Implicit Social Cognitive Processes Underlying Victim Self and Identity: Evidence With College-Aged Adults

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Abstract

Past research on victimization has relied predominantly on individuals' awareness of and willingness to self-report a victimization experience and its effect on self and identity processes. The present research adopts theoretical and methodological innovations in implicit social cognition research to provide a new perspective on how a violent victimization experience might influence identity processes outside of conscious awareness. Our main goal was to test whether individuals who have victimization experience implicitly associate the self with victims (implicit victim identity) and their stereotypes (implicit victim self-stereotyping), and the relation of these associations to explicit victim identity and self-stereotyping. Two pretests with undergraduate student participants (*N*s = 122 and 72) identified victim-related word stimuli for two Single Category Implicit Association Test (SC-IAT) measures of implicit victim identity and self-stereotyping. In Pretest Study A, participants read crime vignettes and listed words that described

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a victim, then in Pretest Study B, participants rated these words on victim relatedness and valence. The Main Study recruited undergraduate student participants (*N* = 101) who completed the SC-IATs, self-report measures of explicit victim identity and self-stereotyping, and victimization experiences. Three of our five hypotheses were supported. Individuals with past victimization experience exhibited strong explicit victim identity and self-stereotyping, but not implicit victim identity and self-stereotyping, relative to those with no victimization experience. Explicit and implicit victim identity and self-stereotyping were unrelated. Finally, among individuals with victimization experience, a strong implicit victim identity was associated with strong implicit victim self-stereotyping. This research has implications for understanding the processes underlying revictimization and for preventing further victimization.

Keywords
violence exposure, adult victims, revictimization

In 2015, approximately five million violent victimizations occurred in the United States, including rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, simple assault, or domestic violence (Truman & Morgan, 2016). Although victimization is an event imposed on an individual, it can have profound effects on health, psychological well-being, and even brain functioning and autonomic responses (Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1995; Brown et al., 2009; Greenfield, 2010; Heim et al., 2000; Macmillan, 2001). Moreover, it can affect the way individuals perceive themselves, such as when they make an internal attribution of the victimization experience, known as self-blame (Dignan, 2005; Janoff-Bulman, 1979). In light of these effects, still, approximately 17% (and estimates vary) of victims will experience repeat violent victimization within one year (Lauritsen & Rezey, 2013). Indeed, the best predictor of repeat victimization is a previous victimization (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007), but, surprisingly, it is not clear why this is so. Without a greater understanding of perpetrator behavior and decision making, and as studies using common predictors of victimization such as personal and contextual characteristics do not satisfactorily answer the question of revictimization, it is useful to explore other heretofore unmeasured factors that might contribute to this phenomenon.

We suggest that one set of factors may be self and identity processes that occur outside of one's conscious awareness, or implicitly, resulting from a previous victimization. Theories of implicit social cognition, social identity,

and self-categorization (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) inform how implicit self and identity processes might operate. Collectively, these theories suggest that individuals who have been victimized may not be fully aware of how such an experience affects their self and identity, or they may consciously reject an association to the category of victim (i.e., identity) and its associated stereotypes because of stigma and self-presentation concerns (also see Dignan, 2005).[1] The main goal of the present study is to investigate whether those who have had one or more violent victimization experiences exhibit greater implicit victim identity (IVI) and implicit victim self-stereotyping (IVSS) compared to those without a violent victimization experience, and to explore how these implicit processes compare with explicit victim identity (EVI) and explicit victim self-stereotyping (EVSS) as measured by self-report questionnaires.

Victimization and Self and Identity Processes

Self-knowledge does not develop or operate in a vacuum—it is shaped by several interacting social forces present in the environment (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012). As applied to victim-related self and identity processes, a violent victimization experience occurs when someone takes direct action toward another; in this way, it is an event that is imposed on an individual. Still, this experience may lead individuals to identify with a new group—victims; a victim identity, then, is also imposed. Victim identification, like any group identification, can occur quickly following a single experience and with minimal contact with other group members (see Baumeister, 1986; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Social identity and self-categorization theories can aid our understanding of the processes leading to one's identifying as a victim. Social identity theory suggests that one's social identities are formed by the groups to which he or she belongs (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979); in other words, social identities represent individuals as social group members (Hogg, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Moreover, while people categorically identify with a social group, they vary in their subjective identification with that group (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Phinney, 1992; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). That is, some group members consider their social identity as more central and important to their self-concept than other group members.

When Turner and colleagues (1987) extended social identity theory to self-categorization theory, they focused on the contexts that make social (vs. personal) identities salient. Self-categorization leads individuals to rapidly identify with their groups to gain a better understanding of the social world.

When individuals self-categorize with their social (group) identity, they mentally represent their self-concept in terms of their group and its attributes, even if these are negative and cultural stereotypes (also see Hogg & Turner, 1987). Put differently, individuals associate stereotypes of their group with the self, a process referred to as *self-stereotyping*. The present research contends that to examine the social identity and self-categorization processes related to the experience of victimization, an implicit social cognition framework is necessary to distinguish between explicit (conscious) and implicit (nonconscious) victim self and identity processes (also see Devos & Banaji, 2003).

Explicit Victim Identity (EVI) and Self-Stereotyping (EVSS)

When individuals are able to reflect on their past victimization experience(s) and can acknowledge (or not) a victim identity, this represents an *explicit* self and identity cognitive process (see Greenwald et al., 2002). We refer to the conscious association between the self and the group "victim" as *explicit victim identity* (EVI). Moreover, when individuals identify as a victim and consequently perceive themselves as possessing attributes typically associated with victims, we refer to this conscious association between the self and victim stereotypes as *explicit victim self-stereotyping* (EVSS). Following social identity and self-categorization theories described above, we expect that individuals with past violent victimization experience will be able to reflect on such an experience, and explicitly categorize themselves as victims and explicitly characterize themselves with attributes of victims when compared with individuals who have not been previously victimized (Hypothesis 1). Furthermore, because variation in subjective identification with a group should correspond to applying the attributes of that group to the self, individuals who strongly categorize themselves as victims (EVI) should strongly self-characterize with victim stereotypes (EVSS; Hypothesis 2). If individuals have *not* experienced a violent victimization, they should not exhibit evidence of this relation.

Some support for the above hypotheses comes from the limited extant victim identity research, which demonstrates that some individuals who have a victimization experience do consciously associate the self with victim, but only in some contexts (Dunn, 2001; Holstein & Miller, 1990; Leisenring, 2006). Leisenring's (2006) qualitative study on battered women in the United States demonstrated that approximately three-quarters of participants who experienced domestic violence acknowledged a victim identity (e.g., participant Tammy, "Well, a victim is someone who got abused and I'm definitely a victim with this situation"; p. 361). However, they primarily did so in contexts where they were seeking sympathy, or where they wanted to signal lack

of control over their situation. Similarly, Holstein and Miller (1990) demonstrated that individuals may identify as victims to distinguish themselves from a perpetrator or to suggest a lack of agency. Additional benefits may also arise for those who self-identify as victims, such as gaining concrete assistance from law enforcement, social and psychological services, and victim compensation funds. Taken together, this research identifies the conditions under which individuals explicitly identify as a victim.

By comparison, some individuals who experience victimization reject a victim identity because they do not wish to be perceived as responsible for the harm inflicted upon them or to be perceived as weak (Leisenring, 2006). Most women in Leisenring's (2006) study both claimed and rejected the identity throughout their interview, suggesting the complexity of a victim identity (also see Dunn, 2001). Importantly, Leisenring (2006) observed that most participants (those who both claimed and rejected a victim identity) recognized victim as a stigmatized identity.

An identity is considered stigmatizing if it taints or devalues an individual in a general or specific way or context (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Goffman, 1963). Indeed, individuals who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, or childhood abuse may conceal these identities because of the stigma associated with such experiences (Quinn et al., 2014). Furthermore, victims are associated with negative stereotypes such as powerless, helpless, and weak (see Holstein & Miller, 1990; Leisenring, 2006). Thus, the challenge with studying victim as an identity that is stigmatized and disempowering is that, like other stigmatized identities, some individuals with victimization experiences may explicitly distance themselves from the group, including how they want to perceive themselves and how they want others to perceive them.[2] To the extent that self-report methods (e.g., interviews, questionnaires) may reflect these self-presentation concerns, they limit the degree to which we are able to measure the effect of experience on the self-concept. It is important, therefore, to adopt methodology that can tap into identity processes outside of conscious awareness.

Implicit Victim Identity (IVI) and Self-Stereotyping (IVSS)

Notwithstanding the importance of past victimization research, it has relied almost exclusively on self-report methods, and therefore is limited by individuals' willingness to disclose or ability to reflect. Very little is known about how violent victimization experiences can influence identity processes implicitly. Implicit social cognition theory posits that past experiences automatically and nonconsciously affect beliefs and judgments outside of one's conscious awareness (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), including mental

associations among the self, group (e.g., victim), and group attributes (e.g., victim stereotypes; Greenwald et al., 2002). Extending implicit social cognition theory to victimization, when one experiences a victimization event, a mental association should be automatically formed between the self-concept and the group category "victim," and its associated attributes and stereotypes (Greenwald et al., 2002). In this work, we refer to this automatic association between self and victim as an *implicit victim identity* (IVI), and the automatic association made between self and victim stereotypes as *implicit victim self-stereotyping* (IVSS). We expect that those with past violent victimization experience will exhibit stronger IVI and IVSS when compared to those without such experience (Hypothesis 3). Furthermore, because implicitly identifying with a group should correspond with implicitly associating with the group's stereotypes (Greenwald et al., 2002), individuals who strongly implicitly categorize themselves as victims (IVI) should strongly implicitly characterize with victim stereotypes (IVSS; Hypothesis 4).

Some support for our hypotheses in the area of victimization, albeit childhood bullying, comes from Rosen, Milich, and Harris (2007) who employed an Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) to measure how fast child participants responded to self words when simultaneously paired with victim words. They found that children who reported more frequent victimization and who expressed more distress in a victimization narrative exhibited stronger implicit associations between self and victim compared with children who reported less frequent victimization and who did not display distress. To our knowledge, this is the only study so far that has measured implicit associations between the self and victim. While it supports the general notion of the impact of a victimization experience on implicit self-victim associations, it did not focus on the relation of implicit identity to implicit self-stereotyping using a broader measure of multiple violent victimization events with an adult sample.

Also, Rosen et al. (2007) did not examine the relation between implicit and explicit self and identity processes. As it relates to socially sensitive topics such as stigma, the correlation between measures of implicit and explicit social cognition is often weak or nonexistent (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009). This is largely the case because respondents, upon reflection, engage self-presentation motives on measures of explicit social cognition, but they are less likely or unable to engage such motivated behavior on measures of implicit social cognition (Nosek, Hawkins, & Frazier, 2011). Given that victimization can be stigmatizing and is a socially sensitive topic, we expected no or a minimal relation between explicit and implicit victim identity and self-stereotyping, regardless of past victimization experience (Hypothesis 5).

Overview of the Research

The present research extends the criminological and psychological research on victims that almost exclusively focuses on explicit self and identity processes by exploring the implicit self and identity processes of individuals who have experienced a violent victimization. We adopt a Single Category Implicit Association Test (SC-IAT; Karpinski & Steinman, 2006) to measure IVI and IVSS. Conceptually similar to the original IAT (Greenwald et al., 1998), the SC-IAT measures individual differences in strength of evaluative associations with a single attitude object. With respect to socially sensitive topics (such as victimization), IATs are more resistant to self-presentation motives, tend to assess psychological constructs different from (but somewhat related to) those measured with self-reports, and are valid measures of implicit self and identity processes (Greenwald et al., 2009). Most relevant to the present research, a particular strength of the IAT is its assessment of associations between the self and group labels, and group stereotypes (Greenwald et al., 2002).

Currently, no known IATs measure IVI or IVSS among adult victims of violence. To develop measures to assess these constructs and their interrelation, we pretested stimuli for inclusion in the IATs. Researchers tend to assume content validity if the IAT stimuli have face validity. However, Bluemke and Friese (2006) suggest that testing the content validity of stimuli is an important precursor to establishing the predictive validity of an IAT. Therefore, Pretest Studies A and B adopted a rigorous pretest of stimuli related to individuals' general cognition about victims (including attributes and characteristics), which were then included in the SC-IAT measures of IVI and IVSS. Then, the Main Study administered these SC-IATs as well as self-report measures of EVI and EVSS among individuals with a past violent victimization experience (vs. no such experience).

Pretest Studies A and B

Pretest Study A was designed to elicit both nouns and adjectives that described victims in hypothetical vignettes. In Pretest Study B, a subset of these elicited nouns and adjectives were evaluated on victim relatedness and valence. A final set of reliable words were selected and included in the SC-IAT measures of IVI and IVSS used in the Main Study.

Method

Participants. In Pretest Study A, 122 undergraduate students from criminal justice and psychology courses at an urban university participated for extra

course credit. Three participants' responses were dropped because they did not adhere to instructions. The final sample size was $N = 119$ (70 female, 49 male; $M_{age} = 19.2$ years, $SD = 2.12$, age range = 18-29). Thirty-six percent of participants identified as Hispanic, 26% were African American, 16% were White, 13% were Asian, 4% were multiracial, and 5% did not select any of the race/ethnicity options.

In Pretest Study B, 72 undergraduate students from a psychology course at an urban university participated for extra course credit (three did not report demographic information; 54 female, 15 male; $M_{age} = 23.3$ years, $SD = 7.12$, age range = 18-57). Thirty percent of participants identified as Hispanic, 24% were African American, 21% were Asian, 14% were White, and 10% were multiracial.

Measures and procedure. In both pretests, participants completed a pencil-and-paper questionnaire during the first or last 15 minutes of their class time. In Pretest Study A, the questionnaire asked participants to read one of five randomly assigned vignettes in which a victimization event was described. Vignettes included short descriptions of five fictitious *violent* victimization events: robbery, assault, gang violence, rape, and domestic violence (see Appendix A). After reading the vignette, participants were asked to write down five words to describe the victim, labeled "person A," "gang A," or "spouse A."

The vignettes were created specifically for this study but modeled after past research that has employed fictitious vignettes (Alexander & Becker, 1978). The vignettes included events that people may be regularly exposed to via the media (e.g., TV shows) and public information (e.g., crime reports), and that portrayed victims whose gender, race/ethnicity, and age were neutral. For example, an original vignette from Alexander and Becker (1978) read,

> . . . a woman departed a downtown department store and proceeded toward her car which was parked on a side street. A man who was walking in the same direction began to follow her and less than one block from her car, stopped her. The woman was (raped/beaten). (p. 100)

By comparison, our vignette read, "Person A was walking home from the local convenience store and stopped to tie his/her shoes. During this time person B approached person A and (kicked/put a gun up to) person A['s head]."

In Pretest Study B, the questionnaire asked participants to rate how well the chosen words from Pretest Study A (selection process described under Results and Discussion) described a *crime victim* on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 to 6 (0 = *definitely does NOT describe a victim of crime*; 3 = *somewhat describes a victim of crime*; 6 = *definitely describes a victim of crime*). Also,

participants rated the same words on a valence 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from −3 to 3 (−3 = *very negative*; 0 = *neutral*; 3 = *very positive*). The order of words and scales was counterbalanced between participants.

In both pretests, participants then completed a brief demographics and past victimization experience questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

Pretest Study A. Participants provided a total of 585 words and phrases. Repeated words, plural versions of words, and phrases (e.g., subject of crime, fearful of death) were combined, resulting in a total of 248 words and phrases. Of these, we selected the top 45 most frequently elicited words to be included in Pretest Study B. However, of the 45 words, only eight were nouns. Because we were interested in both nouns and adjectives to develop two SC-IATs (to measure IVI and IVSS, respectively), the first two authors identified and agreed upon an additional five nouns found on Thesaurus.com (prey, casualty, scapegoat, survivor, pushover), for a total of 50 words to be evaluated in Pretest Study B (see Appendix B). Selection of words from a thesaurus is a method adopted when identifying IAT word stimuli (e.g., Knutson, Mah, Manly, & Grafman, 2007; Rosen et al., 2007).

Pretest Study B. Before conducting the analyses reported next, we separated the 50 words into the two categories nouns and adjectives: words that could be considered both nouns and adjectives were considered in both categories.

Nouns. The goal was to select nouns related to victim and as similar as possible to each other on valence to be included in the IVI SC-IAT. One-sample *t*-tests were utilized to determine which of the nouns were rated significantly higher than the midpoint (3 = *somewhat describes a victim of crime*) on the Victim Relatedness scale. Then, the nouns that met this criterion were compared with each other on valence using paired sample *t*-tests. These tests yielded a total of three nouns (*victim, prey, survivor*); however, only two of these nouns (*victim* and *prey*) were statistically similar to each other on valence but different (more negative) than the third noun (*survivor*; see Tables 1 and 2). Nosek, Greenwald, and Banaji (2005) recommended that the minimum number of stimuli in an IAT is two, and that four is the "ideal" number of stimuli per category. Furthermore, they note that IAT effect sizes increase (albeit slightly) when the number of stimuli is larger than two. Therefore, we chose to include the third noun (*survivor*) because its mean score on victim relatedness was the third highest among the remainder of the nouns (see Table 1).

Table 1. Mean Ratings of SC-IAT Victim Stimuli on Victim Relatedness and Valence.

IAT Stimuli	Victim Relatedness		Valence	
	M	SD	M	SD
Nouns				
Victim	5.46	1.04	−1.96	1.31
Prey	4.22	1.97	−2.09	1.33
Survivor	4.13	1.84	2.27	1.26
Adjectives				
Victimized	5.17	1.20	−2.10	1.39
Traumatized	5.01	1.55	−2.23	1.19
Assaulted	5.15	1.33	−2.26	1.31
Violated	5.03	1.42	−2.21	1.40
Hurt	4.65	1.50	−2.00	1.23

Note. The Victim Relatedness scale ranged from 0 to 6, 6 being most characteristic of a crime victim. The Valence scale ranged from −3 to 3, −3 being negative and 3 being positive. SC-IAT = Single Category Implicit Association Test.

Table 2. The *t*-Test Results of Valence Ratings Between SC-IAT Victim Stimuli.

Word	1	2	3	4	5
Nouns					
1. Victim	—				
2. Prey	0.930 (67)	—			
3. Survivor	17.6*** (68)	17.5*** (66)	—		
Adjectives					
1. Victimized	—				
2. Traumatized	1.07 (70)	—			
3. Assaulted	1.37 (69)	0.41 (69)	—		
4. Violated	1.21 (71)	−0.19 (70)	−0.40 (69)	—	
5. Hurt	−0.61 (70)	−1.88† (69)	−1.77† (68)	−1.23 (70)	—

Note. Degrees of freedom presented in parentheses below *t* value. SC-IAT = Single Category Implicit Association Test.
†*p* < .10. ***p* < .001 (two-tailed).

Adjectives. Adopting the same approach as above, we found that 23 adjectives were rated significantly higher than the midpoint on victim relatedness. To narrow down the number of adjectives, we then set the test value at 4 (a value between "Somewhat describes a victim of crime" and "Definitely describes a victim of crime"). The adjectives that met this criterion were compared with each other on valence using paired sample *t*-tests, yielding a total of five adjectives that were strongly related to victim and similarly negative (*hurt, traumatized, assaulted, victimized, violated*; see Table 2).

Main Study

The main study recruited a sample of adult college students who either experienced a violent victimization (e.g., physical assault, robbery, domestic violence, sexual assault/rape) or not. This study administered the two newly developed SC-IAT measures of IVI and IVSS, as well as their corresponding self-report measures of EVI and EVSS. This allowed us to examine differences in, and the relation among, implicit and explicit victim identity and self-stereotyping as a function of victimization experience.

As described in the Introduction, five hypotheses were tested:

Hypothesis 1: Individuals with past violent victimization experience will exhibit stronger EVI and EVSS compared with individuals without past violent victimization experience.
Hypothesis 2: Only among individuals who have experienced a past violent victimization, a strong EVI will be associated with strong EVSS.
Hypothesis 3: Individuals with past violent victimization experience will exhibit stronger IVI and IVSS compared with individuals without past violent victimization experience.
Hypothesis 4: Only among individuals who have experienced a past violent victimization, a strong IVI will be associated with strong IVSS.
Hypothesis 5: Implicit and explicit victim identity and victim self-stereotyping will be weakly or not related, regardless of past violent victimization experience.

Method

Participants. One hundred six students from undergraduate criminal justice and psychology courses at an urban university participated for extra course credit.[3] Five participants were dropped from analysis: data from three participants were outliers on one SC-IAT measure, one participant committed too many errors on one SC-IAT, and one participant did not

follow the study's procedure. The final $N = 101$ (68 female, 32 male, one other; $M_{age} = 20.4$ years, $SD = 5.12$, age range = 18-55). Nineteen percent of participants identified as Hispanic, 25% were Black, 22% were Asian or Pacific Islander, 19% were White, 7% were multiracial, and 9% did not select any of the race/ethnicity options. Thirty-seven percent of participants reported prior violent victimization experience (see below for measure). This rate is within the range from a 9.5% lifetime sexual assault rate to a 54.5% lifetime physical assault rate reported in previous research *with a national sample of youth younger than 18 years* (emphasis added; Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2013).

Measures

IVI. IVI was measured using a SC-IAT (Karpinski & Steinman, 2006), which uses reaction time to measure the strength of the mental association between the self and victims. Words that represented the self (*I, me, my, mine, myself*); others (*they, them, their, theirs, other*); and victims (*victim, prey, survivor*; see Pretest Study B above) randomly appeared one after the other, centered in the computer screen. Category labels were simultaneously placed at the top left and top right of the screen. For half of the task, participants were instructed to press the "A" key to classify "self" and "victim" words, and the "K" key to classify "other" words. For the other half, participants were instructed to press the "A" key to classify "other" and "victim" words, and the "K" key to classify "self" words. The order of tasks was counterbalanced within participants. For each task, participants first read a set of instructions then completed 17 practice trials, followed by 51 critical trials. For each trial, the target words remained on the screen until participants pressed a key. If the participant pressed the correct key, a new target word appeared. If the participant pressed the wrong key, the word "ERROR" appeared in red in place of the centered target word until the participant appropriately categorized the target word.

Following Karpinski and Steinman's (2006) scoring algorithm, only critical SC-IAT blocks were scored. A SC-IAT score is the difference in standardized reaction times between the self + victim trials and other + victim trials. A relatively high SC-IAT score indicates faster reaction times when self word stimuli are paired with victim word stimuli than when other word stimuli are paired with victim word stimuli, or a relatively strong IVI.

IVSS. The SC-IAT to measure IVSS followed the same measurement and scoring procedure of the IVI SC-IAT above, except that the word stimuli for the category victim were *traumatized, victimized, violated, assaulted*, and *hurt* (see Pretest Study B above).

EVI and EVSS. The measures of EVI and EVSS were created for this study following past research on implicit and explicit criminal identities (see Rivera & Veysey, 2014; Veysey & Rivera, 2017). Participants were asked to self-report the extent to which they associated themselves with the eight victim identity and self-stereotyping words in the SC-IATs described above on a 7-point scale ranging from 0 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 6 (*extremely characteristic of me*). Also, participants were asked to rate themselves on three words (*pushover, stupid, passive*) from Pretest Study B that were unrelated to a victim. All words were randomly presented. As expected, ratings on the words unrelated to victim did not vary as a function of victimization experience, $F(1, 99) = 1.10$, $p = .297$, so they are no longer discussed.

Violent Victimization Experience. We administered modified questions from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008), a widely used self-report measure that assesses past violent victimization (Peytchev, Caspar, Neely, & Moore, 2012).[4] The NCVS inquires about multiple victimization events, including where they took place, and in some cases the respondent's relationship to the offender. We were primarily interested in participants' responses to the questions that captured the types of violent victimization described in the introduction. Specifically, participants were asked if they were ever attacked or threatened: (a) with any weapon (e.g., a gun or a knife); (b) by something thrown (e.g., a rock or a bottle); (c) with anything like a baseball bat, frying pan, or scissors; (d) by physical force, including any grabbing, punching, or choking; (e) by rape, attempted rape, or other type of sexual attack; or (f) none of the above. From this question, we created a dichotomous violent victimization experience variable: participants who selected one or more of responses (a)-(e) versus those who selected response (f).[5]

Procedure. A research assistant informed participants that the study's purpose was to examine "people's beliefs about their identity and experiences." All participants completed the study on a computer. They were first presented with the SC-IAT measures of IVI and IVSS (counterbalanced between participants), followed by the measure of EVI and EVSS, and then the questionnaires of violent victimization experience and general demographics (e.g., gender, age, race, income). Finally, all participants were debriefed, which included an explanation of the study's purpose (". . . a study that is examining the extent to which a person's past experiences with victimization influences the development of an identity with a crime victim."), a reminder that their information was being kept confidential, the researchers' contact information, and a phone number for the on-campus counseling center. Participants also had the opportunity to withdraw from the study and have their recorded data deleted at the time of debriefing.

Table 3. Zero-Order Correlations Among Measures of Explicit and Implicit Victim Identity and Self-Stereotyping (*N* = 101).

Measure	1	2	3	4
1. EVI	—	.729***	.105	−.027
2. EVSS	.768***	—	.297†	.239
3. IVI	.047	.140	—	.411*
4. IVSS	.013	.165†	.206*	—
Overall *M*	1.65	1.06	−0.26	−0.26
SD	1.14	1.17	0.27	0.24

Note. Numbers above the diagonals represent correlations among those with victimization experience only. EVI = explicit victim identity; EVSS = explicit victim self-stereotyping; IVI = implicit victim identity; IVSS = implicit victim self-stereotyping.
†*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ****p* < .001.

Results and Discussion

Table 3 lists all descriptives and zero-order correlations of all measurements as a function of victimization experience.

To test Hypothesis 1, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if participants with a victimization experience differed in EVI and EVSS. In support of Hypothesis 1, those with victimization experience (M_{EVSS} = 1.42, *SD* = 1.31) were significantly more likely to characterize themselves with stereotypes about victims compared to those without victimization experience (M_{EVSS} = .86, *SD* = 1.04), $F(1, 99)$ = 5.57, *p* = .02. Our predicted pattern emerged on EVI as well—those with victimization experience (M_{EVI} = 1.91, *SD* = 1.17) were more likely to characterize themselves with victims in general compared to those without victimization experience (M_{EVI} = 1.49, *SD* = 1.09), but this difference was marginally significant, $F(1, 99)$ = 3.20, *p* = .077.

To test Hypothesis 2, a nested regression analysis was performed to examine violent victimization experience as a moderator of the relation between EVI and EVSS. The dichotomous victimization experience variable was coded 1 for those with victimization experience and 0 for those without victimization experience. Based on the criminological literature, those at highest risk of experiencing violent victimization (excluding rape and sexual assault) are young, African American, male, and/or from economically disadvantaged neighborhoods (Sampson & Lauritsen, 1994). Therefore, we included several demographic covariates in the first step of the regression model (gender, age, race/ethnicity, income, employment status). Then, EVSS scores were regressed on the mean-centered EVI scores

Table 4. Nested Regression Model for IVI Predicting IVSS as a Function of Victimization Experience (*N* = 101).

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	β	B	β
Gender (1 male, 0 female/other)	.112	.146	.154
Age	.025	.076	.052
Race/ethnicity (White, non-Hispanic excluded)			
Asian/Pacific Islander (1 yes, 0 no)	.232†	.289*	.279
African American/Black (1 yes, 0 no)	.025	.065	.047
Hispanic/Latino(a) (1 yes, 0 no)	.260†	.277*	.269*
Multiracial (1 yes, 0 no)	.115	−.05	−.027
Other (1 yes, 0 no)	.122	.025	.045
Employment status (unemployed excluded)			
Employed 20 hr or less (1 yes, 0 no)	.117	.100	.112
Employed 21-30 hr (1 yes, 0 no)	.112	−.047	.108
Employed 31-40 hr (1 yes, 0 no)	.110	.017	.106
Income (1 US$0-US$10,000, 11 US$100,001 or more)	.112	.001	.108
Victimization experience (1 victim, 0 nonvictim)		−.121	.109
IVI		.265*	−.125
Victimization experience × IVI			.247†

Note. IVI = implicit victim identity; IVSS = implicit victim self-stereotyping.
†*p* = .10. **p* < .05.

and dichotomized violent victimization experience in the second step, and their interaction in the third step. This model was not significant, *p* = .941; Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

To test Hypothesis 3, we conducted the same ANOVAs to test Hypothesis 1, but we replaced EVI with IVI, and EVSS with IVSS. Hypothesis 3 was not supported—IVI and IVSS did not differ as a function of victimization experience, IVI: $F(1, 99) = .37$, $p = .545$; IVSS: $F(1, 99) = 1.26$, $p = .264$.

To test Hypothesis 4, we conducted the same nested regression analyses to test Hypothesis 2, but we replaced EVI with IVI, and EVSS with IVSS. Regression analysis yielded a significant Victimization Experience × IVI interaction, $\Delta F(1, 86) = 3.81$, $p = .05$, $R^2 = .21$. Table 4 summarizes regression results by model. Simple slopes analyses were employed to unpack interactions by calculating the relations (betas) among IVI and IVSS among those with and without victimization experience (Aiken & West, 1991). Among people with victimization experience, strong IVIs were associated

with strong IVSS, $\beta = .43$, $p = .01$. By comparison, among people without victimization experience, IVI did not significantly explain variation in IVSS, $\beta = .13$, $p = .36$. Altogether, and in support of Hypothesis 4, these data suggest that implicit victim-based self and identity processes are associated among those with victimization experience but *not* among those without victimization experience.[6]

Finally, to test Hypothesis 5, zero-order correlations were conducted to determine if there was a relation between measures of explicit and implicit victim identity and self-stereotyping as a function of victimization experience (see Table 3). As predicted, EVI and EVSS were not significantly correlated with IVI and IVSS.[7]

General Discussion

The extant research on violent victimization almost exclusively focuses on investigating the identity processes consciously represented in the memories of individuals with a victimization experience (but see Rosen et al., 2007). We adopted an implicit social cognition theoretical framework to examine IVI and IVSS processes among adult students from an urban university. We first conducted pretesting of victim-related words, which provides researchers with victim attributes and characteristics for use in future research. Most importantly, pretesting contributed to establishing valid SC-IAT measures of IVI and IVSS. Overall, three of the five hypotheses were supported. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, participants who reported a past victimization were more likely to explicitly associate themselves with the group victims (EVI) and victim stereotypes (EVSS) compared to those who did not report a past victimization. However, Hypothesis 2 was not supported—victimization experience did not moderate the EVI and EVSS relation. Hypothesis 3 was also not supported—participants who reported a past victimization were no more likely to implicitly associate themselves with the group victims (IVI) and victim stereotypes (IVSS) compared to those who did not report a past victimization. However, Hypothesis 4 was supported—only among those with victimization experience, strong IVIs were associated with strong IVSS. Finally, and consistent with Hypothesis 5, no relation emerged between explicit and implicit victim identity and self-stereotyping.

Some studies (e.g., Leisenring, 2006) suggest that individuals may be motivated to explicitly reject a victim identity because of stigma, but our research is consistent with social identity and self-categorization theories—participants who experienced a violent victimization exhibited evidence of an EVI and EVSS as well as of the predicted relation between IVI and IVSS, when compared to participants who did not experience a violent victimization. However,

and interestingly, we found that individuals with a past violent victimization experience did not distinctly implicitly identify as a victim or with victim stereotypes. We suspect that one potential explanation for this finding is that victim may be a contextually salient identity. Individuals have multiple social identities, one or more of which can be made salient and activated (at least temporarily) in a situation (Oakes, 1987). That is, the situation may dictate a particular membership in a group because identifying with a group becomes functional in how to perceive and behave in a particular situation. For example, a victim identity may become salient when an individual is confronted by a perpetrator or is in a context that the person believes, or has experienced, as dangerous. Here, victim identity activation may motivate an individual to engage in forms of self-protection (e.g., avoidance), and/or seek support or protection from others (e.g., police).

Past victimization experience is the best predictor of revictimization (Lauritsen & Quinet, 1995), but little is known about the mechanisms underlying this relation. Identities, which can develop from social experiences, can influence and maintain future identity-based behaviors and mental health outcomes (Swann & Bosson, 2010). Greenwald and colleagues (2009) show that both measures of implicit (IAT) and explicit (self-report surveys) cognition about socially sensitive topics have good predictive validity, but for different behavioral outcomes. Explicit cognition tends to predict more thoughtful, controlled behaviors (e.g., Friese, Hofmann, & Wänke, 2008), while implicit cognition tends to predict more subtle, automatic/nonconscious behaviors (for a review, see Payne & Gawronski, 2010). Therefore, it is possible that implicit and explicit victim identities both contribute to risk of revictimization in unique ways, though neither can provide a complete picture of revictimization risk alone. And, more importantly, we have yet to understand how implicit and explicit victim identity and self-stereotyping may shape behavioral actions.

To be clear, we are not suggesting that victims are responsible for their victimization. Victimization occurs in a particular context, and is an event in which someone else acts against the person. In the criminal justice literature, routine activities theory suggests that victimization occurs in contexts where a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the lack of a capable guardian (including self-guardianship) intersect in time and place (Cohen & Felson, 1979). In such contexts, all targets should have an equally likely chance of victimization. However, it is possible that those with strong EVI and/or IVI are at a higher risk of victimization in these contexts. We believe that such self and identity processes may explain differences in risk, but, again, there is much yet to be understood about how these processes affect the target, guardianship, or offender target selection (i.e., motivated offender).

Taking the above into consideration, it is important that people who have a victimization experience understand how their experiences affect their cognitions. Much like trauma survivors who learn about what triggers a trauma reaction and can therefore anticipate and reduce physiological responses, knowing that implicit cognitions have been activated may be sufficient to reduce or eliminate the impact. For example, Bargh, Chen, and Burrows (1996) showed that priming elderly stereotypes among a college-age sample resulted in slower walking speed. However, Djikic, Langer, and Stapleton (2008) found that increasing mindfulness of age stereotypes resulted in faster walking pace, suggesting that awareness can remove the link between implicit identity (or stereotyping) and behavior.

Limitations

To our knowledge, the present research is the first to develop measures of IVI and IVSS for adults, and provide initial evidence for the unique relation between IVI and IVSS among adults who have experienced one or multiple violent victimizations. However, some questions remain regarding the implicit self and identity processes in those who have experienced violent victimization. First, the Main Study adopted a cross-sectional design that used the NCVS measure, a well-known self-report questionnaire that assesses violent victimization experiences, but it did not distinguish between an initial victimization and revictimization. Identifying the temporal order between victimization experiences and an IVI and IVSS is important to understanding the cause(s) of revictimization and to developing suitable prevention efforts. To address this limitation, rigorous longitudinal research is necessary to measure IVI and IVSS immediately following an initial victimization experience, and then to follow participants over time to examine the IVI- and IVSS-consistent behaviors that may make a victim vulnerable to revictimization.

Another limitation of our research is that we do not examine when and how implicit victim self and identity processes interact with other identity-based processes to affect important outcomes. Much research currently investigates single identities (e.g., ethnic-racial or gender), but the social world is increasingly diverse, and individuals have to navigate multiple identities at any given time. As it relates to the present research, Sachs, Rivera, Veysey, and Henein (2017) examined the interaction between IVI and gender identity on mental health. They found that men with a victimization experience and who displayed strong IVSS reported greater state anxiety and depression, presumably because the intersection of men's gender and victim identities causes a role conflict (men are not supposed to be

victims), which may be a source of poor mental health. Overall, these data suggest a promising line of research on understanding the conditions under which an IVI interacts with one or more other identities to shape important consequences.

Conclusion

Violent victimization, and its associated processes and consequences, are complex. Examining violent victimization through the lens of an implicit social cognition framework can aid in identifying how and why victimization occurs and recurs outside of victims' conscious awareness. The present research suggests that past violent victimization experiences can influence individuals' self and identity processes. Understanding these processes may support future prevention and intervention efforts to curb the prevalence of violent victimization and revictimization that, in turn, empowers victims with a sense of agency and promotes their overall well-being.

Appendix A

Pretest Study A Vignettes

Vignette A. **Person A** was walking home from the local convenience store and stopped to tie his or her shoes. During this time, Person B approached **Person A** and put a gun up to **Person A's** head. Person B demanded that **Person A** hand over money. **Person A** gave Person B his or her wallet, and Person B fled.

Vignette B. **Person A** was walking home from the local convenience store and stopped to tie his or her shoes. During this time, Person B approached **Person A** and kicked **Person A** in the stomach. Person B continued to kick and punch **Person A** for approximately 2 minutes before fleeing.

Vignette C. **Gang A** was hanging out near the local convenience store. While they were talking, Gang B drove past **Gang A** and fired shots at **Gang A** members.

Vignette D. **Person A** was walking home from the local convenience store and stopped to tie his or her shoes. During this time, Person B approached **Person A** and put a gun up to **Person A's** head. Person B demanded that **Person A** step into the alley. **Person A** complied and, once in the alley, Person B raped **Person A**. Person B fled immediately after the rape.

Vignette E. **Spouse A** was lying in bed when Spouse B walked out of the shower and began yelling at **Spouse A** about a trivial matter. Both spouses began yelling, and during this time Spouse B slapped **Spouse A** in the face.

Appendix B

Fifty Top Words Describing Victim.

1.	Loiterer
2.	Unfortunate
3.	Confused
4.	Scapegoat
5.	Passive
6.	Upset
7.	Nervous
8.	Stupid
9.	Submissive
10.	Injured
11.	Smart
12.	Casualty
13.	Traumatized
14.	Brave
15.	Assaulted
16.	Female
17.	Alone
18.	Sad
19.	Vulnerable
20.	Rival
21.	Afraid
22.	Naive
23.	Cooperative
24.	Vengeful
25.	Victimized
26.	Innocent
27.	Compliant
28.	Abused
29.	Prey
30.	Scarred
31.	Unaware
32.	Helpless
33.	Victim

Appendix B (continued)

34. Average
35. Mad
36. Weak
37. Survivor
38. Calm
39. Shocked
40. Hurt
41. Dead
42. Tired
43. Pushover
44. Angry
45. Defenseless
46. Young
47. Quiet
48. Scared
49. Unlucky
50. Violated

Authors' Note

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Notes

1. Self-presentation refers to how individuals present themselves to others in a way to influence how they view them (Leary, 1996).

2. Those who are reluctant to identify as victims may also be reluctant to report a victimization to the police. For example, victims (particularly women) of sexual and physical assault, rape, and domestic violence may not report their victimization to police because of fear of being blamed for the victimization (Ahrens, 2006), fear of retaliation (Felson, Messner, Hoskin, & Deane, 2002), feeling ashamed (Weiss, 2010), or they did not feel the act was serious (Thompson, Sitterle, Clay, & Kingree, 2007; Zinzow & Thompson, 2011).

3. The participants for the study were recruited via Rutgers University Newark Psychology Subject Pool, which has been a common practice in psychology research for decades (Kulich, Seldon, & Richardson, 1978) and has been practiced by researchers employing the Implicit Association Test (IAT) in their studies (e.g., Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). In addition, because of our access to criminal justice students, the pretests and main study were expanded to include participants from this population, when possible.

4. The exact text of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) Basic Screen Questionnaire (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008) reads,

(Other than the incidents already mentioned,) has anyone attacked or threatened you in any of these ways—(Exclude telephone threats)—(a) With any weapon, for instance a gun or knife—(b) With anything like a baseball bat, frying pan, scissors, or stick—(c) By something thrown, such as a rock or bottle—(d) Include any grabbing, punching, or choking, (e) Any rape, attempted rape, or other type of sexual attack—(f) Any face to face threats—OR (g) Any attack or threat or use of force at all? Please mention even if you are not certain it was a crime.

We modified the question to remove the text in the parentheses, and also removed letters (f) and (g), as they did not represent violent victimization. We instead replaced letter (f) with "None of the above."

5. Although our particular theoretical interest (see the Introduction) was based on the distinction between having any past violent victimization experience versus none, we also examined the violent victimization measure as a continuous variable, which was calculated as the sum of multiple violent victimizations. We entered this variable into similar analyses reported in the "Results" section and found the patterns to be similar.

6. We conducted additional analyses using gender as a factor. For the ANOVAs, there were no significant gender differences among any of the main measures as a function of victimization for male participants, $.00 < Fs(1, 30) < 1.45$, $.239 < ps < .994$, and female participants, $.65 < Fs(1, 67) < .76$, $.390 < ps < .419$, with two exceptions. There was a marginally significant difference on explicit victim identity (EVI), $F(1, 67) = 3.57$, $p = .063$, and a statistically significant difference on explicit victim self-stereotyping (EVSS), $F(1, 67) = 8.09$, $p = .006$, between *females* with ($M_{EVI} = 3.14$, $SD_{EVI} = 1.33$; $M_{EVSS} = 2.86$, $SD_{EVSS} = 1.44$) and without ($M_{EVI} = 2.54$, $SD_{EVI} = 1.12$; $M_{EVSS} = 1.94$, $SD_{EVSS} = 1.10$) past violent victimization experience. Neither of the nested regression models were significant

among any of the main measures for male participants, .614 < *p*s < .747 and female participants, .579 < *p*s < .819. Finally, we examined the moderating effect of gender on the relation between EVI and EVSS, and implicit victim identity (IVI) and implicit victim self-stereotyping (IVSS). The EVI and EVSS model was not statistically significant, *p* = .105; the IVI and IVSS model was marginally significant, *p* = .060.

7. We used G*Power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) to conduct post hoc power analyses. For the tests of Hypotheses 2 and 4, a linear multiple regression, fixed model, R^2 increase with a sample size of 101, three tested predictors, eight total predictors (including five covariates), effect size of f^2 set at .266, and alpha at .05, G*Power yielded power >.99. For the tests of Hypotheses 1 and 3, an ANOVA, fixed effects, omnibus, one-way with a sample size of 101, two groups, effect size set at .269, and alpha at .05, G*Power yielded power > .76.

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