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# Sexual Victimization and Perceptions of Close Relationships in Adolescence

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*An attachment perspective is proposed as a framework for conceptualizing the impact of sexual victimization on close relationships. Two studies were conducted to empirically examine the links between sexual victimization and perceptions of romantic, parental, and peer relationships. Study One included 154 undergraduate women, and Study Two included 48 high school seniors. In both studies, approximately half the women reported having experienced some form of coerced sexual experience. The majority were victimized by an acquaintance, and most victims had experienced multiple incidents. The first study found that victimized women had significantly more preoccupied romantic views than nonvictimized women. Retrospective reports indicated that women victimized in college were significantly more dismissing with their fathers in high school. In Study Two, victims reported more negative interactions with romantic partners, but no differences were found for romantic styles. Victims also reported more dismissing parental styles and more negative interactions with their fathers than nonvictims.*

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**M**any adolescent and young adult women experience some form of undesired or forced sexual experience with strangers or, more often, acquaintances whom they may be dating or perhaps just know. Such forced sexual encounters take many different forms, from unwanted touching to rape. The prevalence rates for sexual victimization vary depending on the operational definition (for a review, see Craig, 1990). For example, when such victimization has been defined as strictly rape, a rate of 13% for women has

been found (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985). When victimization has been more broadly defined, rates as high as 54% have been reported in college samples (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987).

The literature on college and older women convincingly documents the overriding psychological and sexual dysfunctions experienced by rape victims. Feelings of fear, anger, embarrassment, humiliation, depression, and self-blame are among the psychological symptoms experienced following an assault (Becker, Skinner, Abel, Axelrod, & Treacy, 1984; Becker, Skinner, Abel, Howell, & Bruce, 1982). Less sexual satisfaction, arousal or desire problems, and fear of sex are a few of the documented sexual symptoms experienced by victims (Becker, Skinner, Abel, & Cichon, 1986; Becker, et al., 1982; Kilpatrick, Best, Saunders, & Veronen, 1988; Moscarello, 1990; Orlando & Koss, 1983).

One of the more long-term effects of sexual victimization is a distrust of others (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985; Kilpatrick, Resick, & Veronen, 1981; Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988; Medea & Thompson, 1974; Notman & Nadelson, 1976). In addition to experienc-

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ing distrust of men, victims may experience fear of and hostility toward men (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985; Medea & Thompson, 1974). Distrust of men, fear of men, and hostility toward men bode poorly for feeling comfortable with men and establishing meaningful attachments. Thus, it appears that the victimization experience could profoundly affect romantic relationships.

Although the literature provides some information regarding the impact of sexual victimization on romantic relationships, several issues need further attention. Most studies have included a wide range of ages, but less is known about the particular impact of such experiences on adolescent women. Recent studies have documented the prevalence of acquaintance or date rape during the adolescent years (Davis, Peck, & Stormont, 1993; Koss et al., 1988; Small & Kerns, 1993). This high prevalence underscores the importance of studying victimization during this developmental period because the experience and its impact may be different from victimization at older ages. Youth are in the process of developing their expectations for romantic relationships and exploring their sexuality; because this is a new arena, the impact may be greater or perhaps less. Similarly, adolescents' relationships are likely to be shorter in length and less likely to be committed. Because their bonds with perpetrators are not as strong, the effect may be different.

An additional limitation is that research has focused on romantic relationships, and little is known about the links between victimization and parental or peer relationships in either the adolescent or adult years. Finally, the work has been principally descriptive in nature. We believe that an attachment perspective may provide a framework for conceptualizing the impact that sexual victimization may have on close relationships.

Attachment theorists have emphasized that individuals develop expectations or representations of close relationships beginning with their caregivers in infancy. Infants who have received sensitive care will come to see others and themselves positively, whereas those who have not will develop negative working models of others and themselves. By internalizing expectations of others based on the care received, the infant creates a basis on which to transact this and other social relationships. Bowlby (1973) believed that these internal working models of caregivers created by children would endure over time; moreover, they would shape subsequent close relationships. In effect, these models of caretaking relationships would serve as the basis for models of subsequent relationships.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) proposed that adult romantic relationships can be thought of as attachment relationships. They noted many parallels between infant and adult attachments (Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988). Just as they did with their caretakers as infants, individuals seek proximity to their romantic partners, may turn to them when upset, use them as secure bases from which to venture, and are distressed at separation or loss. Hazan and Shaver also recognized that adult love involves sexual behavior and reciprocal caregiving, two components that are either primitive or nonexistent in infant attachment. Thus, they conceptualized adult romantic love as the integration of three behavioral systems: attachment, caregiving, and sexual mating.

Shaver and Hazan (1988) proposed that individuals' representations of their romantic relationships could be conceptualized in similar terms as those used to describe infant attachment. That is, they suggested that such representations or love styles could be categorized as secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent. In support of this theoretical extension, Shaver and Hazan (1988) found the three love styles to be associated with different romantic experiences. For example, individuals characterized by secure romantic styles experience trust, closeness, and a relative absence of jealousy and fear of intimacy. In contrast, avoidant or dismissing romantic styles are associated with fears of intimacy and the lowest incidence of positive relationship experiences, and anxious/ambivalent or preoccupied romantic styles are associated with emotional highs and lows, obsession with partners, and extreme jealousy.

We believe that this conceptualization of adult romantic relationships is promising, especially when it is integrated with the insights of neo-Sullivanian theory (Buhmester & Furman, 1986). Furman and Wehner (1992) proposed that romantic relationships not only involve the attachment, caretaking, and sexual systems, but also the affiliation system or the biological predisposition to seek out and interact with known others. Affiliating interactions with romantic partners and peers provide opportunities to learn and practice the skills of cooperation, mutual exchange, collaboration, and intimate self-disclosure. In effect, the inclusion of this system provides a way to account for the similarities between friendships and romantic relationships as well as the influence of peer relationships on romantic experiences (Furman, 1999).

Like Hazan and Shaver, we expected individuals to have different views or representations of relationships. Those with secure views of romantic relationships think that they should be able to turn to their partners at times of distress, value taking care of their

partners, desire to invest energy in the process of constructing mutual relationships, and value the affectionate and caring elements of sexuality. Those with avoidant or dismissing views may not see their partners as someone to turn to, may have little interest in caring for their partners, may have little investment in relationships, and may see sex as an opportunity for experimentation or self-gratification. Finally, those with anxious/ambivalent or preoccupied views may find it difficult to feel comforted by their partners when distressed, may be overly concerned about their partners' problems, may overly invest in relationships in a self-sacrificing manner, and may be dissatisfied with their sexual experiences.

Such views are expected to be hierarchically structured, such that individuals have views of particular relationships, views of particular types of relationships, and views of close relationships in general. Views are not static traits of the individual but are expected to develop over the course of one's relationship experience. Views of a particular type of relationship are influenced by experiences in other relationships, but they are particularly influenced by the experiences with that type of relationship. Individuals with positive experiences may develop more secure views, whereas those with negative experiences may develop more insecure views. Accordingly, one would expect that those who had been victimized may develop less secure views of romantic relationships. The research that has shown that victimized women distrust, fear, and are hostile toward men is consistent with this idea.

The purpose of the following two studies was to examine what links may exist between sexual victimization and one's perceptions of close relationships, including romantic, parental, and peer relationships. Victimization was expected to be associated with more insecure views of romantic relationships, but the effect of victimization on views of parental or peer relationships is less clear. It is possible that someone may become less trusting of all close others, but it also seems possible that the impact may be limited to certain types of relationships.

#### **STUDY ONE: SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION IN A COLLEGE SAMPLE**

In the first study, we examined the links between perceptions of relationships and sexual victimization in a sample of late-adolescent women. We gathered contemporary data on their college years and retrospective data on their high school years.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Data were collected from 154 undergraduate women enrolled in a private university in a large metropolitan area. Ages ranged from 17 to 25 years ( $M = 19.8$ ). Approximately 41% of the sample were freshmen, 21% were sophomores, 19% were juniors, and 19% were seniors. Eighty percent of the sample were Caucasian, 6% were Hispanic, and the remaining were of other ethnicities, biracial, foreign students, or did not report their ethnicities. These demographic characteristics appear representative of the university's undergraduate population.

### **Procedure**

A cover letter describing a large study on relationships was mailed to female undergraduate students. The students were notified that information on parental, peer, and romantic experiences would be collected. Furthermore, they were informed that one questionnaire asked about any coercive sexual activity they may have experienced. The letter encouraged all students to participate in the project regardless of dating history and regardless of experience with coercive sexual activity. Students interested in participating mailed back response cards, and they were then sent consent forms and questionnaire packets. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants' responses, the questionnaire packets only included identification numbers. The response rate was approximately 15%, which is not atypical for projects for which participants are not provided any compensation.

### **Measures**

The Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) (Koss & Gidycz, 1985; Koss & Oros, 1982) is a commonly used measure to assess an individual's level of sexual victimization. The 10-item self-report instrument was used to ask the women if they had experienced a series of sexual victimization acts. For example, one question read, "Have you had sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?" Each succeeding question described more aggressive and victimizing behaviors, with the last 3 items describing behaviors that met the legal definition of rape. The participants were told not to include instances of incest, an important but different form of victimization.

Those women indicating some level of victimization were asked additional questions regarding their most severe (or only) sexual victimization experi-

ences. Information was obtained about the victims' relationships with the offenders, the time elapsed since the incidents occurred, and the total number of incidents experienced.

The Behavioral Systems Questionnaire (BSQ) (Wehner & Furman, 1999) was used to assess the participants' relational styles. Four parallel versions assessed styles with participants' mothers, fathers, friends, and romantic partners. Within each version, secure, dismissing, and preoccupied relational styles were assessed with 50 items concerning perceptions of features of attachment, caregiving, and affiliation ( $M$ alpha = .89, range = .84 to .94). The romantic partner version also included items referring to sexuality, but these were not included in the current study so that the versions for different relationships would be parallel. The romantic and friend measures included questions about participants' beliefs about these types of relationships (as opposed to one particular relationship), and thus were appropriate regardless of whether the participant had a current romantic relationship or friendship.

In addition to completing the four versions of the BSQ for their current feelings of close relationships, the participants completed a second set of questionnaires based on their feelings at the end of high school. The retrospective versions of the BSQ were shortened to nine items for each of the three relational styles ( $M$ alpha = .86, range = .79 to .90). These data were collected to provide information on the women's styles prior to college to assess any perceived change in styles due to subsequent sexual victimization in college. Additionally, the data provided some indication of whether those victimized in college differed from nonvictims in their preexisting relational styles.

The Dating History Questionnaire was administered to obtain information about participants' current dating statuses and dating behaviors. Finally, demographic questionnaires were included in the packets.

## Results

### Nature of Victimization— Descriptive Information

Fifty-six percent of the women reported some level of sexual victimization. Table 1 presents the frequencies of the sexual experiences described in the SES. The frequencies of victimization ranged from 46.8% reporting unwanted sexual contact subsequent to continual arguments to 1.3% reporting unwanted sexual intercourse subsequent to misuse of a man's authority. The findings are very similar to the results

**TABLE 1: Proportions of Late Adolescents Experiencing Unwanted Sexual Behaviors**

<i>Sexual Behavior</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1. Sex play subsequent to a man's continual arguments?	47
2. Sex play subsequent to a man's misuse of authority?	5
3. Sex play subsequent to threats or physical force?	16
4. Attempted intercourse subsequent to threats or physical force?	10
5. Attempted intercourse subsequent to being given alcohol or drugs?	13
6. Sexual intercourse subsequent to a man's continual arguments?	28
7. Sexual intercourse subsequent to a man's misuse of authority?	1
8. Sexual intercourse subsequent to being given alcohol or drugs?	10
9. Sexual intercourse subsequent to threats or physical force?	13
10. Sex acts subsequent to threats or physical force?	8

provided by Koss and colleagues' (1987) representative nationwide sample of 3,187 college women.

Seventy-four percent of those victimized reported multiple experiences of victimization. Of those experiencing multiple incidents, 24% of the women indicated that the same person committed incidents, whereas 76% reported that they had been victimized by more than one man.

It is interesting that in 98% of the incidents, offenders were reported to be acquaintances of the victim. Offenders were described as nonromantic acquaintances in 37% of the cases, as casual dates in 23% of the cases, and as boyfriends or lovers in 41% of the cases. The most serious (or only) incident was reported to have occurred in high school in 58% of the cases and during college in 38% of the instances.

### Links Between Relationship Styles and Victimization

Mean comparisons between the victimized and nonvictimized women were conducted on their relational styles for each relationship. As seen in Table 2, victimized participants held significantly more preoccupied views of their romantic partners than nonvictimized women,  $t(149) = -2.25, p < .05$ . No differences were found for either dismissing or secure romantic styles. The comparisons for mother, father, and friend were also nonsignificant.

### Links Between Retrospective Styles and Victimization

Next, we examined views of close relationships in high school to determine if there were differences among those who had been victimized in high school

**TABLE 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Relational Style Scores for Late-Adolescent Nonvictims and Victims**

Style	Nonvictims		Victims	
	M	SD	M	SD
Romantic partner				
General secure	3.95	.52	3.88	.52
General dismissing	2.30	.57	2.32	.49
General preoccupied	2.37	.64	2.62	.71*
Mothers				
General secure	3.60	.75	3.74	.71
General dismissing	2.34	.66	2.30	.70
General preoccupied	2.03	.57	1.90	.51
Fathers				
General secure	3.09	.87	3.03	.82
General dismissing	2.38	.62	2.52	.69
General preoccupied	2.26	.55	2.30	.67
Friends				
General secure	3.88	.47	3.93	.50
General dismissing	2.38	.43	2.37	.52
General preoccupied	2.27	.52	2.36	.61

NOTE: An asterisk indicates a significant difference between the two means in that row.

\* $p < .05$ .

( $N = 54$ ), those who had been victimized in college ( $N = 42$ ), and nonvictimized women ( $N = 54$ ). Of particular interest was whether women with certain styles were more prone to experience sexual assault in college; this question was examined by comparing the reports of high school styles of victimized college women and nonvictims.

Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) revealed significant group differences on the dismissing styles for fathers,  $F(2, 114) = 7.07, p < .05$ , and near significant effects on the secure styles for fathers,  $F(2, 114) = 3.04, p < .06$ . As shown in Table 3, those victimized in college and high school were significantly more dismissing with their fathers in high school than nonvictims. Those victimized in college also tended to be less secure than nonvictims. No significant differences were found for any of the friend, mother, or romantic partner styles. These findings suggest that women having insecure relationships with their fathers in high school may be more susceptible to sexual assault in college.

#### Links Between Dating History and Victimization

One-way ANOVAs were carried out to detect any differences on dating history variables between those victimized and those never victimized. The victimized group had a higher number of dating partners than the nonvictimized group,  $F(1, 141) = 6.22, p < .01$ . Victims did not differ in terms of whether they had current romantic relationships,  $\chi^2 = .81, ns$ . Those with

**TABLE 3: Means and Standard Deviations of Retrospective Relational Style Scores for Late-Adolescent Nonvictims and Victims**

Style	Nonvictims		High School Victims		College Victims	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Romantic partners						
General secure	3.69	.61	3.65	.65	3.66	.62
General dismissing	2.47	.61	2.58	.56	2.65	.71
General preoccupied	2.67	.66	2.90	.77	2.93	.57
Mothers						
General secure	3.45	.85	3.55	.81	3.13	.92
General dismissing	2.35	.66	2.33	.66	2.61	.69
General preoccupied	2.15	.66	2.10	.76	2.22	.68
Fathers						
General secure	3.05	.85 <sup>a</sup>	2.80	.77 <sup>a, b</sup>	2.58	.77 <sup>b</sup>
General dismissing	2.45	.58 <sup>a</sup>	2.73	.67 <sup>b</sup>	3.01	.60 <sup>b</sup>
General preoccupied	2.40	.65	2.43	.85	2.70	.78
Friends						
General secure	3.78	.68	4.03	.49	3.92	.60
General dismissing	2.46	.62	2.26	.51	2.43	.74
General preoccupied	2.42	.71	2.36	.71	2.64	.93

NOTE: Groups with different superscripts differ significantly,  $p < .05$ .

current romantic relationships had more secure styles,  $M = 4.06$  versus  $3.65, F(1, 149) = 26.25, p < .01$ . Conversely, they had less preoccupied and dismissing styles,  $M = 2.35$  versus  $2.79, F(1, 149) = 15.51, p < .01$ ;  $M = 2.15$  versus  $2.59, F(1, 149) = 29.74, p < .01$ , respectively. Those who had been victimized, however, continued to have higher preoccupied scores than those who had not, even when current dating status was controlled for,  $F(1, 148) = 7.41, p < .01$ .

#### STUDY TWO: SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION IN A HIGH SCHOOL SAMPLE

The first study yielded some provocative findings about views of relationships in high school but was limited by the retrospective nature of the data collection. The purpose of the second study was to examine the pattern of relations in a sample of high school students. Not only was information available on their styles of relationships with romantic partners, friends, and parents, but we were also able to examine their perceptions of support and negative interactions in these relationships. Such perceptions of relationship qualities are theoretically distinct from stylistic representations of relationships, but an examination of both sets of variables provides an opportunity to obtain a fuller picture of victims' and nonvictims' social experiences and their representations of such.

## Method

### Participants

Data were collected from 48 girls in their senior year of high school. The participants ranged in age from 16 to 18 years of age ( $M = 17.8$ ). Seventy-three percent of the sample were Caucasian, 13% were Hispanic, and the remaining were of other ethnicities, biracial, foreign students, or did not report their ethnicities.

### Procedure

The participants were involved in a larger, coed project on adolescent romantic relationships. The BSQ, the Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI), and the Dating History Questionnaire were administered, and demographic information was collected as part of this project. Because of the sensitivity of the measure, we obtained separate consent for the SES. Forty-nine percent of the girls in the larger project agreed to participate. The questionnaire was administered when the girls were 18 years of age. For 61% of them, this occurred at the completion of the main project; for the remaining 39%, the questionnaire was administered shortly after their 18th birthdays.

### Measures

The SES was the same as in the first study. For those participants who received the survey later than the other measures, we asked them to report only victimization that had occurred prior to their participation in the main project, and we reminded them of when they had participated.

The BSQ was a revised 67-item version of the measure used in the first study, with similar scale properties ( $M$ alpha = .90, range = .87 to .91). One important difference was that the revised BSQ assessed views of parental figures in general rather than having separate versions for fathers and mothers. This change was made because of the high correlations found between views of mothers and fathers (Furman & Wehner, 1994). The romantic BSQ was administered only to those who had had a relationship of 3 months or longer at some time ( $N = 40$ ).

The NRI is a 24-item questionnaire that assesses eight qualities in each of a set of relationships (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). These include six provisions of support derived from Weiss's (1974) theory: (a) reliable alliance—a lasting dependable bond, (b) enhancement of worth, (c) instrumental help, (d) companionship, (e) affection, and (f) intimacy. The six scales have been found to load on a single support factor (Furman, 1996). The measure also included

**TABLE 4: Proportions of Middle Adolescents Experiencing Unwanted Sexual Behaviors**

<i>Sexual Behavior</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1. Sex play subsequent to a man's continual arguments?	35
2. Sex play subsequent to a man's misuse of authority?	0
3. Sex play subsequent to threats or physical force?	4
4. Attempted intercourse subsequent to threats or physical force?	6
5. Attempted intercourse subsequent to being given alcohol or drugs?	9
6. Sexual intercourse subsequent to a man's continual arguments?	27
7. Sexual intercourse subsequent to a man's misuse of authority?	0
8. Sexual intercourse subsequent to being given alcohol or drugs?	8
9. Sexual intercourse subsequent to threats or physical force?	4
10. Sex acts subsequent to threats or physical force?	0

two indices of negative interaction, conflict and annoyance, which also load on a single factor.

The NRI was used to ask participants to rate how much a relationship quality occurred in each relationship; for example, "How much free time do you spend with each of these persons?" Ratings were done on standard 5-point Likert scales. The present study focused on the ratings of relationships with the following people: (a) mother figure, (b) father figure, (c) most supportive friend, and (d) most supportive romantic partner.

## Results

### Nature of Victimization— Descriptive Information

Table 4 presents the frequencies of the sexual experiences described in the SES. Forty-eight percent reported some form of victimization. Most frequently, participants reported unwanted sexual contact subsequent to continual arguments (35%) or unwanted sexual intercourse subsequent to continual arguments (27%).

As in the first study, 64% of those victimized reported multiple experiences of victimization, whereas 36% reported only one incident. Of those experiencing multiple incidents, 56% indicated that the same person committed all incidents, whereas 44% reported that they had been victimized by more than one man. Offenders were reported to be casual or nonromantic acquaintances in 39% of the cases, casual dates in 21% of the cases, and boyfriends or lovers in 39% of the cases. None were strangers.

**TABLE 5: Means and Standard Deviations of Relational Style Scores for Middle-Adolescent Nonvictims and Victims**

Style	Nonvictims		Victims	
	M	SD	M	SD
Romantic partners				
General secure	4.09	.46	3.93	.51
General dismissing	2.04	.53	1.91	.67
General preoccupied	2.32	.61	2.56	.60
Parents				
General secure	3.65	.70	3.32	.73
General dismissing	2.24	.67	2.69	.73*
General preoccupied	2.19	.62	2.27	.52
Friends				
General secure	3.90	.58	3.88	.39
General dismissing	2.08	.66	2.18	.67
General preoccupied	2.30	.63	2.37	.51

NOTE: An asterisk indicates a significant difference between the two means in that row.

\* $p < .05$ .

### Links Between Victimization and Relational Styles, Perceptions, and Dating History

Next, mean comparisons were conducted to examine differences in relational styles on the BSQ (see Table 5). Victims reported significantly greater dismissing styles for parents,  $t(45) = 2.19, p < .05$ . No differences were found in the style scores for friends or romantic partners.

We examined the perceptions of relationships on the NRI. As seen in Table 6, victims reported more negative interactions with their romantic partners,  $t(33) = 2.27, p < .05$ . They also reported more negative interactions with their fathers,  $t(34) = 3.26, p < .01$ . No significant differences were found in perceptions of mothers and friends. Finally, victims and nonvictims did not differ in the total number of individuals they had dated or whether they had a current relationship.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

### Nature of Victimization

The descriptive information provided by the participants regarding their victimization highlights the prevalence of coercive behavior in heterosexual interactions. Approximately half the women in each study reported having experienced some form of coerced sexual activity. Because the samples were voluntary, it is possible that women who had been victimized were overrepresented. The late-adolescent sample, however, closely matched the descriptive information obtained in representative samples (e.g., Koss et al., 1987). Existing data on victimization in middle ado-

**TABLE 6: Means and Standard Deviations of Relationship Perceptions for Middle-Adolescent Nonvictims and Victims**

Style	Nonvictims		Victims	
	M	SD	M	SD
Romantic partners				
Support	4.01	.91	3.64	.96
Negative interactions	1.69	.72	2.41	1.10*
Mothers				
Support	3.79	.79	3.58	.71
Negative interactions	2.20	1.14	2.49	.84
Fathers				
Support	3.34	.96	3.08	.84
Negative interactions	1.51	.61	2.27	.79**
Friends				
Support	3.39	.69	3.42	.77
Negative interactions	1.57	.49	1.81	.77

NOTE: Asterisks indicate significant differences between the two means in those rows.

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

lescents are more limited, making it harder to determine if the proportion of victimized women in the second study is high.

Several disturbing details emerged from the victimized women's reports. First, between two thirds and three fourths of the victimized women reported having experienced multiple episodes of victimization. For those victimized, it appears that coerced behavior is not an isolated incident but one that is likely to reoccur, often by another person.

A second point of concern was that almost all of the victims reported that their most serious (or only) experience was perpetrated by an acquaintance. Between half and two thirds of these incidents were perpetrated by a romantic acquaintance and the others by a nonromantic acquaintance. Contrary to intuition, most assaults do not occur when women are alone in a dark, isolated area, but when women are with someone they know or someone they are seeing regularly. Men may have a more sexualized view of interpersonal interactions than women, and these misinterpretations may lead to sexual conflict between men and women (Craig, 1990). Additionally, the man's initiation of and payment for the date are aspects of the dating situation that lead some men to feel entitled to sex, thereby putting women more at risk for victimization (Craig, 1990).

A third disturbing fact about the victimization experiences was their timing. The late-adolescent women reported that their most serious (or only) experience was more likely to have occurred in high school than in college. Almost half of the high school



women in Study Two had already been victimized. Consistent with this, Koss and colleagues (1987) note that the victimization rate for women peaks in the 16- to 19-year-old age group. Several factors may contribute to this high prevalence. Middle adolescence is a time characterized by exploration of one's sexuality, as one begins dating and becomes involved in romantic relationships. The biological development of boys and girls may outpace their experiences in heterosexual contexts. Moreover, adolescents progress toward intimate relationships without sufficient cognitive advances in perspective taking and decision making. Additionally, peer pressure to become sexually active often co-occurs with parental and societal prohibitions of such behavior, and these mixed messages present a confusing picture to youth attempting to negotiate heterosexual interactions. Miscommunication about sexual behavior is likely to occur in the context of these new experiences.

### *Romantic Relational Styles and Victimization*

The two studies found a relatively complex and somewhat inconsistent pattern of links between victimization and perceptions of relationships. Accordingly, we think that the findings should be interpreted only as preliminary ones that may warrant further empirical investigation. Only 9 of the 50 primary analyses were statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level. We had not predicted that all the effects would be significant, but nevertheless, the number of significant effects we obtained is still modest. Similarly, the results are not fully consistent across studies. With these reservations in mind, we present an interpretation of the results and how they may be pursued in subsequent research.

In Study One, victimized late-adolescent women reported more preoccupied romantic styles than nonvictimized women. The woman who is highly preoccupied describes herself as very dependent, overly caring, and more invested in the relationship than the partner. An imbalance exists in the relationship, and the woman sacrifices her needs to please the partner and maintain closeness in the relationship. Overly involved in the relationship, the woman may not maintain appropriate boundaries with her partner. Such preoccupied behavior could elicit victimization if the romantic partner misreads the woman's needs or takes advantage of her dependence on him. On the other hand, a victim may turn to her partner for much-needed comfort after her ordeal. However, this heightened closeness may be accompanied by worry over whether she can trust her partner because she has been victimized before. This pattern of behavior

might then lead to preoccupied views of the current relationship.

The cross-sectional nature of the study precludes drawing firm conclusions about whether preoccupied romantic styles precede or are a result of the victimization experience, but the retrospective data seem to suggest that the victimization may lead to changes in romantic views. Specifically, women victimized in college and nonvictims did not differ in the level of preoccupation with romantic partners prior to any victimization, but those subsequently victimized in college currently reported more preoccupied romantic styles than the nonvictimized women. A longitudinal study could further investigate this pattern as well as explore potential third variables that may account for these links.

The link between preoccupied romantic styles and victimization was not as apparent in the second study of middle-adolescent women. This difference does not seem to reflect the nature of victimization in the two samples because the types of victimization appeared relatively comparable. Perhaps younger women are less aware of the inappropriateness of victimization; coerced sexual behavior may be such a pervasive occurrence that many consider it an accepted risk of becoming involved in heterosexual relationships. Alternatively, it is possible that middle-adolescent victims attribute the effects of the experience specifically to their perpetrators and do not generalize to romantic partners.

The possibility of a developmental difference in reaction is intriguing in light of Finkelhor and Yllo's (1985) earlier finding that married women who are victimized respond by avoiding or dismissing romantic relationships. Victimization from a spouse may be a different violation of trust than that occurring in the context of dating relationships. A married woman must cope with the violation coming from the man to whom she has committed her life and who may be more permanently tied to her in terms of children and lifestyle. She may see less chance of entering into a successful relationship with another man. In contrast, an unmarried, younger woman can attribute her involvement with the offender to an error in judgment or a chance occurrence, and she may more easily move on to subsequent relationships.

Up to this point, we have considered the possibility that preoccupied views and victimization are not linked in middle adolescence. Some data, however, suggest that they may actually be related, but the smaller sample size prevented us from finding such links. In fact, examination of Tables 2 and 5 reveals that victims and nonvictims differ by approximately .4 *SD* in preoccupied romantic scores in both studies.

Moreover, high school victims reported more conflict (a characteristic of the preoccupied style) in their romantic relationships than nonvictims.

It is also possible that differences would have been obtained if we had examined the participants' internal working models and not just their conscious perceptions of their romantic styles. That is, victims may overtly see themselves as similar to nonvictims but unconsciously may retain a lack of trust or ambivalence about romantic relationships (see Furman & Wehner, 1994 for further discussion of this distinction). Examination of such working models would require a technique such as an interview rather than a self-report questionnaire (Furman & Simon, 1999).

Alternatively, the victims could have had unresolved responses to their experiences, responses not assessed by our questionnaires. An unresolved or disorganized state of mind regarding attachment has been associated with physical or sexual abuse by parents (Main & Hesse, 1990). Accordingly, it seems important to determine whether coercive sexual behavior perpetrated by acquaintances might also lead to such a state of mind.

#### *Relational Styles With Parents and Friends*

In Study One, victims retrospectively reported more insecure relational styles with their fathers, particularly more dismissing ones. Similarly, in Study Two, victims reported more dismissing styles in their relationships with parents. Unfortunately, we did not distinguish between views of fathers and mothers in Study Two, but it seems that this finding on the parental scores reflects a difference in views of fathers because the victims also reported more negative interactions with their fathers than nonvictims, but no similar difference was observed in perceptions of their interactions with their mothers.

In Study One, those victimized in college reported having insecure relationships with their fathers in high school, suggesting that the differences in styles may precede the victimization. Moreover, they did not report differences in their current views of their fathers, as would be expected if the differences in views had stemmed from the coerced sexual experiences.

The victimization could have resulted from the woman craving attention and a good relationship with a male as compensation for the lack of relationship with her father. Alternatively, the victimization could have resulted from the woman not having learned from her father about appropriate behavior and boundaries relevant for heterosexual interactions. It should be noted that no information regarding incestuous experiences was obtained from the

participants. If some of the participants had been violated by their fathers, such victimization could explain their insecure paternal relationships and subsequent college victimizations.

The causal interpretation of the retrospective finding assumes that the reports are relatively accurate; however, the veracity of retrospective reports is always a concern for researchers (e.g., Brewin, Andrews, & Gotlib, 1993; Halverson, 1988). The possibility exists that the victims distorted the retrospective reports of their fathers in efforts to make sense of their victimization experiences. Women seem to share a general belief that relationships with their fathers are relevant to their relationships with their romantic partners (see Collins & Read, 1990). The women may have drawn on this theory of continuity in efforts to account for their victimization. After having been victimized, the women may have viewed their fathers as having let them down and not having provided enough information to prevent assaults, or they may have generalized their postassault negative attitudes of men to include their fathers. The fact that the current views of fathers did not differ for victimized and nonvictimized women suggests that this type of distortion is probably unlikely. If women were reacting to their victimization by retrospectively negating their high school relationships with their fathers, one would expect to see a similar insecure pattern in their current views of their fathers.

Whereas differences were found between victims' and nonvictims' perceptions of their relationships with romantic partners and fathers, few such differences were found for relationships with mothers and friends. The violation of trust implicit in sexual victimization appears not to have generalized to views of mothers and friends. Such a finding underscores the importance of examining views of different types of relationships and not just examining general views, styles, or working models of close relationships (Furman & Wehner, 1994).

It is important to reiterate that these interpretations are only speculations at this point and require further empirical work. Perhaps the most significant contribution of this article is the idea that an attachment perspective may prove valuable to researchers and practitioners for understanding the links between victimization and close relationships. To date, the literature on normal romantic development has remained separate from the literature on victimization. The attachment framework provides a means of integrating the two by considering how such adverse experiences may influence expectations for and behaviors in romantic relationships. The framework also underscores the importance of considering

how a range of close relationships may influence or be influenced by victimization. In general, it may provide a means of integrating different fields and providing coherence to work that has been piecemeal in nature.

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