ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: THE RETROSPECTIVE IMPACT OF RELATIONAL VICTIMIZATION AND ATTACHMENT QUALITY ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL FUNCTIONING OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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PAGES: 174

Although growing evidence suggests that relational victimization is harmful to children as it occurs and shortly after, less is known about the potential long-term effects. The present study develops and validates a retrospective measure of childhood relational victimization experiences. A model is tested of the relations between childhood relational victimization experiences and early parental attachment quality on early adult psychological and social adjustment factors such as peer attachment quality, loneliness, and social anxiety, as mediated by rejection sensitivity. It has been proposed that early parental attachment quality, mediated by rejection sensitivity, may largely impact adult functioning (Downey, Khouri, & Feldman, 1997), but childhood relational victimization may also affect this psychosocial functioning. The Retrospective Relational Victimization Questionnaire (RRVQ) was developed and validated for this study to measure past relational victimization experiences. The primary study used structural equation modeling to assess a primary model of how both childhood parental attachment quality and relational victimization contribute to the experience of rejection sensitivity and in turn affects early adult functioning. A comparison is made with an alternative model which included only early parental attachment as a predictor of early adult adjustment. The RRVQ was found to be a reliable and valid measure of college students’ retrospectively recalled childhood relational
victimization experiences. Neither the primary nor the alternative model was found to be well-fitting; however, additional exploratory results suggest that both early parental attachment and relational victimization experiences are significantly associated with current rejection sensitivity, while early relational victimization is somewhat more associated with current adult peer attachment, loneliness, and social anxiety than is early parental attachment. Educational, clinical, and research implications are discussed.