



# By whom are you bullied? Dyadic nominations identify “invisible bullying”

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## Aim

To what extent does dyadic data identify the same bullies as general peer reports, and how can differences between the two be explained? As dyadic reports (e.g. “I am victimized by X”) are subjective experiences of children’s relationships, bullies nominated by self-perceived victims are not necessarily identified as bullies by others. Thus, how can cases of “invisible bullying”, where a dyadic nomination is not confirmed by peers (Fig. 1), be understood?

## Hypotheses on invisible victim-bully dyads

**Hypothesis 1:** Victims of “invisible bullying” are overly sensitive to negative cues from classmates: so-called “paranoids” (Graham & Juvonen, 1998).

*versus*

**Hypothesis 2:** “Invisible bullies” may harass victims in ways that are (almost) impossible to detect by peers.

## Data

We used dyadic victim-bully nominations of the third wave of the Finnish *KiVa bullying intervention project*, grades 4-6 (ages 10-12). In total, 4,221 nominations were given by 1,210 victims (nominators) to 2,493 bullies (targets) (292 classrooms in 69 schools).

## Construction of “invisible bullying”

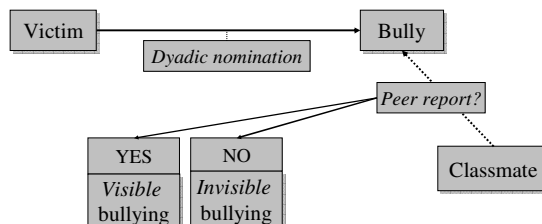


Figure 1. Schematic overview of the dependent variable

## Analytical strategy

We performed multilevel logistic regressions of the binary victim-bully outcome variable “invisible bullying”, coded “1” when a victim nominated a bully who was not peer-nominated for bullying by other classmates than the victim, and “0” when a victim nominated a bully who was nominated by at least one other classmate for bullying.

Bullies were nested in victims who were nested in classrooms.

## Results: Multilevel Logistic Regression

Table 1. Multilevel logistic regression in predicting invisible victim-bully dyads

	B	SE	OR	B	SE	OR
Constant	-1.68	0.38		-0.95	0.41	
Self-report						
Vict General	0.02	0.06	1.02	-0.03	0.06	0.97
Vict Overt	-0.38	0.11	0.68 **	-0.05	0.11	0.95
Vict Covert	0.56	0.10	1.75 **	0.28	0.10	1.32 **
Peer nominations						
Vict Physical	-0.55	1.12	0.58	-0.22	1.15	0.80
Vict Verbal	-2.21	0.91	0.11 *	-0.83	0.94	0.44
Vict Relational	1.51	0.77	4.53 *	-0.23	0.82	0.79
Self-report						
Depression	-0.08	0.08	0.92	-0.06	0.08	0.94
Self-esteem	0.07	0.10	1.07	0.09	0.10	1.09
Anxiety	0.05	0.07	1.05	0.03	0.07	1.03
Have defenders	-0.40	0.14	0.67 **	-0.46	0.14	0.63 **
Peer-report						
Acceptance	0.01	0.57	1.01	0.07	0.59	1.07
Rejection	0.04	0.50	1.01	0.68	0.52	1.97
Dyadic						
Boy-Boy <sup>a</sup>				-1.46	0.16	0.23 **
Girl-Girl <sup>a</sup>				0.43	0.19	1.54 *
Girl-Boy <sup>a</sup>				-1.94	0.21	0.14 **
Mutual bullying				-0.59	0.19	0.55 **
Random effects						
Classroom variance	0.03	0.04		0.07	0.05	
Nominator (student) variance	1.12	0.15		1.00	0.15	

Note. Ndyads = 4,221, of which 706 (16.7%) are invisible. OR Odds Ratio. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

<sup>a</sup> Reference category is boy-girl dyad (where boy is the self-proclaimed victim and girl is the bully)

## Results (Table 1)

### Self-reports

- Experiencing covert victimization (being excluded, told lies about, forced to do things, cyberbullied) made it more likely for victims to report being harassed by an invisible bully.
- Overt victimization (name-calling, physical, and material bullying) made invisible victim-bully dyads less likely.
- Victims who were harassed by invisible bullies also reported being less defended.
- Neither internalizing problems (depression, low self-esteem, anxiety) nor general victimization had an effect on reporting being victimized by an invisible bully.

### Dyadic reports

- Given the overt nature of bullying by boys, it is more likely that their bullying will be observed by peers.
  - This explains why effects of self-reported overt victimization and peer-reported verbal and relational victimization disappear after controlling for dyadic characteristics.
- When there is mutual bullying, it is more likely that the bullying will be observed by peers.

## Conclusion and discussion

Results do **not** support the “paranoid-hypothesis” because victims reported victimized by invisible bullies do not face more internalizing problems or report consistently higher levels of all kinds of victimization. The social position of these victims does not differ from victims with visible bullies.

Instead, when the victimization is covert, it is likely that children’s victimization is not always observed by peers. Victims with invisible bullies might therefore be less defended because classmates do not see a need to intervene.

**Dyadic victim-bully nominations enable identifying bullying that is hard to detect by peers.**

