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Low Self-Esteem: An Invitation for Victimization

Tommi DeVore

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Low Self-Esteem: An Invitation for Victimization

Tommi DeVore

Eastern Illinois University
Abstract

The focus of this study was to assess the relationship between self-esteem and victimization. A modified self-esteem questionnaire, entitled “What I am Like,” originally developed by Egan and Perry (1998), and a modified bully survey, originally developed by Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, & Short-Camille (1994), were administered to students. A total of 32 students from first grade participated in the research project and completed the questionnaires; data were collected in the fall and the spring of the school year. Most students reported some sort of victimization. A Pearson's R was conducted to assess the relationship between self-esteem and victimization. Results identified that peer victimization correlated with self-esteem; higher scores on victimization were related to lower self-esteem. Possible reasons for this relationship between self-esteem and victimization are discussed.
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Low Self-Esteem: An Invitation for Victimization

Self-esteem has always been a puzzle to researchers. Though the literature offers several definitions for self-esteem, King (1999) captured the essence of self-esteem in the following definition: The difference between the ideal self (how one would like to be) and the actual self (how one actually is). It is an evaluation one makes in regards to himself or herself. An individual with modest distance between the actual self and ideal self will develop a positive perception of self (high self-esteem), while an individual with a substantial distance between the actual self and ideal self will develop a more negative perception of self (low self-esteem). Many theorists have had the false assumption that people with low self-esteem are the opposite of those with high self-esteem; implying that if people with high self-esteem want to succeed and be liked, then people with low self-esteem must want to fail and be disliked (Tice, 1993). However, people with low self-esteem would like to succeed, to win love and admiration, to become rich and famous, and be like those with high self-esteem, but such goals seem out of reach to them (Tice, 1993).

The first goal for those with low self-esteem in most situations is to avoid failure, humiliation, and rejection. Low self-esteem people expect to fail and are more likely to believe failure feedback than are high self-esteem people, though both high and low self-esteem people prefer success (Tice, 1993). Studies have found that low self-esteem people desire success just as much as high self-esteem people, but cognitively they expect failure. Also, low self-esteem people are less willing to boast in advance that they would achieve success, possibly because they lack the confidence in their abilities to live up to favorable predictions (Tice, 1993).
Another goal for people with low self-esteem is to protect themselves against distressing outcomes. They lean toward neutral, noncommittal self-presentations and find it difficult to present themselves in a positive manner. People with low self-esteem do not hate themselves, nor are they reckless. They do, however, appear to be cautious, uncertain people who desire success but fear failure. The fear, unfortunately, outweighs the desire (Tice, 1993).

"When I look in the mirror, I do not like what I see." "I am nothing; I have no personality." "I'm not living up to the kind of person I want to be." "Let's face it, I have low self-esteem." These comments, reported by Harter (1993, pg. 87) are often heard from those exhibiting low self-esteem. These people do not hate themselves, though they are obviously distressed. What leads certain individuals to experience and express their feelings of low self-esteem? What goes wrong in the protective function of the self (Harter, 1993)? One must understand the causes of self-esteem before addressing such questions.

One theory of self-esteem is that it is captured as the ratio of one's successes to one's aspirations. If one perceives oneself as competent in domains where one expects to excel, one will have high self-esteem. However, if one falls short of one's ideals by being unsuccessful in domains where one expects to be competent, low self-esteem will result (Harter, 1993). In contrast to this theory of self-esteem, others have adopted the concept of the "looking-glass self." This theory suggests that the self is constructed by the opinions of significant others toward the self. Therefore, if others hold the self in high regard, one's own sense of self-esteem will be high. If others have little regard for
the self, one will incorporate these negative opinions in the form of low self-esteem (Harter, 1993).

Given that approval from significant others has such an impact on self-esteem, it becomes understandable why individuals suffer low self-esteem. Support is often not available for many children for a variety of reasons, and the question is why (Harter, 1993). There is a growing amount of literature on various factors relating to parental support, including parental depression and stressful conditions within the family, that could lead to the parents' inability to provide emotional support (Harter, 1993).

Conditionality is also an important aspect of support. Conditionality of support is the extent to which one feels that support is only forthcoming if one meets parental or peer standards. Level of support and conditionality of support are correlated with one another (Harter, 1993). Parents and peers who provide little support typically offer their support contingent upon the display of behaviors and attitudes they demand. The more conditional the support, the lower one's self-esteem. Conditionality undermines self-esteem, even at high levels of support, because it does not validate approval of the self, but rather specifies behaviors through which one can please parents or peers (Harter, 1993).

Though a child only has to meet the standards set by parents and peers in order to obtain the needed support that will promote high self-esteem, why does low self-esteem persist? A study asking children to rate the importance that classmates and parents attach to five different domains identified critical performance areas (Harter, 1993). The children reported that peers place the most importance on the physical appearance, likability, and athletic competence of others their age. They also reported that parents
place more importance on the scholastic competence and behavioral conduct of their children (Harter, 1993).

The results of the study give way to a more comprehensive theory of the cause and ongoing nature of self-esteem. If approval from peers and parents depends upon manifesting competence or adequacy in certain demands, and one is unable to meet the standards, then the level of self-esteem will be lowered. Conversely, if approval and support from peers and parents is given whether or not one fulfills the expectations of others, high self-esteem will result (Harter, 1993).

Parents, teachers and peers should be made aware of the role self-esteem, particularly how low self-esteem affects everyone's life. Through interview procedures it has been reported that low self-esteem precedes or causes a depression reaction. The incidence of suicide has tripled in recent decades (Harter, 1993). Evidence reveals social/psychological correlates that are predictive of suicidal behaviors, including lack of social support, low self-esteem, depressed affect, and hopelessness (Harter, 1993). Suicide is not the only tragedy that can result from low self-esteem. School violence has become prevalent in today's society. Kids are killing other kids. The shooting at Columbine High School opened the eyes of a nation to what extremes the victims of bullying and rejection by peers would go. Victimization, however, is certainly not just beginning in high school (Harter, 1993).

In elementary schools, bullying is happening in the classroom, the cafeteria, and on the playground. However, the weapons children use in their early years include mean words, thoughtless actions, and kicks and shoves (Feder-Feitel, 1999). Kids exclude other kids, taunt their classmates, and make threats. In fact, the National Association of
School Psychologists reports that one in every seven of today's students is a bully or a victim (Feder-Feitel, 1999).

Research on bullying highlights the importance of a power imbalance between the bully and the victim. The bully always has more power than the victim does, and the victim is unable to defend himself or herself (Atlas & Pepler, 1998). In fact, bullies can have high self-esteem. They want power and control, so they chose victims who are smaller, shyer, or have less self-confidence (Feder-Feitel, 1999). The bully is characterized by an aggressive personality pattern, with a tendency to react aggressively in many situations; little control of emotional and behavioral responses, and a positive attitude toward violence (Menesini, Melan, & Pignatti, 2000). The common characteristics among victims include being more anxious, insecure, and tending to cry more than other students (Horne & Socherman, 1996). Such behaviors would cause others to see that they would not be able to defend themselves if attacked. With an increased understanding of the characteristics of bullies and victims, school personnel and parents can become better equipped to address the problem of bullying within the school and in the larger society (Atlas & Pepler, 1998).

Even children as young as five years old are experiencing victimization in the classroom. There is a growing awareness among educators and psychologists that a child's school adjustment and progress depend on the feeling of comfort in the classroom. One factor that may undermine children's feelings of security at school and disrupt their adjustment and progress is the extent to which they are victimized (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Children who are teased or attacked by peers on a regular basis may conclude that school is a threatening place, and develop negative attitudes toward school
or withdraw from the environment (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Atlas and Pepler (1998) found that approximately 40% of students in primary grades suggested that teachers intervene to stop bullying only once in a while or almost never. This becomes a problem, as children should be guaranteed a safe environment and positive atmosphere to foster learning and development.

Evidence has shown that peer victimization is part of a substantial number of children's school experience, and that younger children are more at risk to be the victim of peer aggression (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Early school transitions, such as moving from preschool into kindergarten, place demands on children, such as learning to cope in a new environment, dealing with unfamiliar school personnel, gaining acceptance into a new peer group, and confronting more challenging academic demands. Being victimized during a challenging period may have an impact on a child's adjustment to school (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996).

Kochenderfer and Ladd (1996) conducted a study to extend the knowledge about the prevalence of peer victimization at early age levels by estimating the extent to which kindergarten children report it as they enter grade school, and to provide a more complete picture of the school adjustment outcomes that may be related to children's victimization experiences at school. They found that as early as kindergarten, about half of all students reported that they had been exposed to victimization at least "sometimes". In addition, the study revealed that being picked on and having kids say mean things were more common forms of victimization for young children than being hit or having kids say bad things about them to peers (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996).
Being victimized at a young age has a significant impact on the child. When children enter school, their self-esteem is already formed, primarily through the influence of family. Although nothing impacts the development of self-esteem as significantly as the family, the impact of the school environment cannot be overlooked (Scott, Murray, & Mertens, 1996). Studies have found that the peer group, as well as the quality of peer interactions, is the most important social network in children's lives, and it has a high predictive value of later social and emotional adjustment (Galanaki, & Kalantzi-Azizi, 1999; King, 1997). Therefore, if a child already has an established low self-esteem, what type of peer interactions will he or she experience? Does self-esteem even play a role in victimization?

In 1988, Perry, Kusel, and Perry conducted a literature review on victims of peer aggression. Almost all research was devoted to understanding aggressive behavior, and was focused on the aggressor. Very little was known about the role of the victim during aggressive encounters, or about the characteristics, background, and behavior of children who served as targets of others' aggressive behavior. In 1998, Perry, Kusel, and Perry developed a modified Peer Nomination Inventory (which was first developed by Wiggins & Winder, 1961) to assess children's victimization and aggression. They found that one in 10 children in later elementary school grades was severely abused by aggressive peers. Also, the chances of being singled out for abuse did not appear to decrease with age. Limitations of this peer nomination tool are that it provides no information about the severity with which any given child is victimized, and it does not identify qualities children who are victimized have that invite and sustain attacks against them (Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988).
More than a decade later, some characteristics of victimized children have been identified. Victimized children may behave in ways that invite and reinforce the attacks against them. As mentioned earlier by Horne and Socherman (1996), these children may display internalizing behaviors such as crying easily, they are anxious, and they tend to reward attackers by submitting. Also, children may unknowingly invite victimization by displaying externalizing behaviors, such as disruptiveness, ineffectual aggression, and argumentativeness, which may irritate and provoke other children, especially aggressors (Egan & Perry, 1998).

Egan and Perry (1998) conducted a study to explore ways that self-esteem might contribute to victimization by peers. The researchers stated that chronic victimization by peers during the school years is associated with a wide variety of problems, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, loneliness, avoidance of school, and friendlessness. Therefore, considering the devastating impact of chronic abuse by peers on children’s lives, it is the goal of researchers to understand the causes of chronic victimization (Egan & Perry, 1998). Two hypotheses were evaluated. The first was that low self-esteem fosters victimization by peers over time. The second was that children’s level of self-esteem governs the impact of behavioral vulnerabilities on their victimization. In other words, behavior problems that place children at risk for victimization lead to victimization only to the extent that a child has low self-esteem and, consequently, lacks the cognitive resources necessary for defense.

Although the main purpose of Egan and Perry’s (1998) study was to examine ways that self-esteem contributes to victimization, they also evaluated whether children’s experiences of being victimized lead to decreased self-esteem over time. Current theories
of self-esteem development have stressed the role of social experience. Important contributors identified for developing healthy self-esteem are positive, supportive treatment by significant others (including peers), self-observation of competent functioning, and positive social comparisons. The experience of being victimized could undermine all of these factors and lead to decreased self-esteem (Egan and Perry, 1998).

Egan and Perry's (1998) study included 189 children (92 boys and 97 girls) in the third through seventh grades. Written parental consent was obtained for participants. Two sets of measures were administered to the children in the fall and again in the spring. The first set of measures was self-esteem measures and the second set of measures was peer reports of victimization and behavioral risk factors. Egan and Perry (1998) found children's self-perceived social competence within their peer group contributed to victimization in at least two ways. First, a sense of social failure and inadequacy among one's peers may contribute to increases in peer victimization over time. Second, confidence in one's standing in the peer group protects behaviorally at-risk children from becoming victimized. The researchers also found that being victimized leads to a decrease in self-esteem.

These findings can be viewed as support for high self-esteem as a coping resource that helps children deal adequately with stress and threat. Most children are at least occasionally tested by threats from aggressive peers, but children with high self-esteem do not tolerate such attacks and defend themselves more effectively against them than do other children (Egan & Perry, 1998).

The researchers have suggested that low self-esteem predicts victimization partly because it is associated with specific behavioral incompetencies exhibited during peer
conflicts (e.g. submission), partly because it leads children to project a self-deprecating identity that invites abuse, and partly because it is associated with a low social position in the peer group (Egan & Perry, 1998). The researchers suggested that future studies consider indirect victimization, children’s actual social standing in the peer group, and include assessments of children’s behaviors specifically during conflicts (Egan & Perry, 1998).

The purpose of the present study, much like Egan and Perry (1998), was to determine if low self-esteem is an invitation for peer victimization. The hypothesis to be evaluated is that low self-esteem predicts victimization. There are good reasons for thinking that low self-esteem might contribute to victimization. First, children with low self-esteem might hesitate to assert their needs or defend themselves during conflicts (Egan & Perry, 1998). Second, it is clear that persons with low self-esteem expect and accept negative feedback more than people with high self-esteem do. Third, persons with low self-esteem often display signs of depression, cautiousness, and poor self-regulation (Egan & Perry, 1998). Whereas Egan and Perry looked at older children, the present study evaluated children in the first grade because first graders are in a transitional time, where they are now in school full-time and exposed to opportunities to be victimized. Also, the younger the child is when identified as having low self-esteem, the sooner the child can begin building self-esteem through early social skills intervention and perhaps help him or her avoid victimization.
Method

Participants

Participants were 32 children (13 girls and 19 boys) in the first grade at two public elementary schools serving middle-class, predominantly White communities. The children were aged 6 to 7 years at the time of first testing (the fall of the school year). Written parental consent was obtained for participants.

Self-esteem Measures

A modified questionnaire (questions were shortened and simplified for younger subjects), with the original developed by Egan and Perry (1998), was used to measure self-esteem. A 6-item questionnaire was used (See Appendix A). Participants circled “yes” or “no” in response to questions such as “I wish I was someone else” and “I am happy.” The questionnaire also included questions such as “I am popular (a lot of kids like me)” and “I usually do things by myself.” Responses were scored either 0 or 2; higher scores reflected higher self-esteem. Total scores on the self-esteem measure could, therefore, range from 0 to 12.

Peer Assessment

A modified bully survey (questions were shortened and simplified for younger subjects) containing 12 items was used to assess victimization (Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, & Short-Camille, 1994), and was designed to measure incidences of bullying and victimization in the school (See Appendix B). Only six items from the bully survey were used in the measure of the occurrence of victimization (Items 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 12). The
remaining 6 items provided useful information, such as gender and whether the child liked school. The children were asked to address their experiences with other students and adults in the school environment. Sample items include: “When you are in the classroom do you feel: Safe or Unsafe”; “Did any of your friends at school hit, kick or push you yesterday or today? Yes or No”; and “Do you sometimes spend recess alone because nobody wants to play with you? Yes or No.” Responses were scored 0 or 2; total scores could range from 0 to 12, with higher scores reflecting higher incidences of victimization.

Procedure

The self-esteem and victimization measures were administered to the children in the fall (November) and again in the spring, about five months later (April). Following a study by Egan and Perry (1998), self-esteem data from the fall and victimization data from the spring were used in the final analysis. Both sets of measures were given at both times, with the victimization measure administered first and the self-esteem measure administered last both times. To control for reading ability, items on the sets of measures were read aloud and verbatim to the children one at a time as they followed along and marked their responses. Both sets of measures were administered individually in five-minute sessions for each child. The students were instructed that the questionnaires would not be graded and would not be seen by any one other than the researcher. They were instructed not to put their names on the questionnaires, as they were assigned numbers for comparison and confidentiality. It was explained to the students that they could discontinue at any time.
Results

Descriptive statistics for the measures of self-esteem and peer victimization were examined for the total sample of 32 children. Scores on both sets of measures could range from 0 to 12. Compared with norms from the Egan and Perry (1998) study, the mean score for the self-esteem measure was in the average range, \( M = 8.44 \), and the mean score for the victimization measure was low, \( M = 3.88 \) (See Table 1). The majority of students surveyed reported they were happy and had a lot of friends. Sixty-three percent of students considered themselves popular, and 84% were happy with themselves the way they are (See Table 2). All but two students reported some type of victimization, with 38% of students reporting that their friends at school say mean things to them and 56% reporting that they spend recess alone because no one will play with them. Only 38% of the students surveyed reported they felt safe while on the playground, as most students were concerned about falling down or being pushed around by other students (See Table 3). Concerns were also expressed about being taken by a stranger when the teacher was not looking, as well as someone having a weapon. The students reported feeling safer in the classroom or school building, where they are more closely monitored.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for measures of self-esteem and victimization (N = 32)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem*</td>
<td>8.44</td>
<td>4 - 12</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimization*</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0 - 10</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Scores could range from 0 to 12
Table 2
Percentage of first-grade students responding “yes” to each self-esteem question (N = 32)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Percentage responding “yes”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am happy.</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a lot of friends.</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to have a lot more friends.</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish I was someone else.</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I usually do things by myself.</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am popular (a lot of kids like me).</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3
Percentage of first-grade students responding “yes” to each measure of victimization (N = 32)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Percentage responding “yes”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When you are in the classroom, do you feel safe?</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you are on the playground, do you feel safe?</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you are in the bathroom, do you feel safe?</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did any of your friends at school hit, kick, or push you yesterday or today?</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do any of your friends at school say mean things to you?</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you sometimes spend recess alone because no one will play with you?</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The relationship between the measures of self-esteem and peer victimization were examined for the total sample of 32 children. The raw scores for the self-esteem measure were correlated with the raw scores for the victimization questionnaire. Results presented in Table 4 indicate that increased levels of victimization correlated negatively and significantly with the lower total raw scores on the self-esteem measure, \( r = -0.352, p = 0.024 \). Although the negative correlation between self-esteem and victimization was significant, the effect size for this correlation was low, indicating that only 12% of the variance was accounted for.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victimization and self-esteem</td>
<td>-0.352</td>
<td>0.048</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

The primary goal of this research project was to evaluate the relationship between self-esteem and victimization. The hypothesis that low self-esteem predicts victimization was supported. Those children with high self-esteem reported less peer victimization than did their peers with low self-esteem, supporting the idea that high self-esteem could be a coping resource that helps children deal with threats and stressors in everyday life.

There are several possible explanations for the relationship between self-esteem and victimization. First, a sense of failure and inadequacy related to low self-esteem may lead to increases in the occurrences of victimization. In other words, confidence in one’s standing in a peer group may protect children who have higher self-esteem (Egan & Perry, 1998).

There is evidence that children associate self-esteem with confidence. Daniels (1998, p. 246) reported that one child (high-school aged) described self-esteem as:

"It's how you feel on the inside that's important. People who don’t like themselves don’t care about themselves... They think, 'I can't'; and they don’t try... They keep to themselves... without friends, and they don’t do well in life. People who like themselves have a positive attitude... They know they will do well... go for their goals, and think 'I can.' People can have confidence in this person..."

This child, like many others, associates self-esteem with confidence in abilities to accomplish goals and the reactions from other people (Daniels, 1998). Those children with higher self-esteem are, or at least appear, more confident than those with low self-
Esteem and this self-confidence may protect them against incidences of peer victimization.

Children displaying low self-esteem and decreased confidence may contribute to their being victimized not only by failing to assert themselves during conflicts, but also by exhibiting certain behaviors that bullies interpret as an invitation to aggress (Egan & Perry, 1998). Signs of sadness, fear and social withdrawal provide aggressors with a target because bullies tend to choose victims who are not as aggressive as themselves and less likely to fight back (Menesini et. al., 2000).

Also, low self-esteem might contribute to victimization because some children tend to seek an interaction with peers that confirm their low sense of self. Some victimized children do seek out their attackers for social interaction (Egan & Perry, 1998). Although some victims do not dislike their bullies and often invite a bully to aggress, most victimized children are inclined to seek interaction with other victimized children. Research has shown that victims with low self-esteem rarely seek out confrontation, but they are more likely to expect it and accept it (Egan & Perry, 1998).

Another reason a child may experience victimization is social status. The absence of friends or low popularity in a group has been known to invite victimization (Egan & Perry, 1998). A study reported to Sonya Leff (1999) found that it is anxious, depressed students with poor self-esteem, already at a physical, personal, or social disadvantage, who are victims of bullies. Her study, carried out in Britain, required school doctors and nurses to record their contacts with children for two months. Staff reported 97 contacts in which bullying was assessed as an important factor affecting the health consultation (Leff, 1999). Fifteen of these children had learning difficulties, thirty children had a
physical disability (including a cleft palate, hearing aid, spinal deformity), and thirty-one were experiencing a family crisis or distress or were actually neglected at home (Leff, 1999). It is important to recognize that children who lack friends and who are unpopular may be targets for victimization.

Given the many detrimental effects low self-esteem may produce, particularly peer victimization, it is an issue that requires education and awareness. Parke, Harshman, & Roberts (1998) researched the importance of programs designed to help children develop a positive sense of self, and in turn increase their social competence, particularly social relationships with peers (Parke, Harshman, & Roberts, 1998). Children who are socially rejected by peers during the first two years of elementary school appear to be at risk for early academic difficulties relative to socially accepted children. Also, children with social difficulties may be at risk for later school failure because of “less than optimal learning styles”, such as spending less time on task and more time on worrying about what is going on in their life (Parke et al., 1998). Failure in school can also contribute to low self-esteem.

The issue of self-esteem and peer victimization has been heavily researched in the past; however, little research has been done on students in primary grades. Denise Daniels (1998) found that young children do have an understanding of personality traits and internal events, such as thoughts, feelings, intentions and motivations. However, younger children tend to overgeneralize and predict that an individual’s positive disposition will result in positive behavior and those individuals with negative dispositions will result in negative behaviors (Daniels, 1998). Also, Daniels (1998) found that out of all age groups, kindergarten to adult, kindergartners were the only group who
believed self-esteem could be changed. Therefore, the younger children are when social skills training and the building of self-esteem begins, the more successful the results might be.

Several researchers have suggested that children can learn about self-esteem and how to increase it through many ways. Social skills training is one way of teaching children about self-esteem, particularly those identified as having low self-esteem. Children could be taught to understand typical responses to fear and trauma, and when those responses come into play (Batsche, 2001). Also, children who are provided with positive attention and reinforcement for prosocial responses to bullying are more apt to repeat those responses when the situation arises again (Batsche, 2001). Along with social skills training, visual art activities have been used with at-risk children who have low self-esteem. Cho (2000) found that four-week workshops, focusing on the student and positive role models, not only nurtured creativity, but also provided an outlet for self-expression and built up self-esteem. Overall, it is important to recognize that self-esteem plays a critical factor in everyone’s life, even a young child’s, and with early intervention the child may become confident enough to stand up to aggressors and decrease the occurrence of victimization.

Several strengths and limitations of this study require mention. One strength is that this study used children in the first grade; previous research has focused on self-esteem in middle childhood and adolescence years because those are the years when low self-esteem becomes more readily apparent. As the present results indicate, low self-esteem and victimization are occurring with young children and it is important to identify them early. Another strength with the present study, also reported by Egan and Perry
(1998), was that examining peer relations over the course of a school year is important, as social relations are forming at the beginning of the school year and become more settled as the year continues. One limitation of this study is the small sample size. Many parents would not allow their child to participate in the project, thus limiting the subject pool. Also, the use of a homogeneous sample limits generalizations to other groups. Another limitation of the study was the memory and recall ability of younger subjects. In addition, the use of correlation data limits the ability to ultimately draw conclusions on the relationship found. Research addressing the causes of victimization is needed, particularly the issue of victimization resulting in low self-esteem. Also, this study identified direct verbal and physical abuse by peers, not indirect victimization, such as telling a friend to exclude a particular child who is not well-liked, which may be a suggestion for future research.

Another direction for future research should be an observational approach in the classroom, the lunchroom and on the playground, where social interactions among young children can be viewed. In addition, teacher perceptions of those children with low self-esteem and the occurrences of victimization in their classroom would be a direction for future research. Most first grade participants in the present study reported some amount of victimization. Are teachers aware of incidences in their classroom, and if so what is being done about it?
References


1. I am happy.
   Yes          No

2. I have a lot of friends.
   Yes          No

3. I would like to have a lot more friends.
   Yes          No

4. I wish I was someone else.
   Yes          No
5. I usually do things by myself.
   Yes  No

6. I am popular (a lot of kids like me).
   Yes  No
Appendix B

1. Are you a boy or girl?  
   Boy  Girl

2. Do you like school?  
   Yes  No

3. Do you like your teacher?  
   Yes  No

4. When you are in the classroom, do you feel:  
   Safe  Unsafe
5. When you are on the playground, do you feel:

Safe          Unsafe

6. When you are in the bathroom, do you feel:

Safe          Unsafe

7. When you are in the lunchroom, do you feel:

Safe          Unsafe
8. Did any of your friends at school hit, kick, or push you yesterday or today?

   Yes          No

9. Do any of your friends at school say mean things to you?

   Yes          No

10. Do you hit, kick or push other kids?

    Yes          No
11. Do you say mean things, tease, or call other kids names?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
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</table>

12. Do you sometimes spend recess alone because nobody wants to play with you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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