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Victimization in South Korean Children's Peer Groups

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This study reports a cross-sectional investigation of the behavioral, academic, and psychosocial correlates of victimization in South Korean children's peer groups. The participants were 122 children (66 boys, 56 girls; from 10–12-years-old) recruited from a primary school in Seoul, South Korea. Multi-informant assessments (peer nominations, teacher ratings, and self-reports) of peer victimization, social behavior, loneliness/social dissatisfaction, and academic functioning were obtained. Multivariate analyses indicated that peer victimization was associated with poor academic adjustment, loneliness, submissive–withdrawn behavior, aggression, and low levels of assertive–prosocial behavior. These findings suggest that there is considerable similarity in the social processes underlying peer group victimization across South Korean and Western cultural settings.

KEY WORDS: bullying; peer relations; victimization.

Research conducted in Western cultural settings has demonstrated that a small proportion of children emerge as persistent victims of maltreatment by their peers (for reviews, see Graham & Juvonen, 1998b; Perry, Perry, & Kennedy, 1992; Smith & Brain, 2000). These chronically bullied children represent an important target group for empirical inquiry and clinical intervention. Children who frequently experience verbal or physical abuse by their peers are at risk for a number of negative outcomes, including maladaptive behavior problems (Hodges & Perry, 1999; Schwartz, McFadyen-Ketchum, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1998), loneliness and depression (Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995; Hawker & Boulton, 2000), social rejection or friendlessness (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999; Hodges, Malone, & Perry, 1997; Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988; Schwartz, Dodge, Pettit, Bates, & The Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2000; Schwartz, McFadyen-Ketchum, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1999), and academic failure (Juvonen, Nishna, & Graham, 2000; Schwartz, 2000).

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Although much has been learned about the social processes underlying victimization in the peer group (Juvonen & Graham, 2001), a potential limitation of the existing research in this area is that it has been restricted almost entirely to Western settings. Investigators in Japan have begun to examine "ijime," a related phenomenon that involves harassment of peers by dominant members of a group (Morita, Soeda, Soeda, & Taki, 1999; Rittrios-Ellis, Bellamy, & Shoji, 2000). There also have been some more theoretical discussions focusing on the prevalence of bullying in different national settings (e.g., Smith et al., 1999). However, the availability of empirical data regarding the correlates of peer group victimization in non-Western cultures remains quite limited. Thus, the relevance of findings from investigations conducted in North America and Europe for children in other cultures is unclear. Moreover, as previous researchers have noted, an exclusive focus on Western contexts could obscure critically important distinctions between culture-specific and culture-general forms of child maladjustment (see Weisz, McCarty, Eastman, Chaiyasit, & Suwanlert, 1997).

This paper describes an investigation that was conducted as part of a larger series of studies examining bully/victim problems in East Asian cultures (Schwartz, Chang, & Farver, 2001). Although there is wide diversity in the beliefs, customs, and practices that characterize cultures in this region of the world, there are also important underlying commonalities. Indeed, across these societies,

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Confucian value systems and collectivistic orientations have widespread influence (Park & Cho, 1995; Triandis, 1995).

The focus of this report is specifically on victimization in South Korean children's peer groups. We sought to identify the patterns of social behavior that are associated with frequent maltreatment by peers in this culture. We also examined relations between bullying by peers and indicators of psychosocial adjustment for South Korean children. To the best of our knowledge, this investigation is the first to examine the correlates of peer group victimization in the South Korean setting.

South Korea represents a dynamic social context in which to examine the determinants of children's maladjustment with peers. This is a society that has experienced considerable turmoil in recent decades with rapid industrialization, increasing urbanization, migration of large segments of the population to cities, and marked expansion of the economy (Park & Cho, 1995). Despite these dramatic changes, and the growing influence of Western culture, South Korean families still tend to be guided by traditional values from the Confucian past which bear on children's socialization and development (Kim & Choi, 1994; Park & Cho, 1995). In contrast to the more individualistic Western cultures, South Korean culture emphasizes group awareness over individual concerns, sensitivity to others, and the minimization of conflict (Cha, 1994; Farver, Kim, & Lee-Shin, 2000). The primary goals in the socialization of children are to help them learn self-control, to develop an interdependent sense of self, and to foster cooperative and prosocial behavior (Farver & Lee-Shin, 1997). Behaviors that further individual interests or action at the expense of the group are generally discouraged (Storm, Park, & Daniels, 1986).

This societal focus on behavioral restraint could have important implications for children's social functioning with peers. In Asian cultural contexts, children may display shy, quiet, or hesitant behavioral tendencies as a reflection of the dominant values of the society as a whole (Chen & Rubin, 1992). These behaviors are generally praised by teachers, parents, and other adult caregivers (Chen, 2000). Researchers have also suggested that shy or timid dispositions are likely to be positively evaluated in Asian children's peer groups, despite the association between such interactive styles and peer rejection for Western children (see Rubin, 1998; Schneider, Smith, Poisson, & Kwan, 1997). Consistent with this perspective, Chinese children who are characterized by shyness–sensitivity (as operationalized by a reputation among peers as sad, shy, or having easily hurt feelings; see Chen, Rubin, & Sun, 1992) are generally well accepted by their peers. There is also some preliminary evidence that a similar pattern holds for South Korean children (Belsky, Rha, & Park, 2000).

In considering these findings, it is important to recognize that inhibited behavior may not be a unitary phenomenon. Western investigators have focused on distinctions between anxious forms of behavioral inhibition (e.g., withdrawal or reticence, submissiveness, fearful, or wary behavior in social situations) and passive behaviors that may reflect low interest in social interaction (Harrist, Zaia, Bates, Dodge, & Pettit, 1997; Rubin & Mills, 1988). The preliminary data suggest that it is the anxious forms of inhibition that are most strongly associated with peer rebuff for Western children, although subtype distinctions appear to become less meaningful over the course of development (see Coplan, Rubin, Fox, Calkins, & Stewart, 1994). It is not yet clear whether similar multidimensional conceptualizations are relevant in the Asian cultural context. However, in a study conducted with Chinese preschool children, Hart et al. (2000) were able to demonstrate acceptable fit for a confirmatory model that incorporated separate factors for passive–anxious behaviors and for more adaptive dimensions of inhibition. Interestingly, these investigators also reported positive correlations between anxious forms of inhibition and peer rejection.

For the present investigation, we focused on withdrawn-submissive behaviors. These are the forms of inhibited behavior that are most strongly predictive of victimization by peers in Western contexts (Boivin et al., 1995; Boulton, 1999; Olweus, 1978; Schwartz, Dodge, & Coie, 1993; Schwartz, Dodge et al., 1998). Moreover, in a past study based on our larger cross-cultural project, we found associations between withdrawn-submissive behavior and victimization in Chinese children's peer groups (Schwartz et al., 2001). From a theoretical perspective, it might also be argued that withdrawn-submissive dispositions function to decrease social interaction and, accordingly, are incompatible with a collectivistic value system (Cha, 1994). Thus, despite evidence that some subtypes of restrained or hesitant behavior (i.e., shyness–sensitivity) are positively evaluated in Asian cultural contexts, we predicted that South Korean children who display submissiveness–withdrawal would experience bullying and rejection by peers.

We expected that the pattern of findings for other classes of children's social behavior would be consistent with past research conducted in both Western and Asian settings. The emerging evidence suggests that, across cultural contexts, prosocial, assertive, and socially competent behaviors are associated with positive adjustment in the peer group (Farver & Lee-Shin, 1997; Farver & Wimbarti, 1995; Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Likewise, aggression and disruptive behaviors seem to be linked to negative

peer attitudes across cultures (Schneider et al., 1997). In the current investigation with South Korean children, we predicted that prosocial–assertive behavior would be negatively correlated with peer victimization, whereas we expected aggression to be positively correlated with victimization.

As a complement to our focus on the behavioral correlates of victimization, we considered relations between academic functioning and bullying by peers. Because, perhaps, of a strong cultural emphasis on achievement (Crystal et al., 1994; Lee & Larson, 2000; Stevenson et al., 1990), academic competence tends to be an important correlate of social acceptance in Asian children's peer groups (McCall, Beach, & Lau, 2000). Western researchers have also suggested that there may be links between academic difficulties and victimization because the stress associated with persistent negative treatment by peers is predictive of academic failure or other forms of school maladjustment (Juvonen et al., 2000; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Accordingly, we hypothesized that there would be an association between victimization in the peer group and deficient academic functioning for South Korean children.

A final area of consideration in this investigation was the relation between maltreatment by peers and children's feelings of social dissatisfaction. As might be expected, research conducted in Western settings has shown that persistently bullied children experience considerable psychological distress (e.g., Boivin et al., 1995; Schwartz, 2000). Because harmony in interpersonal relationships is likely to be of even greater concern in the more collectivistic South Korean culture (Cha, 1994; Kim & Choi, 1994), social problems with peers could prove especially difficult for children in this setting. Therefore, we predicted that South Korean children who were frequent targets of peer group abuse would be characterized by loneliness and social dissatisfaction.

The research questions described above were addressed in a sample of elementary school children from Seoul, South Korea. This is the developmental period during which individual differences in aggression (Eron, 1987; Olweus, 1979), and perhaps bullying by peers (Perry et al., 1988), stabilize in Western children's peer groups. A multi-informant approach was used, including peer nominations, teacher ratings, and self-report data.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 122 children (66 boys, 56 girls) recruited from three classrooms (one classroom in each of the third, fourth, and fifth grades) in a primary school located in Seoul, South Korea. Of these children, 44 were in the third grade (approximate mean age of 10 years), 39 were in the fourth grade (approximate mean age of 11 years), and 39 were in the fifth grade (approximate mean age of 12 years). The children lived in densely populated urban neighborhoods, and were predominately from middle-income socioeconomic backgrounds.

Active parental consent was obtained for each of the participating children. In the weeks before data collection, parents were contacted directly by a research assistant and asked to sign a permission letter that described the study's goals and procedures. They were told that their child's involvement in the project was voluntary, and they could refuse permission without negative consequences of any kind (although none choose to do so).

Child assent was obtained prior to the administration of the questionnaires. Children were reminded that involvement in the project was not part of regular schoolwork and they could decline participation without penalty. Because children could opt not to complete any item, missing values were possible.

Measures

A series of measures was developed for the larger cross-cultural project based on items culled from the existing bully–victim literature. The measures were piloted extensively in two North American cities (see Schwartz, 1995, 2000; Schwartz & Proctor, 2000). In addition, Chinese-language versions were validated in a sample of approximately 300 children in Tianjin, China (Schwartz et al., 2001). A language consultant, who was native to the Seoul region, translated the devices for administration in the South Korean setting.

Peer nominations were collected using an inventory that contained 16 items assessing social behavior, aggression, victimization by peers, and social acceptance. We used a relatively small number of items because of the limited availability of classroom time. However, peer nomination assessments tend to yield highly reliable indices, even when single-item scales are utilized (Coie, Terry, Lenox, Lochman, & Hyman, 1995).

The children also completed *My Day at School*, a self-report questionnaire that taps children's experiences with victimization or bullying (five items for each construct) and their feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction (five items). Ratings were completed on a 1–4 scale, with points ranging from *never* to *almost every day*.

In addition, teachers completed the *Social Behavior Rating Scale*. This device contains 44 descriptors of

children's social behavior, victimization by peers, aggression and disruptive behavior, academic functioning, and peer acceptance. Teachers rated the accuracy of each descriptor on a 5-point scale, with points ranging from *almost never true of the child* to *almost always true of the child*.

Details regarding the specific constructs assessed by the combined measures are presented below.

Submissiveness–Withdrawal

Teachers completed three rating items designed to tap submissiveness and three social withdrawal items (derived from Schwartz, 2000). A Principal Components Analysis (PCA) conducted across the six items yielded a single-factor structure (based on the criterion of an eigenvalue greater than 1.0) with loadings greater than .50 for five of the six items (one submissive item, "gives in too easily to demands or requests from peers," was dropped because of a negative factor loading). A similar unidimensional structure emerged in our earlier data collection in China (Schwartz et al., 2001). Accordingly, we generated a *teacher rating of submissiveness–withdrawal* from the mean across the combined items ($\alpha = .76$; see Table I).

Additionally, one peer nomination item assessed social withdrawal ("kids who like to play alone, these are kids who would rather be alone than be with other kids") and a second item assessed submissive responses to conflict overtures ("kids who cry or get upset when somebody bothers them"). These two peer nomination items were highly correlated, $r = .60$, $p < .0001$. Accordingly, a *peer nomination submissiveness–withdrawal* score was generated based on the total number of nominations received across both items, standardized within class.

Table I. Summary of Principal Components Analyses of Submissive–Withdrawn and Assertive–Prosocial Teacher Rating Items

Construct	Item	Loading
Submissive–withdrawn	Timid or shy	.62
	Avoids social contact with peers	.73
	Likes to play alone	.78
	Cries or withdraws when teased or threatened	.59
	Overly submissive	.85
	Variance explained: 52%	
Assertive–prosocial	Helpful to peers	.78
	Good leader	.51
	Initiates social contact with peers	.87
	Friendly toward other children	.76
	Shares with peers	.69
	Assertive and stands up for self without using aggression	.71
	Variance explained: 44%	

Note. Factor loadings are based on Principal Components Analyses. Single-factor solutions emerged (based on an eigenvalue of 1.0) for each construct.

Assertiveness–Prosociability

Six teacher rating items were utilized to assess this dimension of children's social interactional styles. As shown in Table I, a PCA conducted with these items yielded a single-factor solution. A *teacher rating of assertiveness–prosociability* was generated from the mean across the six items ($\alpha = .74$).

In addition, two peer nomination items were utilized ("can stand up for self without hitting, fighting, or getting angry," "is a good leader"; $r = .61$, $p < .0001$). A *peer nomination assertiveness* score was calculated based on the total number of nominations received across these two items, standardized within class.

Aggression

Consistent with past research in Western contexts (e.g., Boulton, Bucci, & Hawker, 1999; Hart, Nelson, Robinson, Olsen, & McNeily-Choque, 1998; Österman et al., 1998), our measures included items designed to tap multiple subtypes of aggression. We focused on physical and verbal forms of overt aggression (see Björkqvist, 1994; Boulton & Hawker, 1997) that seek to directly cause damage to the well-being of others (i.e., verbal insults, threats, hitting, pushing, and other acts of physical aggression; Olson, 1992) as well as more "indirect" subtypes of aggression (Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988; Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Lagerspetz, 2000). We also considered "relational" (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) forms of aggression that may harm others by causing damage to relationships and social status (i.e., exclusion, spreading rumors, and withdrawal of affection; McNeily-Choque, Hart, Robinson, Nelson, & Olsen, 1996).

As shown in Table II, we used eight teacher rating items ($\alpha = .89$), four peer nomination items ($\alpha = .90$), and five self-report items ($\alpha = .60$). A series of PCAs, conducted separately within informant, consistently yielded single-factor solutions. Previous investigators have reported partially distinct factors for separate subtypes of aggression (e.g., Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). However, our measures were not optimized for discriminating between specific subtypes but were, instead, designed to provide a broad assessment of diverse forms of aggressive

Table II. Summary of Principal Components Analyses of Aggression Scales

Informant	Item	Loading
Self-report	How often do you bully or pick on another kid?	.64
	How often do you tease or make fun of another kid?	.59
	How often do you hit or push another kid?	.39
	How often do you gossip or say mean things about another kid?	.74
	How often do you try to hurt another kid's feelings by leaving them out of fun activities?	.63
	Variance explained: 37%	
Peer nomination	Kids who start fights	.91
	Kids who hit or push other kids	.92
	Kids who gossip or say mean things about other kids	.88
	Kids who try to exclude other kids from play to hurt their feelings	.80
	Variance explained: 77%	
Teacher report	Taunts or teases other children	.75
	Threatens or bullies other children	.79
	Starts fights by hitting or pushing other children	.67
	Uses force to obtain other children's possessions	.70
	Starts arguments with other children	.78
	Tries to get other children to stop playing with a peer	.82
	Tries to hurt other children's feelings by excluding them	.72
	Gossips or says mean things about other children	.81
	Variance explained: 57%	

Note. Factor loadings are based on Principal Components Analyses, conducted within informant. Single-factor solutions emerged (based on an eigenvalue of 1.0) for all analyses.

behavior. PCAs conducted with versions of these measures in both North America and China also produced single-factor solutions (Schwartz et al., 2001). For later analysis, we generated separate aggression variables from the mean of the eight teacher items, the mean of the five self-report items, and the total number of nominations received across the peer nomination items (standardized within class).

Academic Functioning

A *teacher rating of academic performance* score was calculated from the mean of three teacher rating items: "this child's academic performance is excellent," "this child is a good student," "this child has difficulties with school work" (reverse coded). Internal consistency across the items was $\alpha = .80$. In previous research conducted in China (Schwartz et al., 2001) and the United States (Schwartz & Hopmeyer Gorman, 2001), we have found very high correlations between other indicators of academic functioning (grade point averages, standardized achievement test scores) and estimates obtained through teacher ratings.

Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction

The self-report measure included five items that are designed to tap loneliness and social dissatisfaction ("feel left out and ignored," "feel lonely at school," "wish you had more friends at school," "feel like the other kids don't like you," "feel sad and alone"; $\alpha = .85$). For later analysis, the mean score across these five items was calculated.

Social Acceptance

The teacher rating scale contained one item assessing liking by peers ("well liked by peers") and one item assessing disliking by peers ("disliked by other children"). The correlation between the two items was $r = -.56$, $p \leq .0001$. The mean of the liking item and reverse-coded disliking item constituted the *teacher rating of social acceptance*.

In addition, children were asked to nominate the three peers they liked most in the class, as well as the three peers they liked least in their class. The total number of nominations received by each child for each of these two items was then calculated and standardized within class. A *social preference* score was generated from the standardized difference between the "like most" and "like least" scores (as per Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982).

Peer Victimization

In assessing peer victimization, we adopted a measurement strategy that was similar to the approach described above for aggression. We included scales that tap multiple subtypes of peer victimization. Items focused on "indirect" and "relational" victimization as well as more overt behaviors (verbal and physical). We included six teacher-rating items ($\alpha = .84$), four peer nomination items ($\alpha = .75$), and five self-report items ($\alpha = .75$).

As shown in Table III, PCAs produced single-factor solutions for each data source (consistent with our earlier

Table III. Summary of Principal Components Analyses of Victimization Scales

Informant	Item	Loading
Self-report	How often do other kids tease or make fun of you?	.79
	How often do other kids bully or pick on you?	.57
	How often do other kids hit or push you?	.81
	How often do other kids gossip or say mean things about you?	.70
	How often do other kids hurt your feelings by excluding you?	.63
	Variance explained: 50%	
Peer nomination	Kids who get hit or pushed by other kids	.75
	Kids who get picked on or teased by other kids	.88
	Kids who have mean things said about them by other kids	.54
	Kids who get excluded from play	.84
	Variance explained: 58%	
Teacher report	Other children hit or push this child	.77
	Other children tease or make fun of this child	.55
	Other children pick on or bully this child	.82
	Other children gossip or say mean things about this child	.80
	Other children ignore this child to be mean	.78
	Other children try to hurt this child's feelings by excluding him/her	.72
	Variance explained: 56%	

Note. Factor loadings are based on Principal Components Analyses, conducted within informant. Single-factor solutions emerged (based on an eigenvalue of 1.0) for all analyses.

analyses in North America and China; see Schwartz et al., 2001). Accordingly, for each informant, we generated a summary victimization score by calculating the mean across all items.

Procedure

The self-report and peer nomination measures were group administered to the children in a classroom-based session of approximately 1 hr in length. The administrations were conducted by trained research assistants who were not affiliated with the school. The research assistants read standardized instructions and also read each of the items aloud.

Children were seated apart from each other and asked to remain quiet throughout the procedure. They were also reminded to respect the confidentiality of the project. For the peer nomination inventory, children were given a classroom roster and were asked to nominate up to three peers who fit each of the items.

Teachers (with the assistance of teacher-aides) completed rating scales in the weeks following the classroom administration.

RESULTS

Overview

For descriptive purposes, we began by examining bivariate relations among all variables. A primary goal of these initial univariate analyses was to examine interinformant agreement for each construct. Next, we considered gender differences in mean scores for each of the variables (unfortunately, we lacked sufficient sample size to examine Gender × Predictor interaction effects). Finally, we conducted a series of inferential analyses modeling multivariate relations between the indicators of peer group victimization and the psychosocial adjustment variables.

Bivariate Relations Among Variables

Bivariate correlations among the variables are presented in Table IV. As shown, there was modest to moderate agreement among the informants for each of the constructs. The relatively strong correlations among the indicators of peer victimization, and among the indicators of submissiveness–withdrawal, may be particularly noteworthy. Past researchers have sometimes reported difficulty obtaining consistency across informants for these constructs (e.g., Graham & Juvonen, 1998a). The self-report score for aggression, on the other hand, was not significantly correlated with the corresponding teacher or peer variables and was dropped from further analysis. The pattern of weak effects for the self-report aggression scale may reflect the low internal consistency of the measure, but is still consistent with findings of research conducted in Western samples (i.e., Ledingham, Younger, Schwartzman, & Bergeron, 1982).

As expected, the indicators of victimization were negatively correlated with indicators of assertiveness–prosociability, social acceptance, and academic functioning, and were positively correlated with the indicators of submissiveness–withdrawal, aggression, and loneliness. The findings across informants were highly consistent

Table IV. Correlations Among All Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Submissive–withdrawn														
1. Peer nomination	—	**.50*****	−.12	−.20*	.00	.15	.05	−.24**	−.34***	−.06	.32***	.60***	.40***	.39***
2. Teacher rating	—	—	−.38***	−.41***	.00	.16	−.12	−.32***	−.45***	−.15	.23*	.39***	.44***	.24**
Assertive–prosocial														
3. Peer nomination	—	—	—	**.44*****	−.02	−.04	.20*	.43***	.34***	.30***	−.12	−.23*	−.19*	−.07
4. Teacher rating	—	—	—	—	−.47***	−.48***	−.01	.63***	.73***	.68***	−.19*	−.49***	−.50***	−.21*
Aggression														
5. Peer nomination	—	—	—	—	—	**.45*****	**.10**	−.59***	−.50***	−.35***	.01	.36***	.32***	−.04
6. Teacher rating	—	—	—	—	—	—	**.05**	−.44***	−.57***	−.30***	.10	.28***	.67***	.16
7. Self-report	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	−.03	.09	.01	.15	.02	.05	.49***
Social acceptance														
8. Peer nomination	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	**.63*****	.37***	−.32***	−.54***	−.48***	−.21***
9. Teacher rating	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.45***	−.30***	−.54***	−.60***	−.14
Academic functioning														
10. Teacher rating	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	−.05	−.30***	−.23**	−.00
Loneliness														
11. Self-report	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.38***	.24*	.64***
Victimization														
12. Peer nomination	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	**.46*****	**.39*****
13. Teacher rating	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	**.32*****
14. Self-report	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Note. See text for information regarding variable construction. Correlations in boldface assess inter-informant agreement.
$^{*}p \leq .05$. $^{**}p \leq .01$. $^{***}p \leq .001$.

with the findings within informants, providing a degree of validation for our measures.

Gender Differences

A series of t tests was conducted to examine gender differences on each of the predictor and outcome variables. We did not have a priori hypotheses regarding mean differences between boys and girls, but sought to explore the possibility carefully, given the findings from past research in Asian settings (e.g., Schwartz et al., 2001). As shown in Table V, these analyses failed to yield a strong pattern of results. However, girls had higher submissiveness–withdrawal scores (across informants) and academic functioning scores than boys. Boys, in turn, had higher peer nomination aggression scores than girls.

On the basis of the PCAs presented earlier, we conceptualized aggression and victimization as unidimensional constructs and examined summary scores collapsed across subtypes. However, for exploratory purposes, we also conducted analyses with the items separated into overt and relational/indirect scales (for the teacher rating and peer nominations variables). Across informants, boys had higher scores than girls on overt aggression, but did not differ on relational/indirect aggression (see Table V). In addition, there were no gender differences on any of the peer victimization variables.

Multivariate Relations Between Victimization and Psychosocial Adjustment

Next, we generated a series of canonical correlations to examine multivariate associations between the peer victimization variables and the psychosocial adjustment variables. For each of these analyses, a canonical variable was specified from a linear combination of the three indicators of victimization (i.e., self-report, peer nomination, and teacher rating). Canonical variables were also specified for social acceptance and each of the social behavior constructs. These variables were based on linear combinations of the relevant teacher rating and peer nomination scores. However, only single indicators were available for the academic functioning and loneliness constructs (self-report scores for loneliness and teacher rating scores for academic functioning). Separate analyses were conducted for each of the six psychosocial adjustment constructs. In order to minimize inflation of Type I error rates, the significance of the models was evaluated with a critical level of .0083 (i.e., $\alpha = .05$/six multivariate tests).

We did not partial out the effect of gender in these models, because (as reported above) our earlier analyses did not yield a consistent pattern of gender differences across variables. However, analyses conducted with and without control for gender yielded identical patterns of findings.

Table V. Mean (Standard Deviation) of Predictor and Outcome Scores by Gender

Construct	Gender		t-score
	Boys ($n = 66$)	Girls ($n = 56$)	
Submissiveness–withdrawal			
Peer nomination (standardized score)	−0.24 (0.52)	0.28 (1.05)	−3.39***
Teacher rating (1–5 rating)	1.95 (0.55)	2.30 (0.63)	−3.44***
Assertiveness–prosociability			
Peer nomination (standardized score)	0.01 (0.87)	−0.01 (0.97)	0.10
Teacher rating (1–5 rating)	3.26 (0.64)	3.43 (0.51)	−1.59
Aggression			
Peer nomination (standardized score)	0.17 (1.24)	−0.20 (0.52)	2.20*
Overt	0.20 (1.24)	−0.24 (0.47)	2.72**
Relational/indirect	0.08 (1.08)	−0.10 (.88)	1.03
Teacher rating (1–5 rating)	1.73 (0.62)	1.65 (0.47)	0.82
Overt	1.76 (0.71)	1.52 (0.45)	2.20*
Relational/indirect	1.68 (0.59)	1.87 (0.62)	−1.65
Self-report (1–4 rating)	1.70 (0.45)	1.65 (0.51)	0.66
Academic functioning			
Teacher rating (1–5)	2.97 (0.46)	3.13 (0.28)	−2.37*
Social acceptance			
Peer nomination (standardized score)	−0.09 (1.00)	0.10 (0.92)	−1.07
Teacher rating (1–5 rating)	3.67 (0.84)	3.63 (0.60)	0.31
Peer victimization			
Peer nomination (standardized score)	0.03 (1.00)	−0.03 (0.98)	0.34
Overt	0.03 (1.05)	−0.04 (0.93)	0.36
Relational/indirect	−0.01 (0.94)	0.01 (1.01)	−0.12
Teacher rating (1–5 rating)	1.78 (0.56)	1.84 (0.57)	−0.62
Overt	1.82 (0.65)	1.93 (0.65)	−1.00
Relation/indirect	1.75 (0.60)	1.76 (0.61)	−0.10
Self-report (1–4 rating)	1.80 (0.50)	1.92 (0.80)	−1.12
Loneliness/social dissatisfaction			
Self-report (1–4 rating)	1.62 (0.52)	1.84 (0.79)	−1.80

$^{*}p \leq .05$. $^{**}p \leq .01$. $^{***}p \leq .001$.

Table VI summarizes the results of these analyses. After Type I error correction, there were significant canonical correlations between the indicators of peer group victimization and the indicator variables for each of the six psychosocial adjustment constructs. Moreover, the pattern of structure coefficients for the canonical variables was consistent with the results of the bivariate analyses summarized above. Examination of the coefficients indicated negative multivariate associations between peer victimization and assertiveness–prosociability, social acceptance, and academic functioning, as well as positive multivariate associations between peer victimization and submissiveness–withdrawal, aggression, and loneliness.

DISCUSSION

This investigation sought to extend the existing research on bully/victim problems by examining the correlates of victimization by peers for South Korean children. The processes underlying peer group victimization have been explored in a number of previous studies, but past researchers have focused almost entirely on Western settings. To the best of our knowledge, this project is the first to consider this phenomenon within the South Korean cultural context.

Social Behavior and Bullying by Peers

Our results are generally consistent with past research conducted in a number of different cultural contexts. We found that, in the South Korea, children who are characterized by submissive–withdrawn behavior or aggression are likely to emerge as frequent victims of maltreatment by peers. In contrast, assertive–prosocial tendencies are associated with more positive social outcomes in South Korean children's peer groups. We have described comparable effects for Chinese children in a past report (Schwartz et al., 2001). Moreover, investigations conducted in North American and European settings

Table VI. Multivariate Relations Between Indicators of Peer Group Victimization and Indicators of Psychosocial Adjustment

Construct	Structure coefficient	Canonical correlation	Wilks' λ	*F*
Submissive–withdrawn		.66	.537	14.21 (6, 234)***
Peer nomination	.82			
Teacher rating	.30			
Assertive–prosocial		.59	.654	9.22 (6, 234)***
Peer nomination	−.43			
Teacher rating	−.99			
Aggression		.68	.464	18.27 (6, 234)***
Peer nomination	.48			
Teacher rating	.99			
Social acceptance		.72	.471	17.83 (6, 234)***
Peer nomination	−.83			
Teacher rating	−.96			
Academic functioning		.35	.878	5.44 (3, 118)**
Teacher rating	—			
Loneliness		.66	.566	30.18 (3, 118)***
Self-report	—			

Note. Canonical correlations assess relations between linear combinations of the peer nomination, teacher rating, and self-report scores for victimization, and the multi-informant indices for the psychosocial adjustment variable. Structure coefficients are the correlation between the multi-informant indicators for each psychosocial adjustment construct, and the canonical variable generated for that construct. Tests were evaluated using a critical value of $p < .0083$ (.05/number of multivariate tests).
*$p \leq .005$. **$p \leq .001$. ***$p \leq .0001$.

have also yielded analogous results (see Perry et al., 1992). Thus, the overall pattern of findings seems to indicate that similar behavioral styles are associated with risk for victimization by peers across diverse Western and Asian contexts (although it is important to emphasize that direct comparisons between cultural contexts have yet to be conducted).

The significant association between indicators of submissiveness–withdrawal and victimization by peers seems particularly noteworthy in light of the existing research on the social development of Asian children (see Rubin, 1998; Schneider et al., 1997). Past investigators have concluded that restrained or hesitant behavioral styles are associated with positive social adjustment in Asian children's peer groups (Belsky et al., 2000; Chen & Rubin, 1992). These researchers have hypothesized that the meaning of inhibited behavior is influenced by culturally defined values (Chen, 2000). From this perspective, children who are quiet, timid, or shy are expected to be relatively well liked by their peers, insofar as restrained or inhibited behavior reflects the dominant values held by the society as a whole (e.g., cultures that are influenced by Confucian value systems; see Park & Cho, 1995). Nonetheless, we found that South Korean children who are characterized by withdrawn or submissive tendencies tend to emerge as frequent victims of bullying.

A multidimensional conceptualization of inhibited behavior could provide a useful heuristic for considering the full pattern of findings across studies. Past research on the role of behavioral inhibition in Asian children's peer groups has generally emphasized shy or sensitive behavioral dispositions (e.g., Chen et al., 1992). In contrast, we focused on submissiveness and anxious avoidance of social interaction, behavioral tendencies that have been shown to be predictive of victimization in Western peer groups (e.g., Boivin et al., 1995; Boulton, 1999; Schwartz et al., 1993). It may be the case that shyness–sensitivity and submissiveness–withdrawal are distinct dimensions of inhibition with different social meanings in South Korean peer groups. Consistent with predominant cultural values, a shy or sensitive disposition could function to facilitate interdependent functioning within the group social context. In contrast, more overtly withdrawn behaviors, by definition, decrease social interaction with peers and might be viewed as incompatible with a collectivistic orientation (see Triandis, 1995).

Theoretical perspectives on cultural differences in the manifestation of psychopathology might also suggest a need to consider multiple subtypes of inhibited behavior. Weisz and colleagues have described a "problem suppression–facilitation model" of the development of children's behavior problems (for a review,

see Weisz et al., 1997). According to these investigators, cultural processes influence the form of children's maladjustment by providing encouragement for particular behavioral tendencies while discouraging others. In a society that tends to endorse a restrained or inhibited disposition, children will be more likely to experience internalizing behavior problems than externalizing problems (Weisz & McCarty, 1999). The same cultural processes that encourage socially competent aspects of behavioral inhibition (e.g., sensitivity, politeness, deference, humility) in well-adjusted children could also facilitate the emergence of more maladaptive subtypes of this dimension of social behavior (e.g., inappropriate submissiveness or social withdrawal) for children who are on negative developmental trajectories (e.g., children who emerge as victims of bullying).

Although further research on the outcomes associated with distinct subtypes of inhibition may be necessary, the picture that emerged regarding other aspects of children's social behavior was relatively clear. As expected, children who were high in aggression, or low in assertive–prosocial behavior, were frequently targeted for victimization by their peers. These results replicate a pattern that has been observed in a number of different Western and Eastern contexts. Across varied cultural settings, sociability appears to be conducive to positive peer relationships whereas aggression is perceived negatively by peers (see Schneider et al., 1997).

Academic Functioning, Psychological Distress, and Bullying by Peers

The results of this study also highlight the link between academic adjustment and social functioning for South Korean children. We found moderately strong negative associations between teacher ratings of children's academic functioning and multi-informant reports of peer group victimization. Consistent with our hypotheses, children who exhibited poor academic performance in school tended to emerge as frequent targets of bullying. This pattern of findings could reflect the emphasis placed on academic excellence within South Korean society as a whole (Chong & Michael, 2000). To the extent that a cultural focus on achievement influences the attitudes held by the peer group, children who do poorly in school may be at high risk for rejection and maltreatment by peers.

Likewise, it is important to consider the impact that negative experiences with peers can have on children's functioning at school. Western researchers have viewed rejection and bullying as stressors that exert a pernicious influence on children's academic adjustment and attitudes toward school (Juvonen et al., 2000; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Wentzel, 1991; Wentzel & Asher, 1995). Because collectivistic values emphasize interdependent social functioning (Cha, 1994), conflict with peers could prove especially stressful for South Korean children. Over time, reciprocal relations between academic failure and social maladjustment may emerge (see Chen et al., 1992).

The hypothesis that children in this culture experience distress as a result of negative treatment by peers does seem to be supported by our correlational findings. Children who were frequently targeted for bullying reported feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction. In further research, it might prove informative to focus on multiple forms of internalized distress (e.g., depression, anxiety, low self-esteem). In addition, these linkages will need to be examined using longitudinal designs because the cross-sectional nature of the current study necessarily precludes causal conclusions.

Other unresolved questions focus on the consistency of findings across cultures. The link between academic difficulties and peer victimization observed in this study might not replicate in a Western context. In fact, relatively little is known about the academic adjustment of frequently bullied children in North American and European settings. One relevant study was recently conducted by Juvonen et al. (2000), who examined peer harassment in an ethnically diverse middle school in Los Angeles, California. These researchers found a moderately strong pattern of effects, with adolescents who self-reported harassment by peers tending to have low grade point averages and high absentee rates. However, other North American researchers have concluded that only a subset of victimized children are likely to be characterized by poor school performance (Schwartz, 2000).

Gender Differences

Surprisingly, our descriptive analyses of gender differences produced only a weak pattern of effects. In this regard, the results of this study were not fully congruent with past investigations conducted in either Asian or Western settings. For example, in our earlier research on bullying in Chinese children's peer groups, we found gender differences in multiple domains of children's behavioral and social functioning (e.g., Schwartz et al., 2001). It is possible that normative levels of some behaviors are relatively low in the South Korean setting so that reliable comparisons between groups are difficult to conduct. Gender stereotypes within the larger societal context are also likely to have a significant impact on informant response patterns and could obscure meaningful variation. In any case, there does seem to be a need for further investigation

of gender differences in social behavior within this cultural context. Analyses focusing on the gender as a moderating factor in the association between specific risk factors and victimization (e.g., interactions between gender and behavior) for South Korean children could also prove informative.

Caveats and Future Directions

The results of this study provide insight into the processes underlying bully/victim problems in a previously unexplored cultural context. Nonetheless, several limitations of this work should be acknowledged. First, our findings do not provide a strong foundation for conclusions about differences *between* cultural groups (i.e., differences between Western children and South Korean children). As we have argued elsewhere (Schwartz et al., 2001), analyses conducted *within* group are a necessary starting point for a wider program of research examining the impact of cultural processes and other relevant contextual factors on children's social maladjustment with peers. However, comparative statements regarding the determinants of negative peer group outcomes across cultural settings should be made with great care.

This investigation is also limited by the methodological complexities inherent in cross-cultural research. One particularly relevant concern is that informant reports (e.g., teacher ratings, peer nominations) are likely to be influenced by the values and beliefs associated with the dominant culture (Schneider, 1998; Weisz & McCarty, 1999). Informants may be particularly sensitive to behavioral tendencies that violate culturally defined expectations (Weisz et al., 1997). For example, in a social context in which children are typically characterized by quiet, restrained, or inhibited behavior, there might be a relatively low threshold for the detection of disruptive externalizing behaviors. Thus, many of the behaviors that are identified as aggression in South Korea may be lower in intensity than similarly identified behaviors in Western settings. Unfortunately, it is not clear how such interpretational difficulties may have influenced our results.

Similarly, the external validity of behavioral assessments derived from translated measures is dependent on the conceptual equivalence of the items across cultural contexts (Hart et al., 1998; Schneider, 1998). That is, questionnaire items must be understood in a similar manner by informants in both South Korean and Western settings. In the current study, we sought to address such concerns by including multiple informants and by carefully reviewing translations for accuracy and appropriateness. Nonetheless, validity issues remain a central concern in research endeavors of this nature.

Questions regarding external validity are also of concern within societies as well as across societies (for relevant comments, see Bukowski & Sippola, 1998). It should not be assumed that all children experience their culture in the same fashion. Instead, there is likely to be considerable diversity in the customs, belief systems, and cultural practices to which children are exposed. Likewise, Confucian ideologies and traditional values will exert a stronger influence on some South Korean families than others.

A related concern is that the participants in this study are not fully representative of the complete spectrum of South Korean society. Because of resource limitations, and the complexities inherent in research conducted across international boundaries, we recruited a relatively small sample of children. We also focused exclusively on children from Seoul, the urban center of South Korea, and did not attempt to recruit participants from other sections of the country. Clearly, a larger and more representative sample would facilitate generalization of results.

Apart from issues related to the complexity of conducting research in this setting, there is a need for investigations that incorporate a developmental perspective. The social meaning of some classes of behavior may change over the course of development. In Western settings, there is evidence that subtypes of inhibition gradually become less distinct in the middle years of childhood so that solitary–passive behaviors become more closely associated with peer group rebuff by early adolescence (Asendorpf, 1991; Coplan et al., 1994). Other researchers have suggested that attitudes toward aggression begin to shift in a positive direction during early adolescence (for related comments; see Graham & Juvonen, 1998b).

On a more theoretical level, understanding of processes underlying developmental trajectories toward maladjustment could be enhanced by integration of cross-cultural perspectives on children's social functioning and psychopathology. In Western contexts, social difficulties with peers are a powerful marker of later disorder (Parker & Asher, 1997). Extreme subgroups of bullied children (e.g., children who are concurrently victimized and aggressive) may be at particularly high risk for psychosocial difficulties (Schwartz, 2000). Conversely, more positive social interactions with peers (i.e., friendships) can play an important role in buffering children against developmental insults (Schwartz et al., 2000). However, models that incorporate interactions and transactions between peer relationships and psychopathological states have not yet been widely applied to research conducted outside the context of Western culture.

In summary, this study sought to extend the existing bully–victim research by providing descriptive information on the correlates of victimization in South Korean

children's peer groups. As expected, South Korean children who were frequently bullied by peers were characterized by submissive–withdrawal, aggression, and low rates of assertive–prosocial behavior. Furthermore, in this cultural context, peer victimization was associated with academic failure, loneliness, and peer rejection. Overall, our findings were highly consistent with the results of research conducted in Western children's peer groups.

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