

INVITED SYMPOSIUM EARA 2018

**(Cyber-)bullying: the role of supportive environments  
and online social competences in promoting resilience**

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This symposium, with work from scholars from 5 different countries, looks at how (cyber)bullying can be addressed adequately. The first paper reports the results of an explorative, qualitative study amongst Swedish high school students. This study reveals that these students consider the creation of supportive environments and the promotion of internet literacy, as key elements to cultivate resilience among younger students. These two elements are further reflected upon in the other contributions. Paper two, for instance, reports the results of a study on the effectiveness of the Italian school-based program NoTrap!, which is based on peer-led approaches to prevent and combat (cyber-)bullying. This paper pays particular attention to factors that moderate the program's effectiveness (e.g. in promoting resilience). Paper three focuses on the important role of bystanders, especially in the case of bias-based bullying, and looks at the potential of technological tools (i.e. a game) to promote positive bystandership. In the last paper, the attention shifts towards the role of online social competencies (OSC) as an important part of adolescents' overall media literacy and as a possible protective factor against cyberbullying experiences. This paper provides an overview of what OSC entail (according to the literature) and presents the results of a pilot study amongst 1.508 pupils from seven German schools, that aimed to develop a self-report measure for OSC.

**PRESENTATION 1: High School Students' Suggestions  
for Helping Younger Pupils Counteract Cyberbullying**

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**Aim.** This study's aim was to explore high school students' suggestions for helping younger pupils prevent and deal with cyberbullying.

**Method.** Seventy-eight high school students (32 girls and 46 boys) participated in 11 focus groups. The participants, all in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (15 years of age), attended two schools in Gothenburg, Sweden. At each school, all 9<sup>th</sup>-grade classes participated. The schools saw the focus groups as part of their anti-bullying work, and therefore deemed them mandatory for the students to attend. All the students followed through with the focus groups. The focus groups took place in separate rooms at each of the two schools during school hours, and lasted 45–60 minutes; the discussions were audio recorded. Every focus group interview ended with a dialogue about the students' experiences of participating in the focus group discussion.

**Results.** The high school students had many concrete suggestions for ways they could help younger pupils against cyberbullying. The suggestions covered a range of activities, for instance advising younger pupils on how to avoid becoming victims of cyberbullying by teaching them netiquette. Furthermore, the students were positive toward involving adults in counteracting cyberbullying among younger pupils, for example educating younger pupils' parents about cyberbullying. Moreover, the students suggested that they could show support for victims of cyberbullying by taking on the role of a friend when a younger pupil is cyberbullied and spend time with her/him during breaks. They also had ideas about helping younger pupils get cyberbullies to stop, for instance by teaching the younger pupils technical skills for dealing with the cyberbullying on the Internet.

**Conclusion.** To conclude, the findings in this study indicate that high school students want to be involved in helping younger pupils against cyberbullying, and have many concrete suggestions for how this can be done. It should be noted that an important factor related to resiliency is having a supportive environment. Thus, our findings could imply that high school students could cultivate resilience in younger pupils. For example, if older students teach younger pupils about how to counteract cyberbullying, the younger pupils might learn about cybersafety and how to respond assertively to cyberbullying.

**PRESENTATION 2: Effective intervention, personal level of risk and mechanisms of resilience  
in bullying and cyberbullying contexts**

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**Background:** The literature stresses that studying mediators and moderators of the effects of preventive interventions is essential to understand the promotion of resilience across development.

**Research questions:** The present study investigated whether personal characteristics of students in terms of levels of risk for bullying and victimization can moderate the effectiveness of an intervention.

**Methods:** The experimental group comprised 451 adolescents (57% boys; age  $M=14.79$ ;  $SD=1.12$ ; age range 14–18 years) in 22 classes of five high schools, who took part in the NoTrap! program (Palladino et al. 2016), which is a school-based intervention, making use of a peer-led approach to prevent and combat both traditional bullying and cyberbullying. A previous study (Palladino et al. 2016) found that the program led to a decrease in the target variables (victimization, bullying, cybervictimization, and cyberbullying) in the experimental group over time, while a stability of these behaviors was found in the control group.

Data were collected across 3 waves (pre-, middle- and post-test). Latent Class Analysis identified specific subgroups of students at risk for bullying and victimization in the first data collection. Following the literature in the area, predictors for bullying were: provictim attitudes, moral disengagement, affective and cognitive empathy. Predictors for victimization were: coping strategies, perceived social support, avoidance and peer social problems. Respectively for bullies and victims, 3 groups were found which can be labelled: low risk, average and high risk groups. The comparison of the 3 groups across time showed significant interactive effects of time by risk groups for the 4 outcome variables (bullying, cyberbullying, victimization and cybervictimization). In all cases the high risk groups started higher but decreased significantly at time 2 or 3, thus showing that the intervention was particularly beneficial for the high risk groups as compared to the average and low risk ones.

**Implications:** Our study shows how the dynamic interplay of processes and factors across time and contexts can be highly relevant to explain resilience across development.

### **PRESENTATION 3: Exploring the determinants of bystander intervention using a developmental intergroup approach**

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**Background:** Bystander intervention in school bullying is highly effective in stopping a bullying incident. Studies have showed that while almost half of the children indicate they would intervene if they witnessed a bullying episode, in less than 20% of the bullying incidents bystanders actually intervene. Several important predictors have already been identified in explaining a bystander's decision whether or not to intervene in a bullying incident, such as self-efficacy, attitude, perceived personal responsibility, moral disengagement, and victim blaming. However, these determinants are from an individual perspective and do not take into account the group processes, such as ingroup identification and favoritism, which are of importance in explaining bystander intervention in more heterogeneous communities consisting of majority and minority group members (e.g., multicultural schools), identified by religion and ethnicity. The current study takes into account such group processes by integrating a developmental intergroup approach within the traditional bystander intervention model to examine bystander intervention in bias-based bullying incidents.

**Research questions:** What mechanisms explain bystander intervention during a bias-based bullying incident? What is the role of group status in explaining bystander intervention?

**Methods:** This survey study is part of a European project in which four countries (i.e., Scotland, Greece, Slovakia, and the Netherlands) collaborate to develop a serious game aimed at encouraging bystander intervention among children aged 10-12 years. Each country aims to include approximately 150 children in the study. Children are requested to fill in a questionnaire asking about theoretical and empirical based individual and group concepts related to bystander intervention, including their minority/majority group status, group identification, perceived social norm, perceived stigma by association, moral disengagement, perceived responsibility, attitude, and self-efficacy. Data will be analyzed using Structural Equation Modelling.

**Implications:** This study will provide us with valuable information on how personal and group characteristics encourage majority and minority status children to actively intervene in defense of victims of bias-based bullying. The findings about important determinants explaining biased-based bullying will be used for the development of an anti-prejudice bullying videogame, suitable for majority and minority group children.

## PRESENTATION 4: Cyberbullying & Resilience: The Role of Online Social Competencies

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**Background:** Due to the expansion and differentiation of social media platforms and (mobile) communication technologies in the last decade, adolescents' media-based and social practices have increasingly conglomerated. Previous research, for a long time, has stressed that online social interactions can have positive and negative consequences on individuals' psychosocial development. Taking up a risk-orientated perspective, an array of studies have shown that the way especially youngsters interact with others online might influence their likelihood of becoming involved in negative experiences such as cyberbullying or other forms of online harassment. For example, especially among girls, an intensive use of social online media and experimental social online behavior was found to be related with more cyberbullying experiences as perpetrator and victim (Festl & Quandt, 2016).

**Research questions:** Looking at resilience factors, protecting young users from negative online experiences such as cyberbullying, it thus seems to be necessary to put the focus on these social media-based interactions taking place in nowadays digitalized worlds. In the presentation, I will therefore discuss the role of Online Social Competencies as important part of adolescents' overall media literacy and as (possible) protection factors against cyberbullying experiences.

**Methods:** Based on an integrative model of media literacy with three superordinate dimensions (expertise, self-competences & social competences; Riesmeyer et al., 2016), first a systematization of relevant Online Social Competencies (OSC) among youths was developed consisting of four content-based subdimensions: (1) *participatory competences* on how to act with and treat others online, (2) *moral competences* on how to refer one's online behavior to social values and norms, (3) *communicative competences* on how to talk with others about online contents or experiences, and (4) *educational competencies* on how to pass along online knowledge and to show others how to use the Internet. In a next step, a standardized self-report measure of OSC was established, comprising the four content-based dimensions and three process-based components of competence (knowledge, behavioral motivation, abilities) as well as the youngsters' actual behavior. Partly based on previous measures (Müller et al., 2014; Zylka et al., 2015), 64 items were developed, four items covering each of the 16 constructs (e.g., participatory knowledge, communicative motivation, educational abilities etc.). In a pilot study, a sample of 1.508 pupils from seven German schools ( $\bar{x}$  14 years, 66% females) filled out a paper-based questionnaire. The descriptive results showed that adolescents indicated rather high levels of participatory and moral competence, while communicative and educational knowledge, motivation, abilities and behavior were clearly less pronounced.

**Implications:** Some first analyses have confirmed that a participatory-moral online behavior might be explained differently than a communicative or educational social behavior. The former, for example, was found to be less pronounced among individuals that reported high levels of (online) communication pressure in their peer group. It can be expected that especially high participatory and moral online competences might be relevant protection factor mediating the relationship between individual features, online use aspects and adolescents' cyberbullying involvement. These links needs to be proven in future research.