                                    | -.08                  |       |          |       | -.07                   |       |          |       |
| T1 Teacher ES                                   | -.20***               |       |          |       | -.18***                |       |          |       |
| T1 Relational Victimization $\times$ Father ES  | -.04                  |       |          |       | -.04                   |       |          |       |
| T1 Relational Victimization $\times$ Mother ES  | -.05                  |       |          |       | -.04                   |       |          |       |
| T1 Relational Victimization $\times$ Teacher ES | -.10*                 |       |          |       | -.10*                  |       |          |       |

Note.  $t = p < .10$ . ES = Emotional support.  
<sup>a</sup> $\beta$  are standardized values at the final step.  
 \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



**Figure 1.** The moderating effect of T1 teacher emotional support on the association between T1 relational victimization and T2 emotional problems. Low score = 1 SD below the mean; high score = 1 SD above the mean.



**Figure 2.** The moderating effect of T1 teacher emotional support on the association between T1 relational victimization and T2 behavioral problems. Low score = 1 SD below the mean; high score = 1 SD above the mean.

physical victimization) and maladaptive outcomes across the 2-year period: Adolescents who were relationally victimized by their peers, but had high levels of teacher emotional support were less likely to experience both emotional and behavioral problems compared to adolescents with low levels of teacher emotional support. Emotionally supportive relationships between peer-victimized adolescents and their teachers may be particularly important in buffering maladaptive outcomes for several reasons. First, peer victimization frequently occurs in the school context such as in the classroom and on the schoolyard (Craig et al., 2000), and teachers are one of the first adults who can respond immediately to situations and offer appropriate solutions. Second, teachers who are emotionally supportive may be perceived as caring, available, and willing to help, and consequently may be more approached by adolescents for assistance when they encounter peer conflicts. Third, adolescents spend considerable hours at school during classes and may spend additional hours participating in extracurricular activities. This creates more opportunities for adolescents, particularly those who are being relationally victimized by their peers, to develop positive relationships with teachers and to use teachers as one source of emotional support. Although support from parents remain important (Needham, 2008; Stice, Ragan, & Randall, 2004), this extrafamilial support may be particularly important in adolescents as youth are seeking more autonomy from parents in solving their problems.

Findings for father emotional support mirrored findings for teacher emotional support in that higher levels of father emotional support were also independently associated with lower levels of adolescents' emotional and behavioral problems concurrently at both time points and also across the 2-year assessment period. However, the moderating effect for fathers' emotional support was not significant. This finding adds to a growing literature focusing on the positive effects of fathers' parenting on adolescent development. On the other hand, the effects of mothers' emotional support on emotional and behavioral problems were found less consistently than for teachers and fathers.

Higher levels of mother emotional support were significantly associated with lower levels of emotional problems at T2 only, after accounting for physical victimization. Also at T2, mothers' emotional support moderated the effects of physical victimization and emotional maladjustment.

It is not clear why the effects of emotional support would differ for mothers and fathers or why mother support was mainly significant at T2 when youth were transitioning into young adulthood (i.e., mean age of 17.6 years). One reason for the association between father emotional support (compared to mother emotional support) and adolescents' emotional and behavioral problems may be that adolescents perceive the functional roles of their mothers and fathers differently. Previous studies reveal that adolescents perceive mothers as more warm, accepting, and receptive in communicating about various problems compared to fathers, whereas adolescents perceive fathers primarily as active problem-solvers of the difficulties that they encounter (Almeida & Galambos, 1991; Atkinson & Blackwelder, 1993; Dutra, Miller, & Forehand, 1999). Adolescents may perceive mothers' emotional support as pivotal sources of comfort, but they may place greater value in resolving their difficulties and view their fathers' emotional support as a basis for obtaining solutions to their problems. Successful solutions to peer victimization may need to be active and assertive rather than merely emotionally empathic or comforting. The former are stereotypically male traits that fathers may be more likely to model in supporting adolescents. However, the amount, source, and nature of parental emotional support for adolescents who are facing the transition to young adulthood are largely unstudied. Future qualitative research is needed to assess differences in the strategies that parents use to support their adolescents' to deter maladjustment and for dealing with peer relationships in this period.

### ***Limitations***

First, all data were self-reports. Adolescents were asked to report on how often they experienced victimization by their peers, and may have underrated their experiences to avoid the stigma associated with being identified as a victim. Likewise, adolescents' perceptions of adult emotional support may vary depending on the current relationship status with their mothers, fathers, and teachers. Future studies that draw from multi-informant sources, including peer reports of victimization, and parent and teacher reports of adult emotional support can be used to validate responses (Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2002).

Second, the present study was limited in understanding the contribution of peer emotional support on peer victimization and maladaptive outcomes. Previous work suggests that positive friendship qualities including companionship and affection predict positive emotional adjustment among adolescents (Hussong, 2000). By the beginning of early adolescence, perceptions of parental support also appear to decline, while perceived support from friends increase (Helsen et al., 1999). Over time, it may be that peers become more important sources of emotional support than parents or teachers. Future research should consider both peer and adult sources of emotional support when investigating potential protective factors against the maladaptive outcomes of peer victimization. Specifically, longitudinal studies can identify changes in the sources of emotional support from early to late adolescence, and determine whether these changes make a differential impact in buffering against maladaptive outcomes associated with peer victimization.

Finally, the sample in the present study was drawn from middle-class, university educated, and Caucasian families. Future research is needed to determine if findings can be generalized to lower socioeconomic groups and other ethnic groups.

Despite these limitations, present findings extend beyond past research by illuminating the effects of three sources of adult emotional support (i.e., father, mother, and teacher) on the associations between two subtypes of peer victimization and maladaptive outcomes among an adolescent population. Overall, findings emphasize that high levels of emotional support from teachers can have a crucial long-term impact on adolescents' emotional and behavioral problems. Therefore, building stronger and more positive teacher–adolescent relationships become particularly important given that peer victimization usually occurs in the school context and students begin to spend more time at school.

### ***Implications for Prevention Programs***

Existing peer-victimization prevention programs focus on the individual adolescent. These programs aim to enhance the prosocial skills and problem-solving strategies that are essential in helping adolescents to resolve peer conflicts peacefully. However, prevention programs also need to turn their attention to creating responsive environments for adolescents who seek help with peer victimization. Some children and adolescents may be reluctant to seek help from teachers because they believe that the problem will not be resolved, the conflict may be exacerbated, or they will experience reprisal from the aggressor (Newman & Murray, 2005; Newman, Murray, & Lussier, 2001). Training can help teachers to recognize both physical and relational forms of victimization, and equip them with the appropriate skills and responses to use when adolescents approach them for help (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006). For example, teachers can be encouraged to use teachable moments (e.g., when they see peer victimization situations, they help students to resolve the conflict peacefully), to tailor classroom activities to help students develop supportive attitudes and empathetic feelings toward one another, to respond to reports of victimization (e.g., encourage students to talk about their experiences rather than telling them what they should think, and use this to inform their response), and to address conflicts immediately and appropriately (e.g., meet with the victim and the bully to discuss how he or she could respond appropriately to future situations). Finally, teachers should also be informed that emotionally supportive behaviors toward adolescents (e.g., care, warmth, respect, responsive and helpful attitude, and availability), are important in reducing adolescents' emotional and behavioral problems, and can buffer the maladaptive outcomes associated with relational victimization over time. By demonstrating emotionally supportive behaviors toward adolescents, teachers may be sending a message to adolescents that they are more available and willing to respond when they need help.

Emotional support from parents continues to remain a significant protector against emotional and behavioral problems in late adolescence and into adulthood (Needham, 2008; Stice et al., 2004). Therefore, peer victimization prevention programs need to extend beyond the school context and instill sources of emotional support within the family environment. For instance, schools and teachers need to work with the parents of adolescents who are involved in peer victimization experiences. The idea is to get parents involved by focusing on adolescents' behaviors rather than on who is to blame. Second, training can give parents skills to initiate consistent conversations with their adolescents. For example, parents can ask what the conflict is about, and brainstorm solutions with their adolescents that can be used to resolve the conflict. When parents help their adolescents to deal with conflicts, this offers their adolescents support and maintains a relationship that allows for open

communication when adolescents need to seek help. Adolescents will also learn new skills that they can use to resolve future peer conflicts.

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