Male and Female Victims of Male Bullies: Social Status Differences by Gender and Informant Source

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Abstract We examine two sources of variation in victims' social adjustment: (a) the informant who identifies a child as victim (i.e., peer, self, or both), and (b) victim gender. Peer and self nominations were provided by 508 fourth and fifth graders from the Midwest U.S. Girls were more likely than boys to be victimized, and victims were evenly distributed among informant source. Self-nominated female victims had lower social status and were involved in more antipathies than their peer-nominated counterparts. Among boys, self-and-peer reported victims had the lowest social status. Having friends was associated with positive social adjustment. Implications are discussed for at-risk victim subgroups: girls whose self-reports of victimization are not validated by others, and boys whose victimization is publicly acknowledged.

Keywords Victimization · Social status · Gender differences · Informant source

Introduction

The common portrait of male victims of male bullies brings to mind the image of a powerful bully harassing a

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defenseless, marginalized boy (Olweus 1978). But what about when girls are harassed by boys? The goal of the present study is to differentiate victims of male bullying according to gender, and also according to who—the victim himself or herself versus classmates—is reporting peer harassment. Our question is whether girls and boys who are harassed by male bullies have distinct phenomenologies of peer harassment. The hypothesis that guides this study is that these distinctions, that can be observed in children's social status and social interactions, are mediated by a *social* (i.e., peer) or *private* (i.e., self) definition of victimization, and are determined by particular trade-offs that girls and boys may experience within the gendered peer culture of American elementary schools (Adler and Adler 1998; Rose and Rudolph 2006). Using both peer and self reports of victimization, individual profiles of social status, aggressive and prosocial behavior, and social networks, this study intends to broaden the understanding of victimization and its role within the peer culture of children and adolescents, considering also international evidence showing that bullying has become a major concern for educators, scholars and policy makers around the world.

Relationships that may help to define social hierarchies such as bully-victim are unfortunately commonplace in school (see Adler and Adler 1998; Berger et al. 2008; Espelage et al. 2004; Maccoby 1998). This social consideration raises the question of the social definition of victimization; in order to impact the peer hierarchy, these relationships need to be recognized by other members of the peer group. However, victimization can also be a private experience, and as such several studies use only self reports to identify victims (Graham and Juvonen 1998; Juvonen et al. 2001; Leff et al. 1999). It is not straightforward whether the social and private definitions of victim-

ization have similar correlates, or whether male and female victims follow the same patterns of stigmatization, rejection, and unpopularity (e.g., Boulton 1999; Schwartz et al. 2001). In this research, we address these questions by examining how victims of male bullies differ in social status, aggressive and prosocial characteristics, and social relationships as a function of victim gender and the informant who reports upon victimization (Olweus 2009; Veenstra et al. 2007).

Female and Male Victims of Male Harassment

Olweus (2009) comments that cross-gender bullying has been overlooked by child development researchers. Indeed, Olweus (1993, p. 18) outlined the necessary consequence of the preponderance of male bullies and the more similar prevalence rates of male and female victims by claiming that "*boys carried out a large part of the bullying to which girls were subjected*" (itals. original): 60% of fifth through seventh grade girls whom Olweus (1993) reported as being harassed said that they were bullied by boys. Along similar lines, Veenstra et al. (2007) studying 11 year-old Dutch children found that boys were much more likely than girls to be bullies, but there were no gender differences in victimization: in other words, girls were as likely as boys to be harassed by male bullies. We found in a previous study on the sample of children used in this research that over 90% of reported bullies were boys, but reported victims were evenly distributed by gender (Rodkin and Berger 2008). Together with previous studies that support this finding (Espelage et al. 2004; Scheithauer et al. 2006; Schwartz et al. 2001; Solberg and Olweus 2003; Veenstra et al. 2007), our starting point is that most bullies are boys but victims are both boys and girls. The focus of this study is specifically on the victims of male bullying, where victimization can be perceived by the self or by others.

Peer victimization among males is often associated with weakness, dysregulated aggression, or other characteristics that do not fit the prevailing masculine identity (the "whipping boy" described by Olweus 1978; the "bully/victim" in Schwartz et al. 2001) or conform to male gender norms (Fine 1987; Kindlon and Thompson 1999; Yunger et al. 2004). In the context of bullying based on overt aggression, the clearer it is to everybody that a boy is victimized the more likely it is that the peer ecology shall marginalize him. Girls, however, may be more likely to be bullied with covert forms of aggression that are difficult for others to detect, seeming "invisible" (Garandeau and Cillessen, 2006).

Relative to research on same-gender bullying, there has been less sustained inquiry into cross-gender bullying (McMaster et al. 2002; Olweus 2009; Pellegrini 2002;

Stein 1995), particularly in the prepubescent years before sixth grade when these aggressive behaviors emerge. The oversight may stem from an assumption that there is no social interaction between boys and girls when, in fact, girls and boys frequently express mostly negative but also positive sentiments towards each other (Adler and Adler 1998; Maccoby 1998; Rodkin and Fischer 2003; Underwood et al. 2004). For example, preadolescent boys and girls form antipathies, reciprocally nominating one another as "liked least." Abecassis et al. (2002), sampling over 2,300 Dutch 11 year-olds, reported that girls were twice as likely to have mixed- versus same-gender antipathies (see also Dijkstra et al. 2007; Rodkin et al. 2003). Even the positive sentiments that girls express towards boys may reflect gender relations with agonistic norms. For instance, Rodkin et al. (2006) found that fourth to sixth grade elementary school girls disproportionately nominated popular-aggressive boys as among the "coolest" kids in their class. Bukowski et al. (2000) determined that girls' attraction to aggressive boys increased from the end of elementary school (fifth grade) across the transition to middle school (sixth grade). Thus, boys and girls do interact with one another, but cross-gender interactions run the risk of being negative or aggressive in tone.

Is there a possibility that female victims of male bullying would not fit the classic picture of an unpopular, at-risk youngster? In a provocative qualitative analysis of sexual bullying in English secondary schools, Duncan (1999, p. 46) reports that "where a girl had high peer status she might acquire even greater influence [when subjected to peer sexual harassment], but where she was not popular or had few social skills she could feel that she was seen just as a sex object." Due to her social position a popular though harassed girl might dismiss harassment as dysfunctional romantic interest and keep her social status, even above her harasser. If, on the other hand, she has low social status, the victim may not have the resources to dismiss or redefine male aggression. Thus, it could be that female victims of male bullies have higher social status than male victims of male bullies. This difficulty in recognizing boy-to-girl bullying may stem from linkages to peer sexual harassment (Duncan 1999; Eder et al. 1995; Orenstein 1994; Stein 1995). In 2001, the American Association of University Women reported that 81% of secondary students reported sexual harassment before sixth grade, with "girls reporting" being harassed more frequently, experiencing more severe types of harassment, and having more negative emotional reactions to harassment than boys" (Young and Raffaele Mendez 2003, p. 13; see also McMaster et al. 2002). Some cases of peer sexual harassment have been ignored by educators up until the point of legal action (Rodkin and Fischer 2003; Stein 1995).

Gender and the Informant of Peer Harassment

Victimization, as part of social dynamics, defines a particular position of the harassed child within the peer ecology. In this sense, victimization implies social recognition of a particular child as a "victim," and posits her or him as such within the social group (Bierman 2004; Graham and Juvonen 2002). However, victimization does not invariably refer to a socially defined position; children who are reported as victims by their peers do not necessarily acknowledge this situation. Indeed, it is likely that much harassment remains hidden due to its "somewhat secretive nature" (Olweus, 2009) and the subtle nature of covert aggression forms. Children may feel harassed even when their classmates do not identify harassment against them. Troop-Gordon and Ladd (2005) tested the hypothesis of self- and peer-appraisals as mediators of the effects of victimization on later internalizing and externalizing problems among fourth to sixth graders, finding that boy victims see their peers more negatively over time but girl victims increasingly internalize their personal deficiencies. The notion of trade-offs introduced by Rose and Rudolph (2006) is enlightening to this matter. In their meta-analysis about gender differences on developmental outcomes associated with peer relations, these authors proposed a peer-socialization model establishing that, since boys and girls tend to socialize more often with same-gender peers, particular characteristics of boys' and girls' groups would place their members at-risk for particular adjustment outcomes (emotional problems for girls; behavioral problems for boys). In other words, gains and loses and the consequent social implications of victimization could be determined by the gendered contexts in which they occur.

Social Status and Interpersonal Relationships

Attaining social status is a central challenge associated with the transition from childhood to adolescence (Ojanen et al. 2005). Victimization, within the social arena, is related to social status and interpersonal relationships during this developmental phase, and thus different social implications for male and female victims of male bullies might be observed in this social arena, particularly when considering the private versus public definition of victimization (Graham et al. 2003). Social status, however, implies at least two different dimensions (Jiang and Cillessen 2005; Schwartz et al. 2006), usually labeled as *perceived popularity* (or reputational popularity) and *social preference* (sociometric popularity or preference) (Cillessen and Borch 2006; LaFontana and Cillessen 2002). Perceived popularity refers to a person's visibility and social reputation. Social preference constitutes a measure of liking of an individual.

In this sense, if victimization refers to a socially defined position, its impact should be observable particularly on perceived popularity.

Another central feature of the social experience of children and adolescents is the establishment of close peer interactions (Ojanen et al. 2005). Friendships constitute intimate interactions that serve several social and emotional functions for the individual, such as self-worth, confidence, loyalty, and a sense of belonging and continuity (Bukowski and Sippola 2005). Friendships are a protective factor against the negative developmental outcomes of victimization (Hartup 1996; Hodges et al. 1997; Hodges and Perry 1999; Rodkin and Hodges 2003). Hodges et al. (1997) found that the number of friends a child held correlated negatively with victimization, and that adjustment problems onset by victimization diminished as friends increased. The social experience for victimized children may also involve negative interactions such as antipathies or enmities, or children who mutually reject each other (Hartup 2003; Rodkin et al. 2003); however, less is known regarding possible associations between antipathetic interactions and victimization (Card and Hodges 2007).

Gender and the social and/or subjective definition of victimization may imply differential developmental outcomes, particularly on social status and peer interactions. Indeed, scholars have been concerned about silencing among adolescent females (Gilligan et al. 1990; Orenstein 1994). Too often, girls suffer the psychological consequences of having their harassment be ignored, not perceived as important, or self-censored (Orenstein 1994; Rodkin and Fisher 2003; Stein 1995). Duncan (1999) suggests that formal complaints about victimization are seen as hazardous by girls due to embarrassment and fears of retaliation. These possibilities suggest that girls who keep their victimization private might suffer from higher risk, being overlooked and lacking social support and protection. In the tense and sometimes dysfunctional world of preadolescent gender relations, girls with social reputations of being harassed by boys may be popular and so not at-risk in the conventional sense of poor social adjustment (Duncan 1999). Conversely, negative implications for boys may stem from their social visibility and reputation as victims. Therefore, the hypotheses of this study are: (1) Girls whose victimization is only reported by themselves and boys whose victim status is reported by peers will be the most unpopular and disliked. In contrast, (2) girls who are perceived by others as harassed by male bullies can be popular and socially preferred, and will thus show at least average scores on these variables. Mirroring these hypotheses, (3) Self reported female victims and peer reported male victims should have fewer friends and more antipathies, whereas (4) girls reported as victims by peers will have at least average involvement in friendships and antipathies.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 508 fourth and fifth grade children (275 boys, 233 girls) recruited from two elementary schools in the Midwestern United States. The first school had 17 classrooms (215 boys, 175 girls) and was over 98% European-American; the second school had five classrooms (60 boys, 58 girls) with an ethnic breakdown of 66.7% European-American, 23.9% African-American, and less than 10% other ethnicities (Hispanic, Asian, and Native American). All students of fourth and fifth grade classes in both schools were included in the study. Passive consent procedures were used in the larger school: several weeks before survey administration, parents were sent a letter describing the project with a form to sign if they declined their child's participation. Active consent procedures were used in the smaller school: here, parents' or guardians' written assent was required. The use of passive or active consent followed the preferences of each school principal. Students' written assent to participate was required in both elementary schools. The overall participation rate was 83.9%, but this varied by school: participation was 91.1% in the larger, ethnically homogenous school with passive consent and 60.2% in the smaller, ethnically diverse school with active consent. Results were replicated for each school separately with no significant differences between them. Participants of the larger school were reassessed after six-months, using the same measures and procedure.

Measure

Children were asked to identify bullies and the children they picked on, and to rate their peers on a variety of social and personality characteristics.

Who Bullies Whom?

The *who bullies whom* (WBW) instrument involves two questions repeated three times. First, children are asked: "Are there some kids in your class who really like to bully other kids around? Please write the name of a kid that bullies other kids around." Children then write the first name and last name initial of the child who first comes to mind as a bully. It is important to note that children were free to list either boys or girls as bullies. Second, children are asked: "which kids does this bully like to pick on the most?" Six lines are provided for children to write the first name and last name initial of peers who fit the description of being picked on by the particular bully they nominated. After naming a bully and children whom the bully most picks on, children can then nominate a second and third bully along with children whom

those bullies are most likely to harass. Children were instructed in the written survey and in accompanying oral instructions that they were free to nominate any child in their classroom including themselves, and that they did not have to fill in all the provided lines. Indeed, 45% of the participants left this question completely unanswered or wrote "none" by the name of the first bully; others named just one or two bullies.

Children were classified as bullies if they were nominated by at least two peers. Victims were classified as peer nominated (at least two peers nominated them as victims but there is no self-nomination), self nominated (nominated by themselves and less than two peers), or consensually nominated (nominated by themselves and at least two peers, fitting criteria for both peer and self nominations). This criterion focuses on the distinction between the social-reputational and the subjective-private dimensions of victimization (Graham and Juvonen 1998; Graham et al. 2003); it was considered that if the victimization is perceived and reported by at least two classmates other than the self, it becomes part of the social knowledge of the peer ecology. Considering that the average class size of this study was 23 students, two peers represented around 10% of classmates, in line with what previous studies have used as a criterion for identifying victims—but without the arbitrariness involved of setting a particular Z or percentile score (Olweus 2009). Since the focus of this manuscript is on victimization, 2.3% of children that were nominated as both bullies and victims (i.e., bully/victims) were excluded from the analyses.

The measurement properties of WBW with regard to the identification of male bullies are strong. Prevalence rates, stability estimates, and behavioral characteristics of bullying as determined by WBW are comparable to related investigations (e.g., Schwartz et al. 2001; Solberg and Olweus 2003). Rodkin and Berger (2008) investigated the properties of WBW on this sample of children and found that bullies were overwhelmingly male and displayed a clear aggressive profile. Specifically, 7.3% of children were identified as bullies (12.0% of boys; 1.7% of girls). A child's classification as a bully, victim, or non-victim over a six-month period was highly stable (χ^2 (4, $N=390$)$=207.4$, $p<.001$); 63% of bullies identified at time one were also identified as bullies in the follow-up assessment ($Z=+11.3$). Male bullies were over +2.0 SD on peer nominations of relational and overt aggression, and over +1.0 SD on teacher ratings of aggression (all Zs within gender), and male bullies were perceived as aggressive regardless of whether they primarily targeted boys or girls.

Peer Nominations

Children were asked to nominate up to three peers in their classroom who best fit descriptors for 14 items, a portion of

which were used in the present study. Children were told that they could nominate same- or cross-gender peers, themselves (all self-nominations were removed prior to analysis), and that peers could be nominated for more than one item. Scores for peer assessments were calculated from the quotient of the number of nominations received by a child for an item over the number of potential nominations (that is, children who answered the survey in each particular class—one). Four composites were constructed based on a principal components analysis plus a priori distinctions between aggression subtypes. *Perceived popularity* consisted of five items ($\alpha=.87$): *popular, cool, want to be like, best looking* and *athletic*. *Relational aggression* consisted of two items ($\alpha=.83$): *makes fun of others* and *says mean things*. *Overt aggression* consisted of three items ($\alpha=.87$): *doesn't follow rules, starts fights* and *upsets everything*. *Prosocial* consisted of three items ($\alpha=.87$): *cooperate, good grades*, and *nice*. Composites were transformed to rank scores by gender for inferential tests due to the skewed distribution of limited peer nomination variables; however, for display purposes we give raw proportions that are Z-transformed. Six-month test-retest stability for peer nominations was examined in the 17 classrooms of the larger participating school ($n=390$) and ranged from .45 to .79 (all ps<.001). Peer nomination procedures were similar to those used by other investigators (e.g., Cillessen and Mayeux 2004; Coie et al. 1982; Newcomb and Bukowski 1984).

Social Preference

Children were allowed up to six choices for their nominations of children with whom they "liked most" and "liked least" to play. Following procedures used in previous research (Cillessen and Mayeux 2004; LaFontana and Cillessen 2002), social preference scores were calculated by subtracting scores on liked least from those on liked most. Social preference scores were rank transformed for inferential tests following the same criteria used for peer nominations. Six-month stability for liked most and liked least measures were .45 and .61 respectively, in line with values obtained in Jiang and Cillessen's (2005) meta-analysis of sociometric status measures.

Friendships

Children were asked to circle "yes" or "no" to the question: "Some kids have a number of close friends, but others have just one best friend and still others don't have a best friend. What about you? Do you have a best friend?" Children who answered affirmatively (84%) were asked to write the names of children whom they considered to be their best friends. Six lines were provided for friendship identification, but children were told that they could list fewer or more than six friends. Only reciprocated choices were considered friendships.

Antipathies

Reciprocated choices in the item "who are the children in your classroom you would like the least to play with" were used to identify antipathies. Antipathies, thus, constitute a measure of mutual dislike. Only reciprocated choices were considered antipathies.

Procedure

Children were surveyed in the fall (retest assessment was in the spring) during regular class hours through a group administration. Data collection took 45 min per classroom. Children were assured that their answers would be kept confidential and they were told to cover their responses. Children were told not to talk and that they could stop participating at any time, or leave a question without answering if they did not feel comfortable with it. During the survey, one administrator read the instructions and questions aloud while scanning the room to check for potential problems. Additional administrators provided mobile monitoring and assisted children as needed. All surveys were identified and distributed in a manner that concealed the identity of the participants. Surveys were assembled into different, random orders for different classrooms. Measures and procedures to protect the confidentiality and rights of all participants were approved by the local university Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects and the research review boards of the two school districts involved in this research.

Results

Results are structured as follows: first, descriptive results are presented for boy and girl victims of male harassment, along with correlations between study variables. Then, the stability of victimization considering informant source is presented. The next section presents victims' social status and peer reported characteristics by gender and informant source. Finally, associations between victimization and social relationships (i.e., friendships and antipathies) are presented.

Descriptive Results

Table 1 displays means and standard deviations for peer perceived characteristics, by gender. Each variable was standardized within the whole sample ($n=508$); statistics presented correspond to the 100 victims (42 boys, 58 girls) identified in this study, aggregated over informant source. Means that deviate from zero show how distant female and male victims are from the whole sample. Table 1 shows that female victims are moderately popular and

Table 1 Means and standard deviations of peer reported characteristics of victims, by gender.

	Female victims (N=58)		Male victims (N= 42)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Popularity	.26	.98	.11	1.00
Social preference	.27	.97	−.10	1.24
Prosocial	.07	1.07	.06	1.17
Relational aggression	.09	.95	−.21	.52
Overt Aggression	−.02	.76	−.06	.81

Means are z scores standardized within the whole sample (n=508)

socially preferred according to peers (Zs=+.26, +.27). Male victims are near the mean on most variables. Regarding types of aggression, female victims display higher scores on relational aggression than overt aggression (Zs=+.09, −.02), whereas male victims display the opposite pattern (Zs=−.21, −.06).

Table 2 displays correlations among study variables for girls and boys, for the whole sample and for the victims sub-sample. As shown, all correlations followed similar trends for both groups across gender. Aggregating over gender, correlations among victims showed that popularity was highly associated with social preference (r=+.65) and prosocial characteristics (r=+.62). The association of popularity and aggression depended on the type of aggression, being non-significant for relational aggression (r=−.07) but negative for overt aggression (r=−.31). Social preference was negatively associated with both relational (r=−.20) and overt (r=−.56) aggression. As expected, both types of aggression correlated highly with each other (r=+.62), and both were negatively associated with prosocial characteristics (r's=−.23 and −.41).

Identifying Victims by Informant Source

Aggregating across informant source, 100 participants (19.7%) were identified as victims of peer harassment in

the fall (42 % boys, 58% girls). Among victims, 33% were reported as such only by peers, 45% were only self reported, and 22% were consensually reported by peers and self, with no differences by gender (χ^2 (2, N=100)<1, ns). Thus, among boys and girls approximately one-third of the children classified as victims were nominated by peers but did not view themselves as victims, almost half nominated themselves but did not have their nominations validated by at least two peers, and almost a quarter were consensually nominated by themselves and others.

Stability of victimization was assessed after a 6-month period: 59.7% of fall victims who were reassessed in spring maintained their victimization status and 82.4% of children who were not victimized in the fall remained uninvolved directly in bully-victim relationships in spring.

There were 46 children who were identified as victims at both time points. The stability of victimization status using WBW included high 6-month stability within informant source (i.e., self-, peer-, or consensually reported) (χ^2 (4, N=46)= 21.96, p<.001). For these analyses non-victims were not included, considering that due to the high proportion of this group (i.e., 82.4%) a significant χ^2 would mainly represent the stability of non-victims. From 60% to 70% of children who were victimized in fall and spring retained specificity in whether victimization was reported by the child him- or herself, at least two of the child's peers, or both.

Table 2 Correlations between peer perceived characteristics for the whole sample (below diagonal) and for victims (above diagonal), for girls (top panel) and boys (bottom panel).

	1	2	3	4	5
Girls					
Popularity	–	.60**	.66**	−.13	−.25*
Social preference	.58**	–	.62**	−.23***	−.55**
Prosocial	.66**	.58**	–	−.24***	−.41**
Relational aggression	−.03	−.37**	−.20*	–	.73**
Overt aggression	−.12***	−.54**	−.29**	.81**	–
Boys					
Popularity	–	.71**	.59**	.02	−.38*
Social preference	.58**	–	.49**	−.32*	−.60**
Prosocial	.50**	.51**	–	−.25	−.40*
Relational aggression	.02	−.47**	−.31**	–	.48**
Overt aggression	−.16*	−.65**	−.39**	.87**	–

Ns were 234 and 58 for girls, and 274 and 48 for boys, for the whole sample and for the victims' sub-sample, respectively

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.08

Table 3 Anovas on social characteristics of peer-, self-, and consensually nominated victims: female victims.

Victim informant							
Social characteristics	Peer		Self		Consensual		
	Z	SD	Z	SD	Z	SD	F
Social preference	+.65$_a$	.75	+.05$_b$	.67	+.15$_b$	1.49	3.80*
Popularity	+.49	1.01	−.04	.73	+.47	1.22	1.53
Prosocial	+.52	1.18	−.31	.71	+.17	1.25	2.81**
Relational aggression	+.23	1.34	−.04	.58	+.12	.90	<1
Overt aggression	−.07	.85	−.05	.65	+.08	.83	<1

Ns are 19, 25 and 14 respectively. Means having the same subscript are not significantly different at $p<.05$ using Tukey's HSD post hoc comparison. Fs and Tukey post hoc comparisons were calculated with ranked peer nominations due to the skewness of the peer reported composites. Means and standard deviations are displayed as Z-transformed scores.

*$p<.05$; **$p<.07$

Victims' Social Characteristics by Informant Source and Gender

Multivariate analyses testing for main and interaction effects and follow-up ANOVAs were performed for peer nominations in order to assess the social status and behavioral characteristics of the 100 victims of male bullying identified in our study. First, an omnibus MANOVA was conducted with all peer reported composites as dependent variables. Multivariate effects (Wilks's lambda) of gender, victim informant, and their interaction were tested. The multivariate omnibus test showed significant main effects for gender ($F(4, 91)=3.87$, $p<.01$), informant ($F(8, 182)=2.61$, $p<.01$), and the gender-by-informant interaction ($F(8, 182)=2.30$, $p<.05$). Univariate analyses showed interaction effects for Popularity ($F=3.45$), Social Preference ($F=3.84$), Overt Aggression ($F=4.08$) and Prosocial behavior ($F=6.40$, all $ps<.01$). Univariate main effects from the MANOVA of gender were found for Social Preference; girls

were more socially preferred than boys ($F(1, 94)=10.90$, $p<.001$). Univariate main effects for informant were found for Overt Aggression ($F(2, 94)=6.20$, $p<.01$) with consensually nominated victims perceived as more aggressive by their peers. Follw-up one-way ANOVAs and Tukey HSD post hoc comparisons, conducted separately by gender, were carried out on peer characteristics that were significant in gender x informant interactions. Relational aggression was included in the follow-up univariate ANOVA, even though its interaction with gender was not significant in MANOVA, in order to distinguish aggression subtypes. The results of these analyses are presented for girls in Table 3 and for boys in Table 4.

Table 3 shows that female peer-nominated victims had higher social preference than girls whose harassment was reported by themselves or consensually by peers and self ($F(2, 55)=3.80$, $p<.05$). Peer-nominated victims were marginally considered more prosocial than self-nominated and consensually-nominated victims ($F(2, 55)=2.81$, $p=.06$). Effect sizes (η^2) were .08 and .12, respectively.

Table 4 Anovas on social characteristics of peer-, self-, and consensually-nominated victims: Male victims.

Victim informant							
Social characteristics	Peer		Self		Consensual		
	Z	SD	Z	SD	Z	SD	F
Social preference	.05	1.33	.14	.84	−.97	1.66	2.38
Popularity	+.24$_{ab}$	1.04	+.30$_a$	1.00	−.58$_b$	.66	3.24*
Prosocial	−.29$_{ab}$	.74	+.58$_a$	1.34	−.62$_b$	.78	4.20*
Relational aggression	−.05$_a$	.53	−.42$_b$	.42	+.03$_a$	.77	3.61*
Overt aggression	−.02$_b$	.52	−.44$_b$	.45	+.81$_a$	1.23	9.70**

Ns are 14, 20 and 8 respectively. Means having the same subscript are not significantly different at $p<.05$ using Tukey's HSD post hoc comparison. Fs and Tukey post hoc comparisons were calculated with ranked peer nominations due to the skewness of the peer reported composites. Means and standard deviations are displayed as Z-transformed scores.

**$p<.01$; *$p<.05$

The univariate results presented in Table 4 show a different profile for boys who are harassed by other boys. Peers rarely nominated consensually-reported male victims as popular relative to peer- and self- nominated victims ($F(2, 39)=3.24$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2=.12$). Consensually nominated victims were rated by their peers as less prosocial than boys whose reports of harassment came from peers or the self alone ($F(2, 39)=4.20$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2=.19$), and also as more overtly aggressive than peer-nominated and self-nominated victims ($F(2, 39)=9.70$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2=.33$), and as more relationally aggressive than self-nominated victims ($F(2, 39)=3.61$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2=.16$).

Collectively, the results of Tables 3 and 4 confirm partially hypotheses 1 and 2, suggesting that two groups of victims of male harassment are most at-risk for social marginalization: girls whose private, self-reports of harassment are not validated by others, and boys who are publicly and privately recognized by their peers and by themselves as victims. Girls whose harassment was reported by peers, and boys whose harassment was reported either publicly or privately but not both, had more typical profiles.

Victims' Social Relationships by Informant Source and Gender

The next set of analyses addressed the association between victimization and social relationships, particularly friendships and antipathies. Victims with ($n=65$) and without ($n=35$) friends were equally distributed across type of victims (χ^2 (2, $n=100$)=1.82, ns), with no gender differences (67% and 62% of female and male victims held friendships, respectively). No differences were found among victims with friends when considering the interaction of informant and gender (χ^2 (2, $n=65$)=1.79, ns).

Comparisons between victims with and without friends on peer reported characteristics showed an adaptive profile for victims with friends, being more popular ($t=2.20$, $p<.05$) and socially preferred ($t=3.51$, $p<.001$), and less aggressive (both relational and overt; ts$=-2.90$ and -3.96, ps$<.01$) than victims without friends. No differences were found on prosociality.

Regarding antipathies, 32% of victimized children were identified as having an antipathy with another peer (28% of the whole sample held antipathies). Significant differences in the distribution of antipathies were found across peer-, self-, and consensually-reported victims (χ^2 (2, $n=100$)= 8.96, $p<.01$): Self reported victims were more likely to have antipathies than peer- and consensually-peer reported victims (26%, 9% and 4%, respectively). This pattern was consistent across gender. However, the likelihood of self-reported victims to have antipathies was higher for girls (χ^2 (2, $n=58$)=8.58, $p<.01$) than for boys (χ^2 (2, $n=42$)=5.55, $p=.06$). Victims with antipathies were rated by their peers

as less popular ($t=-2.67$, $p<.01$), less socially preferred ($t=-5.14$, $p<.001$), less prosocial ($t=-3.20$, $p<.01$), and more overtly aggressive ($t=3.94$, $p<.001$) but similar to victims without antipathies on relational aggression ($t<1$, ns). These results confirm hypothesis 3 regarding a higher involvement in antipathies of self-reported female victims, and show that peer reported female victims have average involvement in friendships and antipathies (hypothesis 4). The pattern expected for boys (particularly peer reported victims), however, was not found.

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to assess the social status and relationships of children who are victimized, addressing the heterogeneity among victims regarding gender and informant source. Female self-nominated victims and male consensually-nominated victims displayed a risk profile characterized by their classmates as low popularity, low social preference and low prosocial behavior, and holding more antipathies with their peers. Female peer-nominated victims displayed a complementary socially adaptive profile characterized by higher scores on popularity, social preference and prosocial behavior; the same socially functional profile—though not as high on social status—was found as well for male self-nominated victims. In other words, girls who were recognized by peers as a victim (but not seeing themselves as such) had high social status; for boys, the same social recognition as a victim was related to low social status. The opposite was true for self-identified victims with boys displaying a much more functional profile than self-nominated girl victims.

These results show that the traditional picture of the rejected marginalized child that is harassed by his or her peers might hold for boys, but not necessarily for girls (Olweus 1993), at least when harassed by male bullies. Identifying victims through peer and self reports allows for addressing different dimensions of victimization. Peer reports refer to a social consensus of someone's victimization status (Graham and Juvonen 1998), therefore a social position within the social structure. Even though children characterized as victims by their peers do not define themselves as such, they are viewed and treated that way by others. On the other hand, self reports of victimization status refer to a private and subjective experience, which is often unknown by other participants in the social group; therefore self reported victims can be easily overlooked (Juvonen et al. 2001) and consequently constitute a group at higher risk. In fact, Unnever and Cornell (2004) reported that among middle school students, 25% of victims (identified as such through self-reports) had not told anyone that they were bullied, and 40% had not told an adult about

their victimization, which may explain why self-perceived victims can be easily overlooked by teachers or other adults. This may be the case particularly for girls considering that they are more prone to be harassed by aggression that is covert or relational.

When including gender into this picture, public acknowledgement of victimization is associated with a low status position for boys, but on the contrary with a high status position for girls. On the other hand, boys whose status as victims is not shared by the peer group and only reported by themselves display socially adjusted profiles, whereas girls in this situation, by possibly silencing their experience of being victimized, are exposed to a worse social position.

To better understand these results it is necessary to contextualize them within the peer culture of middle childhood (Adler and Adler 1998; Berger et al. 2008; Rodkin and Fischer 2003). During the transition from childhood to adolescence, when the identity configuration process is influenced by peers' recognition, holding a consensually defined victimization status may have completely differential implications for boys and girls. Building speculatively on these gendered implications, victimization for boys may reflect a lower social position that does not fit the male stereotype of being tough (Kindlon and Thompson 1999). For girls, the implication may relate to the recognition and attention that accompanies victimization status—as dysfunctional as this attention might be, culturally speaking (Stein 1995). As shown by Carver, Yunger and Perry (2003), adequate psychosocial adjustment in middle childhood relates to conformity with gender identity, and victimization might precisely question this conformity.

From a relational perspective, the gendered culture of middle childhood plays an important role. Peer norms regarding cross-gender relations during this developmental phase sanction and punish any interest in the opposite sex (Adler and Adler 1998; Maccoby 1998; Sroufe et al. 1993). However, heterosexual interest also rises during this developmental phase. Cross-gender bullying, thus, may constitute a safe way for boys to demonstrate their interest, and for girls to accept it or dismiss it as *nothing else than* bullying. For instance, Shute, Owens and Slee (2008), while studying older adolescents, found that sexual content in bullying was commonplace, even though the literature on bullying does not acknowledge this. In this sense, the present study with younger children may constitute an initial step towards later "sexual bullying" (Shute et al. 2008). At the public level, being harassed by boys may constitute the proof for a girl that she is interesting for boys, therefore gaining social status and at the same time having the chance to dismiss this interest and thus not transgress peer norms; actually, as proposed by Duncan (1999), girls who display high status may gain even a higher position when being harassed. Unpopular girls seem to be in a different situation; due to their position in the peer group, boys' harassment of unpopular girls may constitute a way for boys to show their peers that they are not interested in girls. Besides, unpopular girls may not be so prone to dismiss boys' bullying particularly because of their fear of retaliation (Duncan 1999), and they may not find adequate ways to cope with harassment or not feel confident to talk about it, therefore silencing and experiencing negative developmental outcomes. These findings call attention to the possibility of cross-gender harassment becoming normalized within the peer group, and constituting a validated way to gain a social position through aggressive behavior—for boys—and being targeted by this aggressive behavior—in the case of girls. For instance, there is some evidence that bullying behavior is associated with masculinity and victimization with femininity (Gini and Pozzoli 2006). However, these hypotheses and other possible trade-offs that boys and girls might face (Rose and Rudolph 2006) are currently speculative.

Study findings imply that cross-gender bullying may not be a homogeneous construct; two different harassment-victimization dynamics may be part of the culture that emerges in the later elementary school grades, which from an external perspective may be difficult to distinguish. As Young and Raffaele Mendez (2003) argue, harassment should be qualified regarding implications for victims, not regarding actual behaviors or intentions. Observed victimization and experienced victimization might not constitute the same phenomenon with similar consequences, and should be qualified regarding the goals, outcomes, and resources present for the victimized child. This is not at all to say that victimization is an appropriate interpersonal relationship. Rather, it underscores the compelling necessity for studying victimization and its implications, both in the short and in the long term. The two dimensional approach (i.e. self versus peer perspectives) adopted in this study points in that direction.

The inclusion of peer relations (i.e., friendships and antipathies) in this study intended to highlight the association of being victimized and social experience within the peer culture. Associations between victimization and friendships have been reported in the literature, showing the protective effect of friendships in two directions: First, having friends protects against being targeted by harassers. Second, friendships act as a buffer against negative outcomes of being victimized (Hartup 1996; Hodges et al. 1997; Hodges and Perry 1999). The results presented here support partially these hypotheses. Victims were part of friendships at a comparable rate to non-victims. However, simple comparisons showed that victims with friends displayed an adaptive profile compared to their counterparts without friends. In other words, having friends was associated with better outcomes.

The assessment of antipathies showed that victims were as likely as non-victims to be part of these relationships

(32% and 28%, respectively). However, self-reported female victims were specifically prone to be involved in antipathies, stressing again the potential risks for this particular subgroup of victims. This is particularly important in light of the negative profile described for victims who held antipathies. From a different perspective, these results show that victims do not necessarily get involved in negative relationships; however, they are harassed. This may imply that being victimized is not an interpersonal conflict, but a one-directionally defined interaction. Strategies aimed at resolving victimization should consider this situation, since interpersonal conflict resolution strategies may not be the most appropriate intervention. Bullying can be understood as a specific type of abuse (Barudy 1999), and thus specific interventions that include reparatory features for the victim and that help the aggressor to become aware of the consequences of his or her acts may be more appropriate. Moreover, self-reported female victims were specifically prone to be involved in antipathies, stressing again the potential risks for this particular subgroup of victims.

Even though this study adopted a dyadic approach to victimization, these results also suggest that bully-victim relationships are part of the broader peer culture. There is growing evidence regarding the group nature of bullying. For instance, research shows that the group may foster or inhibit bullying and aggressive behavior through peer norms (Berger 2009; Chang 2004; Ellis and Zarbatany 2007; Espelage et al. 2003). Also, there is consistent evidence showing the role of bystanders and other roles that peers play during bullying episodes (Gini et al. 2008; Rigby and Johnson 2006; Salmivalli and Voeten 2004). Particular cultural norms in the group, and behaviors and attitudes of bystanders may have different implications for how victimization is perceived, signified, and experienced, and thus to its potential negative consequences.

On a methodological note, this study underscores the need for developing sociometric technologies that will allow a better understanding of social structures and dynamics within peer social environments (e.g., Cillessen and Bukowski 2000). This need is particularly relevant when considering the lack of consistency in the literature regarding how children are identified as victims (Berger et al. 2008; Graham and Juvonen 1998; Ladd and Kochenderfer-Ladd 2002; Veenstra et. al 2007). This inconsistency may be due to different methodological approaches to identifying victims: research addressing victimization usually has adopted self reports or peer reports, but these methods have not been taken into account together, therefore overlooking differential factors unique to each informant's perspective (Schäfer et al. 2005; Veenstra et al. 2005). Non-reporting contributes to the inconsistency between self- and peer-reports (Unnever and Cornell 2004). As argued by Juvonen et al. (2001, p. 108), "if the

assessment of victim status relies on only one method, certain subgroups or 'at-risk' groups are not identified." The adoption of a relational approach that asks children to identify *who bullies whom* arises from the importance of obtaining multiple sources of information in assessing bullying and victimization (Ladd and Kochenderfer-Ladd 2002; Veenstra et al. 2005).

The present study has several limitations that need to be taken into account. The adoption of a relational approach allows better assessing victimization as part of social dynamics. However, particularly during the transition from childhood to adolescence relational processes are in constant dynamism, highlighting the need for longitudinal designs. This study, even though it features a follow-up assessment of a subsample of participants, does not allow testing for developmental hypotheses. Methodologically, the present study constitutes an attempt to test and refine new measurements and techniques to assess the relational nature of victimization. For example, there is an important tension in the literature regarding how bullying and victimization should be assessed, both in terms of reporting sources and also providing or not providing to participants a definition of bullying and harassment (Espelage and Swearer 2004). In this research no definition was provided, adopting thus a constructivist perspective where children decide for themselves what constitutes bullying. The fact that no female bullies were identified may stem from this definitional feature; this is currently being investigated by our research group in a new investigation where participants are specifically queried about girls who might bully.

Another limitation comes with the adoption of a constructivist perspective; by allowing children to decide what constitutes bullying it is difficult to tap into bullying subtypes. It is reasonable to suppose that different informants will be more prone to identify different forms of bullying, with self-reports more sensitive to the kind of overt, relational bullying that may be more characteristic of girls. Thus, more than different phenomenologies, different informants might detect different types of bully-victim relationships. On the other hand, in the present analysis we obtained the same pattern of results for overt and relational aggression, consistent with a recent meta-analysis suggesting that gender differences in aggression subtypes can sometimes be overstated (Card et al. 2008). Future measurement progress will help resolve how aggression falls discernibly into gender-normative subtypes.

Despite these limitations, the results presented here have important implications for practice, particularly in three areas: First, educators should be attuned to the particularities of different victimization experiences; not all victims are the same, consequently not all victims have the same needs or respond positively to the same strategies. Second, our research highlights that an important number of victims
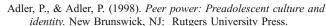
may be overlooked, particularly in the case of girls, self-reported victims who displayed troubling socio-behavioral profiles relative to other girls. In addition, there may be potential negative implications for male victims, particularly when their harassment is consensually acknowledged. Finally, this research in its design and methodology emphasizes the relational, dyadic nature of victimization, hypothesizing possible trade-offs (e.g., social status and peer relationships vs. harassment) that girls may face and that may constitute part of their day to day experiences at school.

In summary, girls who hold a high social status position in the peer group might also be the focus of male harassment. However, girls who lack social skills or social support, or who are unable to attribute the harassment to which they are subjected as a sign of their popularity, may be more prone to develop negative developmental outcomes, particularly if they do not tell anyone about their victimization experiences. Female self-nominated victims, who displayed a negative social profile, may not be considered as children at-risk because their harassment is not public knowledge. For that matter, female peer-nominated victims are also at-risk of being ignored because they appear well-adjusted. Either way, the study of girls' experiences regarding peer harassment and victimization at school deserves much closer scrutiny. Similar to previous work, boys who are victimized by male bullying have a poor socio-behavioral profile and also deserve attention. The risks involved for this group may involve important developmental outcomes that should be further studied. From a broader perspective, long-term consequences present a negative picture: harassment is an interpersonal relationship based on denigration and abuse. In this sense, even though it may constitute a short-term functional means for children to navigate through the culture of their peers, the high social status of female peer-nominated victims implies that abuse and denigration may sometimes be acceptable forms of social relations. They are not. More study and action is needed to better understand the social and psychological processes involved in victimization, with the goal of reducing prevalence and fostering healthier relationships between boys and girls at school.

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