



No One is Safe: Victimization Experiences of High-Status Youth

Molly Dawes¹ · Sarah Malamut²

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Abstract

Traditionally, victims were seen as weak, disempowered youth who typically had low-status in the peer hierarchy. However, accumulating evidence suggests that victimization experiences are not limited to those with low-status and that high-status adolescents may also be at risk. This review outlines a theoretical framework that explains high-status youth's risk for victimization using evolutionary psychological, social dominance, and related perspectives which suggest that those with access to desirable resources may be targeted by peers who want those resources for themselves. Next, the review summarizes the empirical research demonstrating that high-status youth are targets of their peers' aggressive behavior. Specific attention is given to the forms of aggression most often used to target high-status youth as well as the methods used to identify victims with high social status. Lastly, the review concludes with recommendations for future work on this burgeoning area of research.

Keywords High-status victims · Popular victims · Central victims · Peer victimization · Adolescence

Introduction

Understanding the plight of victims has dominated research on child and adolescent development in recent decades and rightfully so, as the prognosis for experiencing peer victimization is grim. Victims suffer severe problems across the psychological, social, and health domains such as anxiety, depression, social rejection, loneliness, low self-esteem, and psychosomatic symptoms (see reviews by Hawker and Boulton 2000; Juvonen and Graham 2014; Olweus and Breivik 2014). The deleterious effects of youth's victimization experiences can last into adulthood (McDougall and Vaillancourt 2015; Wolke et al. 2013) and, most alarmingly, can be fatal (Hertz et al. 2013). Given these distressing outcomes, peer victimization has received considerable international attention and been labeled a public health concern, particularly in the United States (Gladden et al. 2014).

Due to the concentrated efforts of researchers, educators, and key stakeholders over the past few decades, much more

is known about who is likely to be a victim and subsequent efforts have been developed to support such youth through policies, interventions, and best practices (e.g., Ellis et al. 2016; Espelage 2016; Hawley and Williford 2015; Nickerson 2017). Still, research on victims has predominantly captured the experience of low-status, rejected, or socially marginalized youth (e.g., Hawley and Williford 2015). In his original identification of victims, Olweus (1978) distinguished between two types of victims: (1) submissive victims (i.e., pure victims or victims only) who are typically sensitive, anxious, insecure and have few friends, and (2) aggressive victims (i.e., bully-victims) who display both anxious and antisocial behavior (see Olweus and Breivik 2014). The perspective that victims are "largely unpopular, marginalized youth who have little social power and are actively rejected by their peers" has persisted in the research literature (Andrews et al. 2016, p. 1772).

However, emerging evidence within the last few decades suggests that victimization (i.e., being the target of aggression) is not limited to socially rejected, neglected, unpopular, or disliked youth. The accumulating evidence reveals another type of target: youth who are at the top of the social status hierarchy who have been largely ignored in research and, therefore, intervention efforts (e.g., Andrews et al. 2016). To understand whether (and why) high-status youth are victims requires careful consideration of theoretical

✉ Molly Dawes
mollydawes@sc.edu

¹ College of Education, University of South Carolina, 128 Wardlaw College, Columbia, SC 29208, USA

² Department of Psychology, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA

perspectives which outline the complex relations between status and victimization risk. The objectives for this article were to present theories explaining why high-status youth may be victimized as well as review the evidence of high-status victims in the research literature.

There seems to be collective recognition that intervention efforts are not moving the needle on bullying and aggression enough, with some researchers lamenting that “efforts to prevent bullying have been moderately successful at best, or iatrogenic at worst” (Ellis et al. 2016, p. 1). One possible reason is that relatively little is known about high-status victims and how their experiences impact the likelihood of reducing bullying specifically and aggression more generally among peers. Given that high-status youth have received less attention in the victimization literature, researchers may be hamstringing efforts to curb aggressive behavior as neither the nuances of victimization at the top of the status hierarchy nor the totality of students’ victimization experiences at school has been fully addressed. Indeed, Andrews et al. (2016) argue “the field is limited by an incomplete and insufficient conceptual understanding of where the risk for victimization lies” (p. 1773). Given the importance of understanding how *all* youth may be at risk for victimization, the current review addresses this gap by reviewing the extant research on high-status victims.

The review begins with a brief discussion of how victimization is measured and key considerations for assessing victimization. Next, there is a brief overview of the social status hierarchy and theoretical frameworks that explain why both low-status and high-status youth may be at risk for victimization. Then, a narrative review of empirical evidence revealing the victimization experiences of high-status youth is presented. Particular attention is given to the type of aggression examined, how victimization and social status were measured, as well as key findings. The studies included in this review focused on the adolescent developmental period, spanning from early (age 11 or 5th grade) to late adolescence (age 18 or 12th grade). The review concludes with a discussion on the forms of aggression used to target high-status victims, the methods used to identify high-status victims and recommendations for future work.

Assessing Victimization

Who is a victim? The answer to that question lies in which method is used to identify victims and who is asked. Broadly speaking, victims are *the targets of peers’ aggression* (Perry et al. 1998). Various methods ranging from self- and peer-reports to qualitative interviews and observations have been used to identify victims. A brief overview of the most commonly used methods is provided below. However, this summary of methods is not exhaustive; therefore, interested

readers should look at work by Ladd and Kochenderfer-Ladd (2002), Cornell and Brockenbrough (2004), Card and Hodges (2008), and Casper et al. (2015) for additional discussions on methods used to identify victims.

Methods to Assess Victimization

Quantitative Methods

Self-reports remain the most common method for identifying victims. Students typically respond to survey prompts asking them to rate how often they have been victimized over the course of a given timeframe. Youth are identified as victims if they report a high frequency of victimization depending on the scale used. For example, in the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire, victims are those who experience aggression *one or more times a week to every day* (Solberg and Olweus 2003). Youth can also self-report their daily experiences with victimization, as is the case with the use of daily diary reports (e.g., Dyches and Mayeux 2012; Pellegrini and Bartini 2000). This procedure involves asking students to respond to a series of questions provided via website, email, or text message. In one study, youth were identified as a victim if they experienced at least one episode of victimization during a single week (Pouwels et al. 2016).

Peer-reports are also frequently used to identify victims. Peers typically respond to prompts asking them to nominate peers who best fit the description of one who is victimized (peer nominations; Rodkin et al. 2000; Coie et al. 1982). Items can be about general victimization (e.g., “who is picked on?” or “who is victimized?”) or about specific victimization experiences (e.g., “who is victimized by being neglected or excluded?”; Pouwels et al. 2016). Nominations are aggregated together within the voting population (classroom, grade, or school, see Cillessen and Marks 2017). The peer nomination procedure provides information about who has a reputation among peers as a victim (e.g., Perry et al. 1988).

Another method for identifying victims is to ask youth to report on specific bully-victim dyads. This can either take the form of a self-report (“whom do you bully?” or “by whom are you bullied?”; Veenstra et al. 2007) or peer-reports (“who bullies whom?”; Rodkin and Berger 2008). There is slight heterogeneity in how dyadic nominations are implemented; however, like peer nominations, they are generally aggregated together. Rodkin and Berger (2008) classified youth as a victim if they received a dyadic nomination from more than one classmate, whereas Andrews et al. (2016) summed the number of nominations youth received as a victim. Veenstra et al. (2007) combined reports of “who do you bully?” and “by whom are you bullied?” to form an aggregated victim score.

Qualitative Methods

Interviews, observations, and ethnographies have also been used to collect information on who is being victimized. Researchers use interview formats to ask youth about specific aggressive episodes. For example, Xie et al. (2002) used semi-structured interviews to assess conflicts. By using this method, they were able to identify the victim and perpetrator(s) in each conflict, as well as the form of victimization (e.g., physical, social).

Researchers can also identify victims through observations. Craig et al. (2000), Pepler and Craig (1995) spearheaded observational protocols for capturing bullying and victimization. Their procedure involved video and audio taping peer interactions on the playground and using these observations to identify perpetrators and victims. Ethnographic methods involve both observations and interviews extended over a long period of time which afford a holistic and vivid description of youth's daily lives (e.g., Adler and Adler 1998; Eder 1985; Merten 1997). Each of the above-mentioned methods for identifying victims were used in studies presented below that identified high-status victims.

Considerations for Assessing Victimization

One issue relevant to the assessment of victimization is identifying the form of aggression used against the victim. Aggression may be physical, social, direct, indirect, verbal, relational, reputational and/or cyber. A brief definition of each form is below. For additional reviews of definitions, readers are directed to Berger (2007), Heilbron and Prinstein (2008), Wang et al. (2009), and Xie et al. (2005). Aggressive behavior can either be direct (i.e., overt), meaning face-to-face, or indirect, meaning behind the victim's back. Direct aggression can be physical (e.g., hitting, pushing, punching) or verbal (e.g., saying mean things, teasing, name-calling) in nature. Social aggression (e.g., gossiping) is a form of indirect aggression that uses nonconfrontational means and employs the social community as a vehicle for the act (Xie et al. 2005). Relational aggression is used to damage and manipulate the social relationships of the victim to inflict harm, either through confrontational means such as deliberately excluding a peer or non-confrontational means such as spreading rumors (i.e., a form of social aggression; Crick and Grotpeter 1995). Reputational aggression is defined as forms of aggression (e.g., spreading rumors) used deliberately to damage the target's reputation (Prinstein and Cillessen 2003). Aggression that occurs over electronic forms such as social media, emails, or text messaging is called cyberaggression. Physical aggression brings the highest risk for retaliation and injury since it is a direct assault, whereas the oft concealment of the perpetrator's identity

lessens the risk of retaliation from social aggression (Xie et al. 2005).

A second issue to consider is the distinction between being the victim of aggression versus being a victim of bullying specifically. Bullying is a specific form of aggressive behavior that is repetitive, intentional and includes a power imbalance (Olweus 1996). So, for verbal aggression to be considered bullying, the perpetrator would need to have more power than the victim, and repeatedly and intentionally attack the victim by name calling or saying mean things. When cyber aggression via technology includes the bullying hallmarks of a power imbalance between the perpetrator and victim (e.g., social status, technological savvy) and repetition (e.g., how many people see a negative message online or how long the image stays up online), the behavior is said to be cyberbullying (see Olweus and Limber 2018; Smith et al. 2012).

The severity of consequences associated with victimization depend in part on the intensity of the aggressive behavior. Youth who are frequently bullied, bullied from multiple forms of aggression, and bullied by more than one perpetrator arguably suffer the worst outcomes (e.g., van der Ploeg et al. 2015). Likewise, Ybarra et al. (2014) tested differences in victimized youth's outcomes based on whether their experience included the hallmarks of bullying (i.e., power differential, repetition) and found that youth who were bullied repeatedly and by someone with more power reported worse outcomes compared to bullied youth whose experiences did not involve either repetition or a power imbalance. However, as the authors argue, "youth who are victimized but do not meet the criteria of bullying also have elevated rates of psychosocial problems over nonvictimized youth" making them "an important, albeit nonbullied, group of victimized youth who need to be included in research" (p. 299). Indeed, Schacter and Juvonen (2018) found that when adolescents were victimized more than usual (compared to their own self-reported baseline), they reported more somatic complaints (e.g., headaches, nausea) as well as engaged in more characterological self-blame (i.e., felt more at fault for their victimization), suggesting that "even temporarily victimized youth may have unmet mental health needs" (p. 1). Therefore, it would be ill-advised to ignore youth's reports of more general victimization experiences that do not have the hallmarks of bullying (e.g., Finkelhor et al. 2012). Taken together, these results suggest that understanding students' psychosocial adjustment depends on understanding their individual changes in victimization levels, their specific experiences with various forms of victimization and whether that victimization can be characterized as bullying. With recognition for the spectrum of risks associated with victimization, this current review includes studies that assessed victimization in general and bullying more specifically. This inclusive strategy was used in order

to capture the nuances of victimization experiences, especially for high-status youth, and to glean a more complete understanding of the pervasiveness of victimization.

Victimization and Social Status: Theoretical Considerations

Aggressive behavior can be used to pick on the weak (low-status victims) or knock down the strong (high-status victims). In the forthcoming sections, the review outlines theoretical perspectives of why youth at both ends of the social status hierarchy may be targets of their peers' aggressive behavior. Before discussing the intricacies of the status and victimization association, there is first a discussion on why social status itself is so important, particularly for adolescents. Next, a summary of social status indicators utilized in adolescent research and the theoretical frameworks explaining why low-status and high-status youth may be victimized are presented.

The Importance of Social Status

The importance of social status is rooted in evolutionary principles and is a ubiquitous feature of human society today: who is at the top of the hierarchy and who is at the bottom is a “fundamental dimension of social life and critical to social organization and group survival” (Pornpattananangkul et al. 2014, p. 303). As individuals interact, they naturally sift and sort themselves into various positions (Cairns and Cairns 1994), establishing a hierarchy along dimensions of social value (Magee and Galinsky 2008). Robust evidence of the status hierarchy can be found across human societies and social groups who organize themselves along perceived values in rank order (see Cheng et al. 2013 for a discussion). The perceived aspect of status is key: Blader and Chen (2014) argue “individuals cannot have status if others do not regard them as high status” (p. 74). One's position in the order dictates one's access to resources (e.g., attention, access to mates), thereby determining one's opportunity for longevity and reproductive success (Cummins 2005). Those at the top have considerable influence over those below them because they have power over allocation of resources and group decisions (Berger et al. 1972).

There are several terms frequently linked with the concept of social status that warrant discussion (for additional discussion, see Cheng and Tracy 2014; Blader and Chen 2014). Those with high social status are assumed to have more power which is defined as control over finite, valued resources (e.g., Fiske 2010; Galinsky et al. 2003). Social power can be either implicit or explicit (LaFreniere and Charlesworth 1983). Individuals with explicit social power are said to elicit fear and compliance whereas youth with

implicit social power are granted that power because others recognize their competence (LaFreniere and Charlesworth 1983). Thus, those with more explicit social power are said to have more dominance which entails the induction of fear in others through coercive actions, whether physical or psychological (Cheng and Tracy 2014), whereas those with implicit social power may have more prestige which is defined as “influence that is willingly granted to individuals who are recognized and respected for their skills, success, or knowledge” (Cheng and Tracy 2014, p. 5).

Different behavior and characteristics yield dominance and prestige. For example, the use of aggressive behavior or having a large, imposing physical stature can lead to more dominance whereas having desirable characteristics or perceived competence in a valued domain can lead to greater prestige (Cheng and Tracy 2014). High-status individuals, regardless of whether status was achieved through dominance or prestige, are more prominent (Berger et al. 1972). For instance, prominent individuals “speak more, their opinion is sought more often, and their contributions receive more attention from others” (de Waal-Andrews et al. 2015, p. 447), and they are more influential meaning what they say carries more weight, they are more likely to get what they want, and they can shape others' behavior (Berger et al. 1972). While many of these concepts overlap, the subtle differences in terminology necessitate careful consideration, particularly as they apply to the dynamics of status for adolescents.

Social Status Hierarchy in Adolescent Research

The social status hierarchy established during the adolescent developmental period is unique in that it is informal. As opposed to a formal hierarchy where the number of status positions are constrained (e.g., job titles or management levels at a company), an informal hierarchy provides more opportunities for mobility. Furthermore, informal hierarchies develop organically as the members of the social group assign rank order to individuals based on valued dimensions (Magee and Galinsky 2008). Valued dimensions for adolescents include a combination of peer-valued characteristics and behavior (e.g., LaFontana and Cillessen 2002). Examples of peer-valued characteristics include spending power, physical attractiveness, and involvement in prestigious activities such as cheerleading or athletics, among others (Adler and Adler 1998; Eder 1985; Vaillancourt and Hymel 2006; Xie et al. 2006). Youth with prestige and implicit power may have more peer-valued characteristics whereas youth who engage in aggressive behavior are assumed to have more explicit social power and dominance (LaFreniere and Charlesworth 1983; Vaillancourt and Hymel 2006). However, it is important to note that implicit and explicit social power are not antithetical. For instance, Vaillancourt

et al. (2003) revealed that bullies, particularly more powerful ones, were more physically and relationally aggressive (explicit social power) but also possessed certain valued assets such as attractiveness (implicit social power).

Those with high-status enjoy several benefits associated with status, specifically power over finite resources such as peer support and peer attention (Fiske 1993; Hawley 1999). These benefits are so desirable that many youth aspire to be popular (e.g., Adler and Adler 1998) and pursue status as their social goal (e.g., agentic goals, Ojanen et al. 2005; popularity goals; Dawes and Xie 2014, 2016; social demonstration-approach goals; Ryan and Shim 2008; see; Dawes 2017 for review). To adequately understand why some high-status adolescents may be targets of aggressive behavior, it is important to first understand the different indicators of social status assessed during adolescence which are reviewed in the next section.

Social Status Indicators

Applied to the adolescent developmental period, key social status terms include: popularity, peer preference, peer rejection, peer acceptance, and centrality (see Cillessen and Marks 2011 for a discussion of terminology). Arguably the most commonly used indicator of status is popularity, which is distinct from peer preference (previously referred to as sociometric popularity; Parkhurst and Hopmeyer 1998). Popularity is typically assessed by asking students directly who is popular and indicates one's position and social power in the peer network (Bukowski 2011). Peer preference has two components: peer acceptance ("who do you like the most?") and peer rejection ("who do you like the least?"). Peer preference and popularity are associated with one another but are not mutually exclusive (Parkhurst and Hopmeyer 1998). For instance, some youth may be both popular and well-liked whereas others may be popular but disliked (e.g., Cillessen and Rose 2005). Centrality is another way to assess one's status in the hierarchy (e.g., Cairns et al. 1998; Farmer and Rodkin 1996) and is conceptually similar and empirically related to the construct of popularity (Cillessen and Borch 2006; Cillessen and Marks 2011). Centrality information is gleaned from social network analysis of either friendship, best friendship, or peer group information. Youth who are central are well connected to other youth in the peer network, meaning they have ties to many peers and/or have ties to other well-connected youth who in turn have ties to numerous peers.

Of these three indicators, (popularity, peer preference, centrality), popularity and centrality are more in line with concepts of power and influence (Cillessen and Marks 2011). Popular youth are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior, thereby displaying their dominance over their peers (Cillessen and Rose 2005). As such, popular youth

have more control over desirable resources (Fiske 1993; Hawley 1999) and the power to influence and establish norms (i.e., norm salience; Dijkstra et al. 2008). Relatedly, central youth are also assumed to have more social resources given their position in the center of the peer network (Friedkin 1991). With their numerous connections, central youth have more control over social information which gives them more influence in interactions (Burt 1982; see; Faris and Felmlee 2014 for discussion). Unsurprisingly, empirical evidence demonstrates a high correlation between these two status constructs (Cillessen and Borch 2006). In contrast, peer preference is more of an emotional, relational judgment compared to popularity or centrality (Cillessen and Marks 2011). Unlike popularity and centrality, which remain strongly correlated over time (Cillessen and Borch 2006), the association between peer preference and popularity weakens across development (Cillessen and Mayeux 2004). As outlined below, whether youth are popular or central may be related to their risks for victimization.

Low-Status Victims

Why are low-status youth victimized? Aggression against a low-status peer may serve several functions. First, targeting weak classmates may provide perpetrators with a way to display their ability and willingness to aggress in order to increase or keep their high social status (i.e., low prestige victim perspective, see Andrews et al. 2016). Indeed, the "ability to bully another person conveys status upon the one with more power, thus establishing his or her place within the social hierarchy, at least in relation to the victim" (Kolbert and Crothers 2003, p. 81). Targeting low-status peers is also a relatively low-risk endeavor for perpetrators, as low-status peers are unlikely to have the physical or social resources to retaliate (e.g., Volk et al. 2014) and because this behavior typically will not result in disapproval from peers (Veenstra et al. 2010).

Second, aggressing against low-status youth may serve as a way to demonstrate or enforce valued norms in the peer group (e.g., normative targeting; Coleman 1990; Faris and Felmlee 2014). In adolescence, youth face immense pressure from peers to conform to the social norms of the peer group and those who are unable, or unwilling, to conform to the standards of their peers tend to experience social ramifications (Faris and Felmlee 2014). By victimizing youth who violate social norms, perpetrators can maintain and uphold the social dominance hierarchy while also reinforcing socially accepted or valued behavior (e.g., Berger and Dijkstra 2013; Faris and Felmlee 2014; Juvonen and Galván 2008).

Lastly, low-status youth may have correlated constraints that could increase their risk for being targeted for victimization (Cairns and Cairns 1994). For instance, low-status

youth may have internalizing problems or may lack social skills and competencies which are related to being victimized (Cook et al. 2010; Reijntjes et al. 2010). The reciprocal relationship between low-status and victimization can mean that low-status youth are targeted by perpetrators because it is easy to display dominance over someone with low social power. On the other hand, youth who are victims may lose status, thereby becoming low-status as a result of their victimization experience (and putting themselves at risk for being targeted further).

Evidence of such low-status victims in the research literature abounds. Victims tend to be less popular, to be rejected more by peers, and to have lower levels of peer acceptance (e.g., Bouman et al. 2012; de Bruyn et al. 2010). Traditionally, studies have focused on risk for victimization for low-status youth whereas the risk for high-status youth has been underexamined.

High-Status Victims

Why would high-status youth be targeted for victimization? Concepts from evolutionary psychological and social dominance perspectives, the self-evaluation maintenance model, and the notion of instrumental targeting help explain why high-status youth may be targeted (see Andrews et al. 2016 for additional discussion of the high prestige victim perspective). Evolutionary psychological and social dominance perspectives suggest that people strive for power over finite resources that are integral to their own health and/or survival such as access to social resources like peer support (Hawley 1999) or resources like dating opportunities (e.g., Volk et al. 2012). It also allows perpetrators of aggression to advance up the social ladder and achieve one's social goals (Hawley 2003; Pellegrini 2001). These theories suggest that in order to achieve one's goal of access to finite resources, the most suitable target is someone who already has those resources. High-status youth are the individuals in the dominance hierarchy with access and power over desirable resources, thereby increasing their risk for being targets of their peers' aggressive behavior.

Social competitors for high-status youth could be other high-status youth who "are at near-adjacent points in the status hierarchy and pose the greatest threat to high-status individuals' status position" (Prinstein and Cillessen 2003, p. 315). A related perspective includes Tesser's (1988) self-evaluation maintenance model which posits that individuals are assumed to specifically target youth who challenge their status and are seen as a threat. This suggests that youth who feel threatened may target other high-status peers who are in a position to challenge their status. Alternatively, perpetrators who target high-status youth could be any peer who simply wants to climb the social ladder (notion of instrumental targeting; Faris and Felmlee 2014). After all, "it is

more impressive to attack the strong than the weak" (Faris and Felmlee 2014, p. 233).

To demonstrate high-status youth's risk for victimization, consider how a high-status youth may be targeted for their access to dating (and therefore mating) opportunities. According to the evolutionary psychological perspective (Volk et al. 2012), individuals are driven to survive and secure successful mating opportunities (Konnor 2010) that will allow them to pass on their genes (Dawkins 1989). Thus, individuals will compete with one another in order to acquire access to mating opportunities. High-status youth are more likely to have high dating popularity ("who are the students in your grade you would most like to go on a date with?"; Houser et al. 2015), and engage in sexual behavior (Mayeux et al. 2008) which may make them a target of perpetrators' aggression as perpetrators try to gain access to dating opportunities linked to their evolutionary drive (Volk et al. 2012). This process has been illustrated in research on intrasexual targeting against attractive females who are more likely to have high-status (e.g. Arnocky and Vaillancourt 2012; Vaillancourt and Hymel 2006). Specifically, because attractive girls are more likely to be valued by boys as a potential mate (Buss 1989), an attractive girl may be targeted by another girl (particularly with indirect aggression) because the attractive girl is a threat to the perpetrator's dating opportunities (Leenaars et al. 2008). For example, a girl can derogate a high-status, attractive girl competitor by spreading rumors about her that call into question her value as a mating partner in the perpetrator's attempt to elevate her own attractiveness as a potential mate (Vaillancourt and Sharma 2011). Taken together, these perspectives suggest that because high-status youth have access and control over resources coveted by others, they are at risk of being targeted for victimization.

It is also worth considering that characteristics of high-status youth may make them targets for their peers' aggression. Youth with high social status may not necessarily be well-liked; they can be seen as snobbish and stuck-up by their peers (Adler and Adler 1998; Eder 1985; Merten 1997; Parkhurst and Hopmeyer 1998). Furthermore, during their ascent up the social ladder, they may ignore or drop previous friends who are not as popular (Adler and Adler 1998; Merten 1997). Such behavior is not likely to engender high-status youth to some of their peers, particularly those who make friendship overtures that are rebuffed (Eder 1985). Peers who perceive they are being slighted or rejected by high-status youth may feel anger which can motivate them to engage in aggressive behavior (see Lemay et al. 2012). Relatedly, high-status youth may be envied by others for their position and such jealousy may compel peers to act aggressively (Leary et al. 2006). In these scenarios, it is reasonable to expect that high-status youth may be targets of their peers' aggression.

The state of empirical evidence of high-status victims is less clear; hence, the motivation for this review. To fill this gap, this narrative review summarizes the existing literature describing this phenomenon (namely of high-status victims), identifies patterns among the findings, and makes suggestions for future work.

Current Review

This current article will provide a narrative review of a phenomenon that has recently gained attention in research: that high-status youth are being victimized. This review was based on a few important parameters including: (1) the developmental age of the sample, and (2) the measure of social status. Regarding the developmental period, this review is limited to studies with adolescent samples, ranging from early adolescence (defined as an 11-year old sample or 5th grade sample) to late adolescence (through age 18 or end of high school). Studies with multiple-aged samples were included so long as one assessment was within the age range. There are several reasons for the focus on the adolescent developmental period. First, victimization prevalence rates identify early adolescence as a critical time period. Some evidence suggests that victimization peaks in middle school (Nylund et al. 2007) so it is crucial to understand these dynamics as they begin to affect more adolescents. Second, it is during the early adolescent developmental period that social status dynamics, including the desire for status and the importance of peers, take on increased significance (Adler and Adler 1998; Dawes and Xie 2016; LaFontana and Cillessen 2010). Thus, it is imperative that research examines how these factors (victimization and status) relate to one another during this age.

The second parameter for inclusion in this review was the type of status indicator assessed in each study. The review is limited to studies that assessed status either as (1) popularity or (2) centrality (excluding peer preference). As discussed previously, these two status indicators are most in line with concepts of power and influence compared to peer preference (Cillessen and Marks 2011). Given that the theoretical framework for high-status victims presupposes that high-status youth are targeted precisely because they have access to desirable resources afforded from their greater social power, this review focused on the two status indicators that connote such social power. Therefore, in keeping with the aim to review evidence of powerful and dominant youth who are targets of aggression, evidence for popular and central victims only are summarized below.

This narrative review begins with notable ethnographic studies with their descriptions of popular, well-connected youth being victimized. Summaries of studies are organized into two sections for each status indicator (i.e., popularity

and centrality) with studies presented in chronological order. Each study overview includes the following key components: (1) how victimization was measured (e.g., self-report, peer-report), (2) the form of aggression measured, (3) how status was operationalized, (4) the general analytic method and (5) the major findings. Findings across all studies using the same status indicator are then summarized.

Evidence of High-Status Victims

Popular Victims

Eder (1985) conducted an ethnographic study on the dynamics of popularity in a middle school setting, primarily focusing on the cycle of popularity for girls. Eder and her team sat in the lunch room observing interactions among peer groups and interviewing students for a more in-depth understanding of the observed dynamics. Popular girls were typically cheerleaders and attractive youth who were afforded greater visibility among peer groups at school. Such popular girls were often seen to be stuck-up by other peers and thus, not necessarily well-liked. In the article, Eder summarizes an interview with popular girls in which they disclose (self-report) being the targets of aggression: “According to the cheerleaders, the people who were not in the top group saw the cheerleaders as stuck-up and therefore disliked them and started rumors about them” (p. 162). This ethnographic work provides insight into the process of high-status (i.e., popular) girls being targeted for aggression due to their perceived characteristics (i.e., snobby).

Adler and Adler (1995, 1998) described the links between popular youth and victimization in their discussion of the inclusion and exclusion practices of cliques (i.e., peer groups) in grades four through six (1995) and grades three through six (1998). Victimization and popularity were assessed through observations and in-depth interviews with students for both studies. While not a core focus of the study, Adler and Adler (1995) described the process by which popular youth who were clique leaders could be kicked out of their group. They describe how “the ultimate sanction, expulsion, is a dramatic example of the effects of exclusion, weakening potential rivals or bringing them down from positions of power while herding other group members into cohesion” (1995, p. 158). The authors also described how aggression was used by clique leaders to pick on members of the popular group, exclude members or realign followers when they perceived them as a threat to their status. Many of the instances discussed by the Adlers include scenarios where high-status youth pick on other high-status youth when they feel their position in the popular group is threatened.

Merten (1997) interviewed middle school students to identify a popular clique of girls that had a reputation for being mean and powerful. The ethnographer used observations to identify popular youth who were “widely known or recognized” and/or those who were “sought after as a friend” (p. 179). Victimization was assessed via observations and students’ self-report in interviews which revealed how girls aggressed against one another within their clique. Popular girls would share secrets, manipulate others in the clique to exclude or be mean to one of the girls, or even try to damage her relationships outside of the clique in attempts to isolate her. Furthermore, Merten (1997) found that most of this behavior occurred when teachers were not around, and some teachers were skeptical that the girls would behave in these ways to their friends. Notably, although these girls were considered popular, they also reported being distressed when they were targets of friends’ aggression.

Prinstein and Cillessen (2003) were some of the first researchers to differentially examine the relations between popularity and peer preference (measured via peer nominations) with specific subtypes of victimization (i.e., overt, relational, and reputational), using a sample of 10th graders. They hypothesized that victims of reputational aggression, but not relational or overt aggression would have relatively high popularity. Popularity was calculated by taking the difference score of standardized peer nominations of “most popular” and “least popular”. Victimization was assessed using peer nominations which asked participants to identify who was victimized by each form of aggression (overt, relational, reputational). Victimization scores were calculated as the standardized sum of nominations for each item. To test their hypotheses, the authors conducted separate hierarchical multiple regressions for each of the three forms of victimization, testing for both linear and curvilinear effects. The results of the linear effects revealed that high popularity predicted reputational victimization, whereas low popularity predicted relational and physical victimization. Furthermore, they found a significant curvilinear effect for reputational victimization, such that both youth with low levels and high levels of popularity were targets. These results were one of the first quantitative analyses to provide indication that some victims may have high-status, and that the relation between status and victimization is intertwined with the type of victimization experienced.

Rodkin and Berger (2008) introduced a new methodology (who bullies whom?) to assess the distribution of social status among bullies and their victims using a dyadic perspective in a sample of fourth and fifth grade children. By utilizing this measure, Rodkin and Berger were able to directly compare the popularity of bullies and victims. For this study, they focused exclusively on male bullies. They hypothesized that bullies, in general, would be more popular than their victims. They also sought to assess any gender differences,

and they predicted that girls who were targeted by boys would in fact be popular. Rodkin and Berger (2008) used a sample of fourth and fifth grade students (aged 10–11) to test their hypotheses. To identify bullies and victims, participants were asked “Are there some kids in your class who really like to bully other kids around? Please write the name of the kid that bullies other kids around” (p. 475). Next, students wrote down the names of peers who were picked on by the specific bully they named. Participants had the chance to nominate up to three bullies and their victims (additional lines were provided to allow for multiple victims). If a youth was identified by at least two peers (including self-nominations), they were classified as a bully or victim. Status was measured with three peer nomination items used to calculate popularity: “popular”, “cool”, and “want to be like” (“If I could be somebody else, I’d want to be just like these kids”). Without considering gender, their results from one-sample *t* tests indicated that bullies and their victims did not have significant differences in popularity. However, as they expected, when they conducted MANOVAs with gender as a between-subjects factor, they found that girls who were victims of boys were highly popular, whereas boys who were victims of boys had low-status. These results suggest that even in late childhood, some youth who are victims may have high-status. It also highlights the importance of considering gender differences and specific dyads of bullies and victims.

Pronk and Zimmer-Gembeck (2010) collected qualitative reports about relational aggression to understand youth’s perceptions of the motivations behind relational aggression. They interviewed 33 youth aged 11–13 (grades 7 in Australia). Interviews involved reading hypothetical vignettes to participants about relational aggression scenarios and were asked probing questions to gather their perspectives on the motives behind the aggressive behavior. Though this study does not directly test for the status of those being victimized, the interview information can be extrapolated to infer about the status of some victims. When asked about the motivations for why peers use relational aggression, youth reported that they believed that perpetrators do so in order to pursue popularity. The researchers found that aggression was used “toward a peer who is perceived as a threat to one’s own popularity or status within the friendship group” (p. 190). The authors reported one compelling insight from a participant that “someone may not be invited to a party because they ‘might be more popular, and more people might pay attention to that person if they were invited’” (p. 190). This study suggests that youth themselves recognize that aggression can be used to target high-status youth.

Dyches and Mayeux (2012) examined the associations of eight forms of social aggression and the characteristics of victims (e.g., popularity) using a sample of 5th and 7th graders. Using daily diaries over a 5-day period, participants reported whether they had engaged in the following

verbal and nonverbal acts of aggression: “eye rolling or making a mean face”, “excluding someone from an activity”, “manipulation of a friend in order to get what is wanted”, “ignoring a peer who wanted to talk or hang out with the participant”, “spreading a rumor about a peer”, “stealing someone’s friend”, and “telling a peer’s secret that was not supposed to be told”. Participants were also asked to rate how popular they thought their targets were. Responses to the two items assessing popularity (i.e., “How popular is this person” and “How unpopular is this person?”) ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Across all of the daily diary responses, the authors created a mean popularity score for students’ targets. Results from a MANOVA analysis (grade by gender by aggressive behavior) with targets’ characteristic (e.g., popularity) as the dependent variable revealed that girls were more likely to socially aggress against peers they thought were popular than boys. These findings suggest that girls chose targets for social aggression whom they think are popular, perhaps to damage their reputation or position in the social hierarchy.

Sainio et al. (2012) used 1-year longitudinal data to examine associations between same- and other-sex popularity with same- and other-sex victimization in a sample of students in grades 4–6 (aged 10–12) and grades 8–9 (aged 13–15). Victimization was collected from self-reported dyadic nominations. First, students indicated the frequency in which they were bullied using the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Olweus 1996) with responses ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*several times a week*) on a global item (“How often have you been bullied at school in the last two months?”) and ten additional items asking about more specific bullying forms. Second, participants who reported that they were bullied at the level of at least two or three times a month and who reported being bullied by classmates were asked to mark the names of classmates who bullied them (unlimited number allowed) on a randomized roster of their classmates’ names. From those responses, the authors identified participants who experienced same-sex victimization (e.g., girl victim nominated a girl bully) and other-sex victimization (e.g., girl victim nominated a boy bully). Popularity was measured using a peer nomination procedure in which students nominated popular peers by marking the names of up to three peers on the provided roster of classmates (“Who are the most popular ones in your class?”). Nominations from same-sex peers captured same-sex popularity and nominations from other-sex peers captured other-sex popularity. Using multilevel multinomial logistic regression models to predict same- and other-sex victimization, the authors found that other-sex popularity was positively related to other-sex victimization over time, meaning that being seen as highly popular by other-sex peers increased the likelihood of being victimized by other-sex peers.

Badaly et al. (2013) assessed the concurrent and prospective associations between popularity and victimization (overt, relational, and electronic) in a sample of 9th grade students followed for 1 year. Assessments occurred in the spring semester of students’ 9th grade year (Time 1) and the spring semester of their 10th grade year (Time 2). The researchers used peer nominations (limited to nine grade-mates) to gather information about popularity (“popular”), overt victimization (e.g., “hit, pushed, or bullied”), relational victimization (e.g., “get left out of activities, excluded, or ignored”), and electronic victimization (e.g., “others insult or are mean to using the internet or text messages”). They found that popularity at Time 1 and Time 2 was positively related with both relational and electronic victimization at both time points (the exception being a nonsignificant association between Time 2 popularity and Time 1 electronic victimization). Further, they still found a significant correlation between popularity and electronic victimization, albeit with slight gender differences, even after partialling out participants’ level of social acceptance (peer nominations for “really like”). For girls, there was a significant, positive association between popularity and electronic victimization (controlling for acceptance) at Time 1 whereas the association between popularity and electronic victimization at Time 2 was only significant for boys. However, it is worth noting that the results of the study’s cross-lagged panel models indicated that the longitudinal association between Time 1 popularity and Time 2 electronic victimization was no longer significant after controlling for both overt and relational victimization. The authors concluded that their pattern of results suggest “that popular youth are at an increased risk for victimization, regardless of the setting in which aggression may occur (i.e., in school vs. in the digital domain)” (p. 900).

Wurster and Xie (2014) examined the popularity status of victims targeted by bistrategic youth, those who engage in high levels of both aggressive and prosocial behavior (i.e., Machiavellian, Hawley 2003). In a sample of 5th graders, Wurster and Xie first identified different behavioral subtypes based on students’ use of prosocial and aggressive behavioral strategies. Peer nominations for prosocial behavior (“willing to help other kids”, “friendly to others”), social aggression (“this person gossips”, “good at causing people to get mad at each other”), physical aggression (“starts fights”, “bullies others”), and popularity. To identify perpetrators and targets of aggressive acts (both social and physical), the authors used peer-reports of aggressor-victim dyads. Participants were interviewed and asked about students who get hit or pushed by their peers (physical aggression targets) and who did that the most (physical aggression perpetrators). The process was repeated for social aggression: participants were asked in the interview about youth who “get other people to turn against another student” (social

aggression perpetrators) and whom that person gets peers to turn against (social aggression targets) and for prosocial behavior (“this person has given you help when needed”, p. 370). The popularity of all targets of each type of behavior by a perpetrator was averaged to represent the average popularity status of recipients of each specific perpetrator’s behavior. Comparing across subtypes using two-way ANOVAs controlling for gender, the authors found that victims who experienced social aggression from bistrategic youth were more popular than the victims of aggressive-only youth (those who did not engage in prosocial behavior), indicating that bistrategics selectively choose victims who are highly popular. The authors reason that such selection on the part of bistrategics youth is intentional: they chose “targets who likely will maximize the benefits of the behaviors employed” (p. 374). In other words, their social aggression can knock down their social competitor, thereby allowing the perpetrators to elevate their own status.

Closson and Hymel (2016) looked specifically at the associations between aggression and popularity in a sample of 11–15 year-olds. Using rosters of participating grademates, participants self-reported how often they behaved in certain ways towards each same-sex peer (a form of dyadic nomination) using a 5-point scale ranging from *never* to *always*. Direct (physical and verbal) aggression was assessed by having students report how frequently they engaged in behavior such as hitting or saying mean things to each peer on the roster. Indirect aggression was assessed by asking students how often they spread rumors about a peer (social aggression) or excluded a peer. To assess popularity, they used a similar roster procedure where each participant ranked how popular each same-sex peer was on a 5-point scale ranging from *very unpopular* to *very popular*. Popularity scores were computed as the average rating each participant received from his or her same-sex peers. The authors employed multilevel modeling given the nested nature of the data with targets (Level 1), nested in perpetrators (Level 2), nested in the grade (Level 3). They found a positive association between direct and indirect aggression and target popularity, meaning that perpetrators targeted popular peers with direct and indirect aggression. Additionally, results of the cross-level interactions between target and perpetrator characteristics revealed that it was typically popular perpetrators who were targeting other popular peers for aggression. Plainly speaking, the more popular the student, the more likely they were to be targets of direct and indirect aggression perpetrated other popular youth.

Closson et al. (2017) focused on the association between types of indirect victimization and popularity in a sample of 11–15 year-olds. They assessed two forms of indirect victimization such as spreading rumors and peer exclusion. Using a roster of participating grademates, students self-reported how often they engaged in each behavior toward their peers

including “talk behind their back or spread rumors about each person” (labeled reputational victimization by the authors) or exclude peers (i.e., “leave out, ignore, or stop talking to”) using a 5-point scale from *never* to *always*. Students’ victimization scores were calculated as the average rating received from all grademates. Additionally, each participant rated all other participating grademates on popularity, likeability, and aggression (i.e., meanness) using 5-point scales. Average ratings received from grademates on each item were used to reflect students’ social status, acceptance, and aggression. The authors performed hierarchical multiple regression analyses to examine associations between likeability, meanness, popularity, peer conformity goals (i.e., wanting to have characteristics and competencies valued by the peer group such as wearing stylish clothes or being good at the same sports as other kids), and gender on the two forms of indirect aggression. They found that popularity was positively associated with being talked about or being the subject of rumors, but was not associated with exclusion, after controlling for likeability and meanness. Further, they found significant moderation by gender and peer conformity goals such that popular girls with high peer conformity goals were more likely to be talked about behind their backs or be the subject of rumors. The authors suggest these popular girls may be seen to “value superiority, materialism, and superficiality” which may make them seem “phony or stuck-up, which is not well tolerated among popular girls” (p. 498). They likewise found a significant three-way interaction of popularity, gender, and peer conformity goals on exclusion, highlighting the complexity of victimization risks. Overall, this finding suggests that high popular youth are at greater risk for being victimized by specific forms of indirect aggression and that victims’ characteristics may moderate these associations.

Closson and Watanabe (2018) examined victimization occurring within friendships cliques in 6th through 8th grade, with a specific focus on the role of popularity. Using a peer nomination procedure, popularity was measured as the difference score between nominations of “most popular” and “least popular”. Preference was also assessed as the difference between “like most” and “like least” nominations. Friendship cliques were identified by asking participants to nominate “students who are in the group of friends you hang around with most often”. Participants were then asked how often each friend in their clique experienced overt victimization (i.e., “gets hit, kicked, or punched”, has “mean things” said to them) and relational victimization (i.e., target of a rumor; others are told “to stop liking this friend”) perpetrated by someone in their friend group with responses ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*a whole lot*). Using the same response scale, participants also reported the extent to which they liked each member of their clique (likeability) and the amount of social support each member received from other

group members (“When he or she is having problems, someone in our group helps this friend”). The authors conducted two hierarchical linear models predicting overt and relational victimization with participants nested in friendship cliques. The authors found that target popularity predicted relational victimization in friendship cliques, even after controlling for levels of preference among grademates and likeability, prosocial behavior, and social support from members of the friendship clique. Interestingly, they found two significant interactions between popularity and preference: for youth with high preference, popularity was not associated with overt victimization but was positively associated with relational victimization. Further, youth who were popular and had higher levels of social support from clique members were more likely to experience overt victimization within their group. The authors concluded that certain features of the peer group that protect against victimization within the broader peer context may not protect youth within friendship cliques. Such evidence reveals that popular youth may be victimized by members of their friend groups and that other types of status (i.e., likeability) or resources (e.g., social support) may be important to consider to fully disentangle risks for victimization.

Malamut et al. (2018a) used qualitative reports of rumors heard at school to identify victims of social aggression (specifically rumor spreading) in a sample of students followed longitudinally from 5th through 7th grade. Participants were asked to report rumors that they heard at school, identify the victim of the rumor and the content of the rumor. Social status was measured using peer nominations of “cool” and “popular”. Given that a function of rumor spreading is to damage a peer’s reputation (Xie et al. 2005), they hypothesized that targets of rumors would have high-status. Results from a series of ANCOVAs controlling for gender and ethnicity revealed that rumor victims (depending on the content) had higher social status than nonvictims. Specifically, in 5th grade, romantic rumors victims had higher social status than nonvictims. In 6th grade, victims of rumors about personal/physical characteristics had higher status than nonvictims. Lastly, in 7th grade, victims of sexual activity rumors were more popular and cooler than nonvictims. These findings support the notion that some victims, especially victims of social aggression, have high-status.

Malamut et al. (2018b) further examined whether being a rumor victim led to subsequent increases in social status. They hypothesized that rumor victims, especially those who already had high-status, would gain status due to the nature of rumors (i.e., being talked about). Victims in the 7th grade were identified through qualitative reports of rumors heard at school. Controlling for social status in sixth grade (aggregate of peer nominations for “cool” and “popular”), they found that being a rumor victim predicted increases in status over time, specifically for adolescents who already had

high-status in sixth grade. This was one of the first studies to demonstrate that being a victim of certain types of aggression (i.e., rumor spreading) may lead to increases in status for adolescents who already occupy a high position in the social status hierarchy.

Combined, the evidence from these studies suggest that popular youth *can* be victims of aggression. Popular youth were identified as victims through self-reports during interviews or observations (Adler and Adler 1995, 1998; Eder 1985; Merten 1997), self-reports from daily diaries (Dyches and Mayeux 2012), peer nominations of specific forms of victimization (Badaly et al. 2013; Prinstein and Cillessen 2003), peer reports of specific forms of victimization perpetrated within friendship cliques (Closson and Watanabe 2018), self-reports of specific aggressor-victim or bully-victim dyadic relationships from perpetrators or victims (Closson and Hymel 2016; Closson et al. 2017; Sainio et al. 2012), peer-reports of dyadic relationships (Rodkin and Berger 2008; Wurster and Xie 2014), and lastly, from qualitative interviews with students (Malamut et al. 2018a, b).

High-status youth were found to be victims of direct aggression (Closson and Hymel 2016), indirect aggression including socially aggressive behaviors such as spreading rumors (Closson et al. 2017; Eder 1985; Malamut et al. 2018a, b; Wurster and Xie 2014), relational aggression which aimed to manipulate the victim’s relationships with peers (Adler and Adler 1995; Closson and Watanabe 2018; Merten 1997; Pronk and Zimmer-Gembeck 2010), reputational aggression (Prinstein and Cillessen 2003), cyber aggression (Badaly et al. 2013), and bullying (Rodkin and Berger 2008; Sainio et al. 2012). With the exception of the few studies (Closson and Hymel 2016; Closson and Watanabe 2018) which found that some high-status youth were victims of direct and overt aggression (of which physical aggression was included), the majority of studies discussed above found popular youth to be victims of either indirect, social, relational, or reputational victimization.

Victims with High Centrality

Faris and Felmlee’s (2014) study simultaneously examined two perspectives of the association between social status and victimization: that low-status youth can be targeted for victimization (i.e., normative targeting) and that high-status youth can be targeted as well (i.e., instrumental targeting). Their main hypothesis was that the association between victimization and social status would be curvilinear over time such that victimization would increase as social status increased until reaching the top of the status hierarchy where victimization was expected to decrease. The authors tested their expectations using a sample of early adolescents followed longitudinally from the 6th to 8th grade. Social status was measured as students’ level of centrality. To

assess centrality, the authors used friendship network data gathered by asking participants to “name up to five of their best friends” (p. 236). From those nominations, the authors measured each students’ betweenness centrality which is calculated by “first determining the shortest paths, or geodesics, between all pairs of actors, and then calculating the percentage of all geodesics that include the focal actor” (p. 236). Thus, someone with a high betweenness centrality is one with many connections in the network and/or whose connections link many others in the network. Victimization was measured as the combination of self-reports of victimization and self-reports of perpetration. Students listed up to five classmates who picked on them or were mean to them (victimization). They were also asked to nominate up to five classmates that they were mean to or picked on (perpetration). Someone was identified as a victim if (1) they said they were picked on by peers or (2) they were identified as the recipient of aggression from a student who was mean to them. Thus, students’ victimization scores reflected the number of students who aggressed against them. They found support for their hypothesis of a curvilinear effect of centrality on victimization: victimization risk increased as centrality increased until the higher levels of centrality were reached (i.e., betweenness of 3) whereby victimization risks decreased as centrality increased. They concluded that being high-status was associated with increased victimization unless the student was at “the very pinnacle of the hierarchy where they can rest comfortably above the fray” (p. 249).

Andrews et al. (2016) sought to examine what they called the high prestige victim perspective and the low prestige victim perspective using a sample of middle school students followed longitudinally from 6th to 7th grade. Victimization was assessed using dyadic nominations for aggressors and their victims for physical (e.g., “Someone who hits, kicks, or pushes others”) and relational (e.g., “Someone who gossips about others or excludes others”) aggression similar to Rodkin and Berger’s (2008) procedure. Participants nominated up to three aggressors for each item (physical or social) and were allowed to list up to three victims for aggressors. Total victimization scores were calculated as the sum of all victimization nominations, separately for relational and physical aggression. Social network prestige was operationalized as youth who have many friendship nominations. Participants nominated their closest friends (up to 10 nominations) and from those nominations, social network prestige (see also proximity prestige; Wasserman and Faust 1994) was calculated using social network analysis. Prestige represented the number of times a student was nominated as a friend by their peers as well as how easily they could be reached by peers through the network. Andrews et al. tested a series of regression analyses using their longitudinal sample, examining both the linear and curvilinear associations between victimization and social network prestige. Results

for relational and physical victimization were similar: girls were more frequently nominated as victims of both relational and physical aggression when they were high in social network prestige whereas boys both low and high in social network prestige were frequently nominated as victims of relational and physical aggression. These results provided support for the high prestige victim perspective for both boys and girls, and for both forms of aggressive behavior. Support for the low prestige victim perspective was found as well, but only for boys. These results suggest that youth who are well-connected (i.e., many friends), can be targets of peers’ aggression.

These two studies on the victimization experiences of highly central youth indicate that those who are well-connected in the peer network can be targeted for victimization. Well-connected youth were identified as victims through self-reports and peer-reports of victimization (Faris and Felmlee 2014) and peer-reports of aggressor-victim dyads (Andrews et al. 2016). The forms of victimization included general victimization (i.e., picked on), physical aggression (e.g., hitting), and relational aggression (e.g., gossip). Both studies tested the curvilinear relationship between victimization and centrality, and both studies found that highly central youth were increasingly at risk for victimization. However, a key difference between the studies was that Faris and Felmlee found that a few very central youth at the very top of hierarchy were less likely to be victimized, whereas Andrew and colleagues found that risk for victimization increased all the way to the top of the social hierarchy.

Discussion

Peer victimization is associated with an array of emotional, social, and health problems (e.g., Hawker and Boulton 2000; Juvonen and Graham 2014). Most research on victimization thus far has focused on vulnerable, low-status adolescents. However, there is growing evidence that high-status youth are also victimized which is important to understand for several reasons. First, more youth are at risk for victimization than perhaps previously thought. Not accounting for all victims of aggression limits prevention and intervention efforts and also renders our understanding of the consequences of victimization incomplete (Andrews et al. 2016). Second, high-status adolescents’ victimization may have implications for the cycle of aggressive perpetration. For example, high-status victims may become more aggressive to defend their status and, in the process, establish norms for aggressive behavior among their peers (e.g., Dijkstra et al. 2008) which may be a significant barrier to reducing victimization.

This narrative review outlined a theoretical framework explaining the risk of victimization for high-status youth and reviewed the empirical evidence of popular and highly

central youth being victimized by their peers. In doing so, this review highlights a growing phenomenon in the victimization literature: that high-status youth *are* targets of their peers' aggressive behavior. Particularly relevant for high-status victims is understanding the different forms of aggression used against them and various methods used to identify them.

Popular and Central Victims

High-status youth's risks for victimization can be understood by considering the evolutionary psychological and social dominance perspectives (e.g., Hawley 1999; Volk et al. 2012). Specifically, high-status youth may be targeted because they have access to desirable resources and are therefore considered a competitor that the perpetrator needs to target, presumably in order to promote his or her own status at the cost of the victim's status. This narrative review of the literature on high-status victims provides support for these assumptions. First, the studies reviewed reveal that high-status youth are victimized by several forms of aggression. Specifically, high-status youth were found to be victims of reputational aggression which involves specific and deliberate attempts to harm one's social standing among peers (Prinstein and Cillessen 2003). This suggests that high-status youth are targeted because they have access to coveted resources associated with high-status. For youth who want to climb the social ladder, there may be more to gain by targeting social competitors who occupy desired positions in the social hierarchy. In other words, because high-status youth enjoy desired resources and power in the peer group, they are at risk to be challenged or have their reputations damaged by youth who aspire to be popular. Two relevant issues emerged from these studies. First, high-status youth may be more likely to be targeted with certain forms of aggression and second, the method used to measure victimization may impact whether or not high-status victims are identified.

Forms of Aggression Used to Target High-Status Youth

The evidence presented in the current review demonstrates that high-status youth can be victimized from a range of aggressive behavior including bullying, overt aggression, physical aggression, indirect aggression, relational aggression, social aggression, reputational aggression, and cyber aggression. The majority of studies found that popular and central youth were victims of indirect, relational, and social aggression. These forms of aggression may be better suited for targeting youth with social power as the tactics involved in non-confrontational behavior (e.g., gossip), can reduce risks for retaliation while still being an effective way of knocking down a social competitor (e.g., Xie et al. 2002,

2005). For instance, the covert nature of some forms of social aggression (e.g., rumor spreading) provides a low-risk opportunity for youth to challenge peers with mid- to high-social status (Prinstein and Cillessen 2003; Xie et al. 2002, 2005; Wurster and Xie 2014). Whereas reputational aggression may be used to negatively impact a youth's standing in the social hierarchy within the larger peer group, relational aggression (e.g., excluding or ignoring someone) may be more effective at harming a peer within a specific friendship or friend group (e.g., Prinstein and Cillessen 2003; Xie et al. 2002).

In total, there was less evidence for the use of physical aggression against high-status victims. Closson and Hymel (2016) and Closson and Watanabe (2018) assessed physical acts ("hit, slap, kick, or punch") as part of their measures of direct/overt aggression, and Andrews et al. (2016) assessed physical victimization with an item asking whom is hit, kicked, or punched. Direct aggression is one way to exert dominance in a public way (e.g., physical or verbal; Card et al. 2008; Wurster and Xie 2014). However, this tactic is not without risk, as direct aggression may have social costs (e.g., being defeated, facing peers' disapproval, potential retaliation; Veenstra et al. 2010; Xie et al. 2005), which may influence whom the aggressor chooses to target and whether or not the aggressor chooses to engage in physical acts.

Adolescents who want to target high-status peers are faced with challenges and likely competing motivations. On the one hand, high-status adolescents have highly valued resources (e.g., attention, social power) or perceived characteristics (e.g., stuck-up) that may put them at risk for victimization (e.g., Adler and Adler 1998; Hawley 2003). On the other hand, adolescents may be hesitant to challenge high-status peers, as high-status youth are more likely to have the social resources and position in the peer group to defend themselves or retaliate against aggression. This poses a high-risk, high-reward endeavor for adolescents who want to challenge peers with high social standing. Subsequently, adolescents may be strategic about the form of aggression they use against high-status peers. To better capture the experiences of high-status victims, future research should use measures that assess specific forms of victimization.

Methods that Identified High-Status Victims

The methods used to identify victims included observations, interviews (self-report and peer-report), daily diaries, peer nominations, and dyadic nominations. The majority of studies were divided between the use of observational and interview methods (Adler and Adler 1995, 1998; Eder 1985; Malamut et al. 2018a, b; Merten 1997; Pronk and Zimmer-Gembeck 2010) or some form of dyadic reporting (e.g., Andrews et al. 2016; Closson and Hymel 2016; Closson et al. 2017; Rodkin and Berger 2008; Sainio et al. 2012;

Wurster and Xie 2014). Notably, peer nominations for victimization *did* identify high-status victims when the nomination items asked about specific forms of victimization such as relational victimization, cyber victimization (Badaly et al. 2013), and reputational victimization which is motivated by the desire to damage the victim's reputation through gossip or saying mean things (Prinstein and Cillessen 2003). Peer nominations for general items (e.g., picked on) may be more likely to identify weak, disempowered youth who have a global reputation as a victim. In contrast, measures that assess more specific acts of victimization (e.g., spreading rumors) may be better able to identify the victimization experiences of youth from a wider range of social status positions.

Of the studies which found high-status victims to be targeted with direct and physical aggression (Andrews et al. 2016; Closson and Hymel 2016; Closson and Watanabe 2018), it is important to note that these victimization measures involved a form of dyadic nomination. Closson and Hymel (2016) asked youth to indicate whether they were an aggressor and whom they aggressed against using a list of same-sex classmates. Thus, high-status victims were identified as the recipients of students' self-reported direct aggressive behavior. Closson and Watanabe (2018) asked members of friendship cliques to report how often each friend within the clique was overtly victimized by someone in the group. Andrews et al. (2016) gathered dyadic nominations of aggressors and victims from peer-reports, asking students to nominate peers who gossip often and to then nominate whom they gossip about the most. The benefit of using the dyadic approach is that it can move beyond general reputations among peers to capture the specific relationships between perpetrators and victims (Rodkin and Berger 2008; Rodkin et al. 2014). As evidence suggests, the dyadic relationship between a specific aggressor and a specific victim accounts for more variance in the occurrence of aggressive behavior (Card and Hodges 2010). Thus, it is no surprise that a majority of the studies reviewed which identified high-status victims involved some form of dyadic report (e.g., Andrews et al. 2016; Closson and Hymel 2016; Closson et al. 2017; Rodkin and Berger 2008; Sainio et al. 2012; Wurster and Xie 2014).

It is important to highlight that a few studies found high-status youth to be victims of bullying specifically (Rodkin and Berger 2008; Sainio et al. 2012). When peers nominated specific bully-victim dyads, high-status youth were identified as victims of bullying (Rodkin and Berger 2008). It is worth noting that in Rodkin and Berger's (2008) study, no definition of bullying was provided to youth. Thus, when students were not primed to consider the specific features of bullying (repetition, intentionality, power imbalance), they spontaneously reported that high-status youth were victims of bullying as *they* defined it. This finding is in line with

evidence that when it comes to bullying, youth and researchers may not always be talking about the same thing (Vaillancourt et al. 2008). The study by Sainio et al. (2012) likewise found that high-status youth were victims of bullying using dyadic nominations (self-report), although their method differed from Rodkin and Berger (2008). First, they provided the Olweus (1996) definition of bullying to their participants "which emphasizes the repetitive nature of bullying and the power imbalance between the bully and the victim" (p. 447). They also gave examples of what bullying is not. Then they asked students to self-report how often they were bullied using a general item and more specific bullying forms and to indicate by whom they were bullied from a roster of their classmates. From this, high-status youth self-reported they were being bullied, even after they were read a definition of bullying. This indicates that high-status victims, who presumably have high social power from their status, still perceived that their aggressors had power over them. This finding from Sainio et al. (2012) suggests that there may be nuances to the power imbalance beyond social status asymmetries. For example, a perpetrator and victim may be viewed by peers as having similar status (e.g., may both have a popular reputation) but may occupy different levels of centrality in their peer group, such as being nuclear, secondary, or peripheral (Cairns et al. 1995). Different levels of centrality correspond to different levels of social power and social impact within the group according to social identity perspective (Hogg 1996) and social impact theory (Latané 1981). Thus, if a perpetrator occupies a nuclear position in a popular group, he or she may be better able to mobilize group members to participate in a bullying attack against a victim within the same group who may have secondary or peripheral status in the group. Some evidence of these dynamics can be seen in Merten's (1997) description of popularity dynamics within cliques (where some youth were more central in the clique than others) and Closson and Watanabe's (2018) finding that relational aggression was used against highly-popular youth within the same friendship clique. It would be premature to make definitive statements about the nature of power imbalances among bully-victim dyads at the top of the status hierarchy based on this limited evidence, but this evidence does suggest that there may be nuances to the power imbalance that need more careful attention.

In summary, this review joins recent calls from researchers (e.g., Volk et al. 2017) who stress the need to be conscious of how victimization is assessed (e.g., form of victimization, informant/method), which will have an impact on the types of victims identified. These measurement decisions affect how researchers then interpret and generalize results to inform intervention and prevention efforts to mitigate the negative consequences associated with victimization and reduce the occurrence of aggressive behavior.

Limitations

Although this review summarizes a new and important area of research, there are a few limitations that should be noted. First, this review of high-status victims only focused on two status indicators: popularity and centrality. As outlined in the review, there are other measures of high social status such as peer acceptance which may be related to victimization experiences. Indeed, some evidence exists that high-status youth (in terms of peer acceptance) are also victimized (Graham and Juvonen 1998).¹ However, the decision to focus on popularity and centrality in this study was deliberate and driven by the theoretical framework. These status indicators are more in line with the concepts of power, dominance, and access to desirable resources that would make youth targets for aggressive behavior from those seeking to increase their own status. Thus, although the review was limited to two status indicators, it is reasonable to expect popular and central youth to be most at risk for victimization given their social power among peers.

Second, and relatedly, this review is limited in its ability to formulate conclusions about how profiles of high-status youth may be related to victimization. For instance, certain combinations of status indices and/or social resources may either exacerbate or buffer high-status youth from victimization. Although it is widely acknowledged that social status is

¹ Although this review focused on popular and central victims, there is evidence that even well-liked youth are victimized. Graham and Juvonen (1998) were some of the first to identify youth with high-status (high peer acceptance and low rejection) who indicated that they were victimized frequently via self-report. They were the first to examine the convergence and divergence in self-reports and peer-reports of victimization, identifying a group called paranooids who were high in self-report but low in peer-report. The term paranooid came from Perry et al. (1998) and to their credit, Graham and Juvonen questioned whether such a name was fair to these youth simply because they did not fit the classic stereotype of a victim and stressed that such a term should not be used to discredit their experiences. Indeed, current research refers to these youth as self-identified victims which exemplifies the shift in understanding of these victims and recognition of their experiences (see Scholte et al. 2013; Dawes et al. 2017). As far as the particulars of their study, using a sample of 6th and 7th graders, they assessed peer nominations of victimization (i.e., nominations for youth who are picked on/ pushed around and put down/ made fun of) and aggression (i.e., nominations for starts fights/ pushes others and puts others down). Peer acceptance was the number of liking nominations and peer rejection was the number of disliking nominations. From self-reports, they asked youth to indicate how true statements were for them, whether they were called bad names, pushed around, laughed at, or picked on. They found that self-identified victims had high peer acceptance and low peer rejection on par with nonvictims yet they suffered high levels of loneliness and social anxiety and lower feelings of self-worth compared to nonvictims. Indeed, their levels of social anxiety were similar to convergent victims (i.e., those with high self- and peer-reports of victimization). See also Peets and Hodges (2014) for another example of well-liked youth being targets of aggression.

multidimensional and that there is considerable heterogeneity among high-status youth (e.g., de Bruyn and Cillessen 2006), the majority of studies presented in this review did not consider whether certain social status profiles (i.e., being popular *and* well-liked) or the specific resources a high-status youth has (e.g., peer support) makes them more or less likely to be targeted by their peers for aggression. Exceptions to this include a few notable studies that assessed additional indicators of social status (e.g., Badaly et al. 2013; Closson et al. 2017; Closson and Hymel 2016; Closson and Watanabe 2018; Dyches and Mayeux 2012) with most studies including other measures of status as controls in their analyses linking popularity and victimization. For instance, Badaly et al. (2013) assessed both popularity and peer acceptance and examined whether the association between popularity and victimization held after accounting for youth's level of acceptance (it did, with variations by gender and form of victimization). Notably, Closson and Watanabe (2018) took this direction a step further by testing the interaction between popularity and other status indicators. Specifically, they tested whether preference from grademates or social support and likeability from clique members moderated links between popularity and victimization perpetrated by clique members. They found that preference protected popular youth from overt aggression but “operated as a vulnerability factor in the link between popularity and relational victimization” (Closson and Watanabe 2018, p. 344). Such findings indicate that the dynamics of victimization for high-status youth is complex. The consolidation of research evidence in this narrative review is an important first step to fill a gap in the literature on high-status youth's victimization experiences; yet, more work is needed to understand how social status profiles relate to victimization risk, particularly for youth at the top of the status hierarchy. Future research should differentiate the circumstances under which popularity and social network centrality, along with other indices and resources (e.g., being well-liked, having friends, peer group membership, peer support), may buffer or exacerbate high-status youth's risks for victimization. Research along these lines, perhaps using person-oriented approaches, may help unravel the complex relations between social status and risk for victimization.

Future Directions

Given the relatively small amount of empirical studies focusing on victims with high status, many questions remain for future research. First and foremost, the consequences of targeting high-status victims remain largely unknown. This line of inquiry can be further broken down into research which examines (1) the consequences of victimization for high-status youth's adjustment (e.g., psychological, risky behavior; Faris and Felmlee 2014), (2) the consequences

for high-status youth's engagement in subsequent retaliatory aggression, and (3) the consequences for perpetrators targeting high-status youth.

The first direction seeks to address the lack of evidence of the cost of victimization for high-status youth. Two of the studies included in this review incorporated an analysis of the outcomes of victimization for high-status targets. The first study (Faris and Felmlee 2014) found that high-status victims had larger increases in internalizing and externalizing symptoms and larger decreases in social network centrality compared to low-status victims. The second study (Malamut et al. 2018b) found that high-status youth who were victims of rumors actually increased in status over time. These results suggest that peer victimization experiences for high status youth can lead to a mixed bag of outcomes, some negative (e.g., internalizing), and some positive (e.g., increased status). More work is needed in this direction to fully elucidate how high-status youth fare after they are victimized, but this preliminary evidence suggests that it may be worth considering both positive and negative outcomes. For example, it is worth examining whether high-status victims engage in higher rates of risky behavior (e.g., drug and alcohol use) as a means to either reassert their high-status or cope with their victimization. Popular adolescents often have more access and opportunities (e.g., invitations to parties) to alcohol and substances (e.g., Schwartz and Gorman 2011) which have been shown to be related to popularity (Mayeux et al. 2008). Furthermore, youth appear to believe that substance use will help them be popular, as it is reflective of "adult" behavior (Moffitt 1993). Thus, some high-status adolescents may increase substance use as a means of reaffirming their status after being challenged. Given their greater access to drugs and alcohol, it is also worth examining whether high-status victims specifically engage in higher levels of drug use, which has been shown to be a coping mechanism used by victims (e.g., Sullivan et al. 2006; Sharp-Taylor et al. 2009). Empirical research is needed to test these questions.

The second research direction may be particularly important for efforts to reduce aggression and bullying in schools. Understanding how victimization at the top of the status hierarchy is related to perpetration as well is fundamental to prevention and intervention efforts. Those with high status are keenly aware of the desirable benefits of status, which explains why they tend to endorse higher levels of status goals (e.g., Dawes and Xie 2016). Thus, high-status adolescents who feel like their place in the social hierarchy is being threatened may want to retaliate in order to defend their status. In fact, research does suggest that there is a reciprocal association between relational victimization and relational aggression (e.g., Ferguson et al. 2016; Ostrov and Godleski 2013). Moreover, this association may be moderated by popularity, such that relational victimization predicts

relational aggression at higher levels of popularity (e.g., Ferguson et al. 2016). This is particularly concerning as aggression by high-status youth may influence peers' perceptions of the acceptability of aggressive behavior (e.g., Dijkstra and Gest 2015). In other words, when high-status victims are targeted with aggression, it may lead to a cyclical process resulting in elevated levels of aggression in the peer context.

A third important avenue for future research is examining the cost/benefit to perpetrators who aggress against high-status youth. If perpetrators are successful, the rewards may be sweet (e.g., gaining desirable resources); however, if they are unsuccessful, the cost can be steep (e.g., loss of affection, Veenstra et al. 2010; getting in trouble; Dyches and Mayeux 2012). Whether or not a perpetrator decides to risk targeting a high-status peer is likely to be influenced by several factors including: (1) the perpetrator's goals (does he or she want to be well-liked or popular?), (2) the perpetrator's resources (does he or she have peer support?), (3) the perpetrator's characteristics (e.g., gender), (4) the form of aggression the perpetrator intends to use such as physical or social aggression, (5) the relations between the perpetrator's characteristics and resources and the victim's characteristics and resources (e.g., cross-sex dyad, power imbalance), and (6) the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim within the broader peer network (are they in the same peer group?). For instance, if perpetrators who want to target high-status peers do not have the size or strength to be successful in a physical attack or the ability to use the social community to make a rumor effective (i.e., peer support), their attacks will likely be unsuccessful, especially if the target is popular and has peers willing to defend them and retaliate against perpetrators. Research in this direction, in conjunction with research on the consequences of victimization for high-status victims, can illuminate the dynamics involved when youth aggress against high-status peers and the costs involved for all parties.

Conclusion

The current review aimed to highlight growing evidence that high-status adolescents are at risk for victimization which is in contrast to traditional conceptions of victims as socially marginalized or low-status youth. Given the pervasiveness of victimization in schools and the significant psychological, emotional and social costs to victims, it is critical that research captures the nuances of victimization at both ends of the social status hierarchy. This is the first comprehensive review of the victimization experiences of highly popular and highly connected youth. Taken together, the extant research on high-status victims revealed several key findings: (1) high-status adolescents are indeed at risk for victimization, (2) high-status youth are more likely to be targeted with indirect, social,

or relational forms of aggression, and (3) qualitative methods (e.g., ethnographic studies, interview), dyadic nominations (either self- or peer-report), or peer nominations of specific forms of victimization may be particularly well-suited to identify high-status victims.

Understanding high-status youth's experiences of victimization is important for several reasons. First and foremost, there is limited empirical research on high-status victims. This means there is a subset of youth who are experiencing victimization that have largely been ignored in the literature. It is important to understand how these experiences impact high-status youth's overall functioning and well-being. Furthermore, high-status youth's experiences as a victim may be related to the prevalence of aggression or bullying in the peer group. Research suggests that high-status youth use aggression to maintain their status (Cillessen and Mayeux 2004; Rose et al. 2004; Stoltz et al. 2016) and this link may be heightened for youth who feel that their high-status is threatened as a result of being victimized. In order to protect and secure their status to maintain access to desirable resources, high-status victims may then use aggressive behavior (Volk et al. 2012). The link between aggression and social status is suggested to explain why bullying interventions are generally less effective in adolescence (e.g., Yeager et al. 2018). Even at ages when certain interventions have had success (e.g., in childhood), they are less successful at reducing the bullying behavior of popular youth than youth with average or low popularity (Garandeau et al. 2014). It is possible that the dearth of research on high-status adolescents' victimization experiences contributes to this troubling pattern.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors report no conflict of interests.

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