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## *Chapter 10*

# **THE ADOLESCENT-PARENT CONTEXT AND POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE ECOLOGY OF CYBERBULLYING**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

An increasingly serious concern for many youth negotiating the normative challenges of adolescence involves the threat of cyberbullying. A full understanding of the dynamics of cyberbullying and the development of effective interventions requires an appreciation of the contributions of the multiple contexts, or the ecology of cyberbullying, including the family, the peer group, the school, and the neighborhood/community (Barboza et al., 2009; Espelage & Swearer 2011). Given the centrality of school experiences and peer relationships in the lives of adolescents, considerable attention has been directed at the school and peer context of cyber bullying (Barboza 2015). Much less research attention, however, has been directed towards the equally powerful and relevant family context of both face-to-face and cyberbullying.

With reference to the role of the family context in cyberbullying, it is useful to recognize that many adolescents participate in multiple microsystems involving interpersonal contact that includes in-person interactions (e.g., school, family or peer based), virtual contact (e.g., social media, not location specific), or some combination of both. In turn, understanding the dimensions of both the virtual experience of adolescent participation in social media and the adolescent participation in the family context are relevant to understanding and preventing cyberbullying victimization in a variety of interpersonal interactions.

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Using the ecological perspective to bullying as a guiding framework (Barboza, Schiamberg et al., 2009; Espelage and Swearer 2011), this chapter will focus on the adolescent-parent relationship as the immediate and focal context (i.e., the microsystem) of cyberbullying (Veenstra et al., 2007). A review of research will in turn examine the critical dimensions of that context in relation to cyberbullying, including: (a) social factors and social media, which frame the adolescent parent context, (b) characteristics of the microsystem participants - adolescents and parents, (c) factors which influence the quality of the adolescent-parent relationship, and (d) contributions of contexts of adolescent experience beyond the adolescent-parent microsystem. The latter includes research connecting bullying and cyberbullying to the presence/absence of resources and developmental assets (e.g., individual characteristics and connection to external supports, including the family and community resources), frequently associated with Positive Youth Development (PYD) (Benson et al., 2004; Lerner et al., 2005 ).

## **A SOCIAL FRAMEWORK FOR ADOLESCENT-PARENT RELATIONSHIPS**

Rapid advances in communication technology (e.g., the continuing evolution of cell phones, and computers) lends importance to developing a comprehensive yet somewhat fluid definition of cyberbullying. This is essential given the multiple ways that cyberbullying is defined (and reported), in turn complicating the accuracy of comparisons of the prevalence and correlates of cyberbullying across different studies. Other factors which inform the challenge of defining cyberbullying include the following: (a) the variation in age, gender, and other demographic characteristics across the samples studied, and (b) the need to sort out the elements of a cyberbullying definition which are shared/not shared with definitions of traditional face-to-facebullying.

## **PREVALENCE OF CYBERBULLYING**

According to Aricak (2008), in the U.S., 91% of 58,273,000 children under the age of 18 are computer users, and 59% are Internet users. Twenty three percent of preschoolers (who are younger than five years old) were reported to be Internet users as well. Almost 8 out of 10 adolescents connect to the Internet from their home (Mason 2008; Lenhart, Madden & Rainie 2006). According to Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, and Coulter (2012), 93% of teens are active Internet users and 75% own a cell phone, up from 45% in 2004. Therefore, cyberbullying can be considered invisible because of its potential to harass victims outside of the classroom and school campuses.

With statistics such as these, it is not surprising that the rates for cyberbullying are alarming. For example, in a study involving 3,767 students in the U.S., 11% of respondents were victims of cyberbullying, 7% were cyberbullies -cybervictims, and 4% were cyberbullies, at least once over the previous several months (Kowalski and Limber, 2007). Approximately half of the victims had no knowledge of the identity of the cyberbully. As well, the data indicated that 53.2% of respondents indicated that the cyberbully was from their school and 37% reported that the cyberbully was their friend. In a 2007 panel study involving

13-17 year olds, 43% had experienced cyberbullying in the previous year (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor 2007). Hinduja and Patchin (2008) found that over 32% of boys and 36% of girls have been the victims of cyberbullying. A study by i-SAFE (2004) on 1,500 U.S. students in grades 4 through 8 found that 42% of students reported being bullied while online, and one in four reported that this happened on more than one occasion. Fifty-eight percent indicated that another person said mean or hurtful things to them online, with more than four in ten indicating that this happened more than once. Taken together, these results point to a disturbing prevalence of cyberbullying.

As might be expected, being online is associated with the likelihood of cyberbullying. In a study of 384 individuals under the age of 18, 11% reported bullying others while online and 29% reported being the victim of online bullying (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006). Cyberbullying was most prevalent in chat rooms along with text messaging and e-mail. As well, while online, 50% reported that they felt that they were not respected, 30% reported being called names, 21.4% reported being threatened by others, 19.8% reported being humiliated, and 18.8% reported having rumors spread about them. Results of another study with adolescent girls found that 68% of the time the bully was a friend or an acquaintance whom they knew from school while 28% of the time the bully was from a chat room (Burgess-Procter, Patchin & Hinduja 2008). Thirty six percent of the students in Ybarra, Diener-West and Leaf's (2007) nationally-representative sample reported that they were concurrently subjected to traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Higher rates were found by Juvonen and Gross (2008), with as many as 85% of adolescents who experienced cyber bullying were also victims of traditional bullying at school.

Likewise, Li (2006) found in a sample of 264 Canadian junior high school students, that one in four of these students had been cyberbullied and almost half of the students knew someone who was being bullied. Li (2006) also found that 54% of the students were victims of face-to-face bullying and over a quarter of them had been cyberbullied. One in three students had bullied others in traditional bullying, and almost 15% had bullied others using electronic communication tools. In the U.K., a study found that one in four 11 to 19 year olds reported that they had been the victim of cyberbullying (NCH, 2002). The most common medium through which cyberbullying was perpetrated was via text messaging on cell phones (NCH, 2006). Furthermore, a survey conducted by the National Crime Prevention Council found that of the more than 40% of U.S. teenagers who were cyber bullied, only about 10% told their parents about their experience (UPI, 2008).

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF CYBERBULLYING: INFLUENCE ON THE ADOLESCENT-PARENT MICROSYSTEM**

Bullying is seen as intentional behavior that causes repeated harm to another individual. The victim of the bullying finds it difficult to defend himself or herself (Olweus 1993; Slonje, Smith & Frisen 2013). The advancement in technology has resulted in a transformation of bullying from the physical world to the virtual world (Ang & Goh 2010; Appel, Stiglbauer, Batimic & Holtz 2014; Aricak et al., 2008; Beale & Hall 2007; Beran & LI 2007; Rideout, Foehr & Roberts 2010). Traditional bullying stops at school. In the case of cyberbullying, the bullying occurs in cyberspace and through technological devices. Cyberbullying can follow a

victim home via his or her cell phone and computer (Strom & Strom 2005). Cyberbullying uses the Internet and other technology willfully as a medium to transmit harm and discomfort intentionally and repeatedly at a specific person, group, or persons (Jones, Mitchell & Finkelhor 2013; Li & Ang 2012; Ybarra & Mitchell 2004; Ybarra, Diener-West & Leaf 2007). It includes negative behaviors, such as lying, threatening, teasing, insulting, and displaying others' pictures without their consent in virtual settings (Belsey 2005; Monks, Robinson & Worlidge 2012; Sakeyarion, Carroll & Houghton 2012; Williams & Guerra 2007). In traditional bullying, school administrators and teachers are considered to be the regulators of bullying (Holt & Keyes 2004). This is not the case in cyberbullying as the Internet is used because it provides a sense of anonymity to the perpetrators and, as well, there is limited monitoring by adults and parents. The use of technology reduces the sensitivity an individual has toward others in his or her surroundings.

### **Three Components of Face-to-Face Bullying Shared with Cyberbullying**

There are many different definitions of cyberbullying in the literature, and many of these definitions come from the traditional bullying definitions. All of the definitions, however, share the common component of repetition of harm, hostility, and aggression that is directed toward the victim, via an electronic device or through the Internet (Tokunaga 2010). The definition of traditional bullying has three components: repetition of the harmful behavior, a power imbalance between the bully and his or her victim, and intent to harm. These three components are also evident in cyberbullying. However, the anonymity and pervasiveness of cyberbullying makes the detection of each of these components more difficult. The repetition of harmful behavior represents acts of cyberbullying that might spiral out of control, due to the technology used. Repetition is difficult to operationalize in cyberbullying. For example, if a picture is uploaded online, that picture can be distributed by other people. Repetition is created through the ongoing humiliation resulting from the embarrassing picture (Dooley et al. 2009; Fauman 2008; Leishman 2005). In the context of cyberbullying, this refers to an individual's greater knowledge of technology, Internet, and computers (Smith et al., 2008; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput 2008). Power can also come in the form of the anonymity of the Internet. It is more difficult for the victim to respond effectively if he or she does not know the bully's identity (Raskauskas 2010; Slonje & Smith 2008). Finally, Dooley, Pyzalski, and Cross (2009) state that the victim can feel powerless because the material that is posted online can be hard or impossible to remove. The victim is harmed psychologically, emotionally, and/or socially. Also, the behaviors must involve psychological torment and be carried out with harmful or malicious intent (Dehue, Bolman & Vollink 2008).

### **The Dynamic Features of Cyberbullying and the Adolescent-Parent Relationship**

In addition, three features of cyberbullying, including anonymity, asynchronicity, and accessibility, pose advantages for cyberbullies, increasing risks for victims of cyberbullying and, in turn, challenges the adolescent-parent relationship as a source of support and prevention of cyberbullying. Anonymity refers to the absence of in-person audiovisual

information (e.g., nonverbal cues) in communication and/or to the possible absence of cyberbully identity and, therefore, the source of cyberbully statements. In turn, such anonymity is a source of cyberbully advantage and power. Cyberbully power is derived, not from having an in-person physical or psychological advantage, as in traditional bullying, but rather through their technological competence and their ability to hide their identity while online. Their ability to hide their identity provides cyberbullies with a safe haven, in turn not having to be bear the consequences of cyberbullying. Cyberbullies often engaged in cyberbullying because they knew that there would be no consequences resulting from their cyberbullying behavior (Holtz & Appel 2011; Lee & Chae 2007; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput 2008). Anonymous cyberbullies can transmit a personal attack in seconds (Garringer 2008). As Cooper (2004, p. 1) states, “the Internet has unleashed its dark side, an underground adolescent world of spite and vengeance. It is the bathroom wall moved into everybody’s bedroom.” Asynchronicity refers to the time allowed to respond to messages posted online. Because messages and posts to the Internet can remain online indefinitely and individuals can respond to these posts whenever they want, perhaps even days, weeks, or months after the post has been made; this lack of synchrony allows bullies the chance to post hurtful information at any time that they wish. Accessibility refers to the Internet users who have varied interests, age, and social backgrounds (Appel et al., 2014). Thus, in addition to anonymity, variation in age and differences in using the Internet may be affected by interests and social backgrounds, further compounding the problem of cyberbullying (Barr 2005).

Anonymity, asynchronicity, and accessibility can lead to adolescents feeling less conscious and apprehensive about their physical appearance, giving them greater confidence that they will not be discovered and punished for being cyberbullies (Beale & Hall 2007; Berson & Berson 2005, Slater & Tiggemann 2010). This is particularly the case for adolescent girls. That said, these three characteristics can also pose risks for adolescent development, such as increases in adolescents’ verbal aggression (Anderson & Bushman 2002). Cyberbullies have been found to be less inhibited in saying things to another person that they would never say face-to-face (Keith & Martin 2005; Sparling, 2004). Also, these three characteristics might allow easy access to sexual and/or violent content that is now readily accessible (Baumgartner, Valkenburg, & Peter 2010). In fact, Englander and Muldowney (2007) label cyberbullying as an “opportunistic offense,” because it results in harm without any physical interaction, may not require a lot of planning time, and the anonymity of the Internet reduces the chances that the cyberbully will be caught.

## **Cyberbullying As Covert Bullying**

There are two broad types of how bullying is classified, and these types are based on how the bullying behavior is displayed. Researchers classify bullying according to whether it is overt or covert. Direct bullying refers to harassing others through direct (overt) physical or verbal attacks. Examples include hitting and pushing. Indirect bullying is also referred to as relational bullying. It is a covert form of bullying. Covert bullying creates harm by destroying the victim’s social relationships. Some examples of covert bullying include gossiping, spreading rumors, name calling, and excluding a person from their social group (Aricak 2008; Beran 2006; Bjorkqvist, Lagerspatz & Kaukiainen 1992; Coyne, Archer & Eslea 2006; Ma 2001).

Since cyberbullying is characterized by an absence of direct confrontation, it is best considered covert (indirect) bullying. If true, this tends to explain why girls, who might be less confrontational in face-to-face contexts, may feel less inhibited when online, because they can use the anonymity of the Internet to manipulate others (Ang & Goh 2010; Belsey 2004). Despite these dynamic features that distinguish cyberbullying from face-to-face, or traditional bullying, some researchers suggest that cyberbullying is not qualitatively different from traditional bullying. They argue that instead online harassment is merely an extension of bullying in face-to-face contexts (Li, 2006). For example, Hinduja and Patchin (2010) found that 65% of cyberbullying victims were also victims of traditional bullying. Seventy-seven percent of cyberbullies also reported being involved in traditional bullying.

## ADOLESCENT-PARENT MICROSYSTEM

### Adolescent Characteristics

#### *Bullies, Victims and Bully-Victims*

As indicated, defining cyberbullying is challenging due to difficulties in identifying repetitive behavior and in measuring power imbalances as they occur online. However, individuals who are involved in bullying are frequently divided into three distinct groups: bullies, victims, and bully-victims. Based on the responses of 3,767 middle school students in grades 6-8 in U.S. schools, Kowalski, Limber and Agatston (2008) found that 21% of students were identified as victims, 13% as bullies, 18% as bully-victims, and 48% as non-involved students. Bully-victims reported the highest percentages of simultaneously being a cybervictim (36%) and a cyberbully (23%).

Bullies are those who initiate aggressive behaviors with others. They are usually stronger than their peers and strive to achieve certain goals, such as control over others (Hazler, Carney, Green, Powell & Jolly 1997). Adolescent bullies have high emotionality and low self-control (Juvonen, Graham & Shuster 2003; Pellegrini et al., 1999). Traits, such as delinquency and aggressive behavior, are associated with being a bully in the traditional sense (Perren & Alsaker 2006). According to Piskin (2002), bullies come from families where physical punishment is used and there is little parental warmth and involvement. Victims are the opposite, they are the subject of the bullies' harassment, suffer from low self-esteem, and are usually physically weaker than their peers. Victims who are often targeted might be overweight, small in size, or have a learning disability (Willard 2005). Victims usually come from families where parents and family members might be overprotective (Piskin 2002). Being a traditional victim is associated with internalizing problems, such as depression and somatic symptoms (Arsenault et al., 2006). Traits associated with being a bully-victim are linked with both internalizing and externalizing problems (Haynie et al., 2001; Iverson, Broberg, Arvidsson & Gillberg 2005). Recently, there has been a surge in "cyberbullicides" - suicide that is directly or indirectly influenced by an individual's experiences with online aggression/bullying (Hinduja & Patchin 2010).

Victims might also attempt to retaliate through technology, because it is not as intimidating as face-to-face confrontations. Therefore, cyberbullying becomes a means of self-protection (Beran & Li 2007). Finally, bully-victims are those individuals who bully their

peers and who are also bullied by their peers (Espelage & Swearer 2003). Children bullied in cyberspace may also bully others in cyberspace. Children bullied in school are also at risk of being bullied online. According to Patchin and Hinduja (2006), life in cyberspace is often intertwined with life in the real world. Many adolescents spend their daytime hours with friends at school and public places. At night, they “see” their friends via chat, Facebook, and other social media sites. Whatever is discussed on these sites is talked about in the day, and vice versa. Technology has advanced so much that there is now no separation between the online and the offline worlds. According to Schneider et al. (2012), one third to more than three quarters of adolescents who are bullied online are also bullied while offline.

### **Individual Behaviors Characterizing Cyberbullying**

The impact of cyberbullying may vary depending on the type of cyberbullying that the victim experiences (Calvete, Orve, Estevez, Villardon & Padilla 2010; Slonje et al., 2013). In interpreting the impact of cyberbullying, several major factors emerge as possible explanations for the impact of cyberbullying, including the social media involved and the specific actions or behaviors transmitted via social media. Some researchers have categorized cyberbullying as typically occurring in two primary social media venues--- the Internet and via cell phones (Ortega et al., 2009). The use of smart phones, however, makes it possible to send and receive e-mails on the cell phone and also to use the Internet beyond simply sending and receiving e-mails.

The technological transformation enabling the integrated use of Internet and cell phones has further increased attention to the specific actions or types of communication through which cyberbullying is perpetrated. Willard (2006) described eight categories: flaming (i.e., sending angry, rude, or vulgar messages to someone), online harassment (i.e., repeatedly sending angry, rude, or vulgar messages), denigration (i.e., put-downs, harmful, untrue, or cruel statements), cyber stalking (i.e., harassment that includes threats of harm or is highly intimidating), masquerading (i.e., pretending to be someone else and posting material that makes another person look bad), outing/trickery (i.e., engaging in tricks to get embarrassing information about a person and then making the information public), exclusion (i.e., intentionally excluding a person from a social group), and bombing (i.e., the cyberbully uses an automated program to cause the victim’s e-mail to fail and to block the victim’s e-mail account) (Bhat 2008; Burgess-Proctor, Patchin & Hinduja 2008).

Furthermore, all of these categories of communication are possible regardless of the medium through which cyberbullying occurs (e.g., through cell phone or Internet). To illustrate, Rivers and Noret (2010) described the contents of abusive text messages and e-mails. The ten major categories that they developed included: threat of physical violence, name calling, hate-related and abusive statements, death threats, description or portrayal of sexual acts, demands/instructions, and threats to the victim’s home or family and to their existing relationships. Similarly, Huang and Chou (2010) studied the types of cyberbullying behaviors across victims and bullies. For both victims and bullies, the most commonly reported behaviors involved threats and harassment, followed by making jokes, and then spreading rumors.

The face of cyberbullying has been changing. For example, smart phones are being used to check e-mail as well as to access the Internet. Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter,

have gained popularity, allowing for communication involving the public posting of information such as photographs, with abundant opportunity for comments by others as well as anonymity. Texting via the Internet has emerged as another communication venue involving the need for brief statements, accompanied by the evolution of a new vocabulary. This new terminology not only points to increased opportunities for cyberbullying but, as well, to increased need for responsible behavior and prevention strategies. Additional examples of such new terminology include “sexting” (circulation of sexual images without the victim’s consent), “trolling” (persistent abusive comments made online), and “griefing” (harassing someone in an online game). In short, the continued evolution of technological media has created opportunities for enhanced cyberbullying with devastating potential consequences.

### **Gender Differences**

While some studies points to traditional or face-to-face bullying perpetrated primarily by men and boys (Beake & Scott 2001; Boutlon & Underwood 1992; Forero, McLellan, Rissel, & Baum 1999; Jolliffe & Farrington 2006; Sourander, Helstela, Helenius & Piha 2000), gender differences in cyberbullying are inconsistent. Some studies have find no gender differences between boys and girls, as perpetrator or as victim, while other evidence suggests that girls are more likely to be cybervictims and use psychological techniques of tormenting victims ( Rivers & Noret, 2010). Other studies suggest that males engaged in cyberbullying more frequently than females (Calvete et al., 2010; Fanti et al., 2012; Harman, Hansen, Cochran and Lindsey, 2005; Li, 2006; Salmivalli and Poyhonen, 2012; Smith et al., 2008). However, while males reported more engagement in cyberbullying compared to females, females engaged in face-to-face indirect bullying and relational aggression more frequently (Anderson & Strum 2007; Crick & Grotpeter 1995; Hara 2002). One possible explanation for this is that girls tend to have more close-knit relationships and boys tend to socialize in larger groups with less sharing of personal details. In other studies, such as Dehue et al. (2008), boys (18.6%) were found to be more likely to be cyberbullies compared to girls (13.4%). Li (2006) studied 264 junior high school students in Canada and found that 55.6% of males and 54.5% of females were aware of cyberbullying. Twenty-five percent of males and 25.6% of females reported being victims of cyberbullying. Other researchers have found no gender differences between boys and girls in the rates of cyberbullying (Williams & Guerra 2009). The inconsistency of findings for gender differences in cyberbullying is largely the result of different samples and methodologies often using different types of cyberbullying.

### **Gender and Suicidal Ideation**

Suicidal ideation is especially salient if social acceptance is vital to an adolescent’s identity and self-esteem. Being cyberbullied can have devastating effects on a victim’s psychological, emotional, and social well-being (Patchin & Hinduja 2006). In Roland’s (2002) study of 1,838 Norwegian eighth graders, boys who were the victims of cyberbullying had suicidal ideation 2.5 times more than non-bullied boys. Bullied girls had suicidal ideation that was 4.2 times more than non-bullied girls. The boy bullies suffered from suicidal ideation



3.8 times more than the non-bullies, and the girl bullies suffered from suicidal ideation 8 times more than the non-bullies. Cyberbullying makes the feeling of unhappiness even worse in the victim's mind (Hinduja & Patchin 2009). Hinduja and Patchin (2009) found that youth who bullied others at age 8 were more likely to have suicidal thoughts at age 18 compared to non-bullies. There are many reasons why such negative outcomes befall bullies and their victims, including the following: (a) the preservation of computer-based messages that are stored on web sites and search engines; (b) the ease and freedom through which hurtful statements can be made; (c) the difficulty identifying the bully, difficulty proving that cyberbullying occurred, and the challenge of determining appropriate punishment; (d) the possibility of cyberbullying extending beyond the classroom and school, minimizing the input of teachers; (e) the advancement of technology and its use by growing numbers of adolescents and young adults.

## Age

Adolescence is a phase in life in which there is massive growth in social relationships outside of the immediate family (Giordano 2003). Interactions with their peers helps adolescents to refine their socio-emotional skills, to take different perspectives, and to consider intimate relationships (Crosnoe 2000; Rubin, Bukowski & Parker 1998). However, their expanding social circle also exposes them to risk, such as cyber bullying and harassment.

Cyberbullying, however, is not restricted by age and can occur from elementary school to the college years. For example, in a study of fifth, eighth, and eleventh graders, fifth graders were found to experience the least victimization rate (only 4.5% of their fifth grade sample were cyberbullied), eighth graders seemed to be at the peak of cyberbullying experiences (12.9%), and cyberbullying rates for eleventh graders dropped during high school (9.9%) (Williams and Guerra, 2007). Similarly, Tokunaga (2010) found that the greatest incidence of cyberbullying occurs around the seventh and eighth grades (around 13-15 years of age). Cyberbullying tends to decrease after late adolescence (Sevcikova & Smahel 2009).

## PARENT CHARACTERISTICS/BEHAVIORS AND CYBERBULLYING

There is a lack of research on parents and how they influence their adolescents' risk of being involved in cyberbullying (Mesch 2009). There is evidence from some researchers that positive parent-child relationships may help to decrease the likelihood of cyberbullying (Ybarra & Mitchell 2004). This applies to both Asian and Western adolescent samples. In the field of digital media use, the most common question is the role that parents play in minimizing the risks that come with online technology. This is termed parental mediation, and the literature has focused on TV and its influence on children. According to Nathanson and Cantor (2000), there are two areas of parenting strategies: (a) active mediation, which involves talking with adolescents about the Internet, and (b) restrictive mediation, which involves setting rules and regulations. Of the two, Nathanson (1999; 2002) and Nathanson

and Cantor (2000) have found that active mediation yields more positive results compared to regulating and restricting adolescents' media usage.

### **Parental Monitoring**

Implications of parental monitoring are an important element cyberbullying. In a study of U.S. parents' and adolescents' online behaviors, adolescents whose parents monitored their children's online behavior tended to be more cautious in disclosing such personal identifying information as their name or e-mail address (Rosen, 2007). Other evidence suggests that giving out personal information, visiting inappropriate sites, and total amount of time spent online was lower for the adolescents whose parents had specific rules that limited their online activities Beebe, Asche and Harrison, 2004).

Due to the anonymity and accessibility of the Internet, however, parents' restriction of their children's media usage has been shown to be ineffective. This is because Internet activities might occur outside of parents' control. Also, young people and parents relate differently to technology (Keith & Belsey 2004; Martin 2005). That is, adults view computers as practical tools, whereas children and adolescents view the Internet and technology as a "lifeline" to their peers (i-SAFE 2004; Keith & Martin 2005). Sites, such as Facebook and chat rooms, might be considered "safe" but they can contain very inappropriate material (Mesch 2009; Shin & Huh 2011). Communication between parents and their adolescents can facilitate awareness of cyberbullying and possible resources to cope with these Internet stressors (Appel, Holtz, Stiglauer & Batinic 2012). For example, in a study of 363 secondary school German adolescents, the quality of Internet-related communication with their parents mattered (Appel et al., 2014). Adolescents who did not have or engage in this type of communication had an increase in verbal aggression over a six-month period. Those who had high levels of communication had the reverse relationship. The reluctance of students to disclose cyberbullying to their parents is because some parents view physical bullying as more serious and harmful than verbal and indirect bullying and are less likely to intervene in cyberbullying cases (Aftab 2005; Barr 2005; Dehue Bolman & Vollink 2008).

### **Parental Communication**

In general most adolescents do not talk to their parents about their online experiences, especially those that are stressful or annoying (Appel et al., 2014). Nine out of ten adolescents aged 12-17 years were found to not tell their parents about cyberbullying (Juvonen & Gross 2008), even in cases where the cyberbullying causes severe emotional distress. In Patchin and Hinduja's (2006) study, 56.6% of their sample responded to cyberbullying by telling an online friend. Even fewer (19.5%) told their parents and only 16.8% reported telling a sibling. In the popular press, a United Press International (UPI) study found that fewer than 10% of victims turned to their parents for help (UPI, 2008). In a similar finding, a study of 38 fifth through eighth graders found that children did not tell parents or other adults about their cyberbullying experiences because they felt that adults would not be able to identify the bully or to find evidence that cyberbullying occurred (Mishna, Saini, and Solomon, 2009). Other reasons included wanting to be independent, the fear that reporting the cyberbullying would

make the problem worse, or the adult would tell the victim to ignore it (Mishna et al., 2009). Similar findings can be found with Li (2006), who found that only 30% of adolescents disclosed their cyberbullying experience to an adult. As in the case of traditional bullying, the rates of disclosing to an adult are minimal.

Furthermore, there is evidence that adult monitoring of adolescent Internet usage is a relatively infrequent parent practice (Berson and Berson 2005; Ybarra and Mitchell 2004). This is likely a significant contributor to the at-risk behavior among adolescents. For example, Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) found that 30% of adolescents used the Internet for three or more hours per day. More than half of these adolescents reported poor parental monitoring, 7% reported that their parents knew where they were online, and 9% reported that their parents rarely knew who they were spending their time with outside of the home (Ybarra & Mitchell 2004). Interestingly, Odendaal, Malcolm, Savahl, and September (2006), in their study of 23 tenth graders between the ages of 14 to 16 years old, found that most of these students were not monitored by adults. Despite this, victims tend to trust their parents over school officials to help them find a solution to being cyberbullied.

Other factors that affect parent-adolescent communication on cyberbullying and other matters of adolescence include age, gender, and cultural experience. Both age and gender have already been discussed with reference to other aspects of cyberbullying, including prevalence and correlates (see above). That said, as students get older, they are less likely to confide in their parents or guardians about being cyberbullied (Cassidy, Jackson & Brown 2009). With reference to gender and cyberbullying victimization, Li (2006) found that female cyberbully victims were more likely to tell adults (including parents) if they had been cyberbullied. One possible explanation is that men/boys regard asking for help as putting themselves in a “one down” position (Tannen 1994).

With reference to cultural factors in cyberbullying communication, Li (2006) sampled 157 Canadian students and 202 Chinese students from China. She found that Chinese students were more likely than their Canadian counterparts to believe that adults in schools will try to fight cyberbullying. Also, Chinese students were more likely to tell adults about cyberbullying incidents. Cultural differences between China and Canada could account for these differences, in particular China’s emphasis on Confucianism, which posits that children should show respect to authority, including parents and teachers (Cole et al., 1997).

## **THE ADOLESCENT-PARENT RELATIONSHIP: CHARACTERISTICS AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY**

The past three decades has seen unprecedented interest in understanding the relationship between the socio-familial environment and childhood aggression. Few studies, however, have investigated the parent-child context as a proximal risk factor for the onset of bullying behaviors. The few studies that do tend to implicate family violence (Farrington 1993), specific parenting styles (Baldry & Farrington 2000), and the lack of parental monitoring (Roberts & Coursol 1996; Low & Espelage 2013) in the etiology of face-to-face and online victimization. These studies have emphasized the family’s role in modeling aggressive behaviors either directly, for example through family violence (Shields & Cicchetti 2001) and parental conflict (Baldry 2003), or indirectly by being part of a causal chain of risk factors for

bullying perpetration or victimization. This includes things such as living with a depressed parent, low levels of parental attachment, and the lack of cognitive stimulation (Beran & Violato 2004; Zimmerman, Glew, et al., 2005).

## **SOCIAL LEARNING AND ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**

According to social learning theory and social interaction learning theory, maladaptive and aggressive social interactions with peers originate in impaired and conflictual family dynamics (Patterson 1982; Patterson, Dishion & Bank 1984). Compared to children growing up in non-violent households, children exposed to violence are developmentally disadvantaged due to recurring health problems (Bowes et al., 2009) and posttraumatic stress (Kilpatrick & Williams 1998). The cumulative impact of violence exposure coupled with complex stressors and comorbidities that often accompany violence has been linked to the development of both internalizing and externalizing behaviors in children. Chronic exposure often culminates in what has been coined the ‘cycle of violence’ (Holt, Buckley & Whelan 2008). Generally speaking, face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying behaviors are consistent with social learning theory and the role of maladaptive socialization within the family context in promoting such behavior. The social interactions in the home are a critical source of origination for diverse forms of aggressive behavior (Low & Espelage 2013), including diverse forms of face-to-face and online abuse. Children living in families characterized by deficient parents are “mis-socialized” into acting aggressively either directly or indirectly. While few in number, studies have found a strong, positive relationship between domestic violence and bullying, thereby corroborating previous research suggesting that children who are exposed to family violence engage in higher levels of both generalized aggression and bullying (Bauer et al., 2006). In one study, for example, exposed youth were nearly three times more likely to partake in bullying and/or threatening other students at school and more than twice as likely to spread gossip or exclude others from participating in group activities (Baldry 2003).

Another type of family violence, abuse directed towards the child himself or herself, shows strong associations to online aggression. Children who witness domestic violence are more likely to be involved in bullying and/or victimization, even after controlling for the individual-level characteristics of age, gender, and other childhood adversities, such as the presence of child abuse or neglect. Child maltreatment has been shown to operate directly and indirectly to increase the likelihood of being a victim or perpetrator of bullying. Child victims of physical and sexual abuse, for example, have been shown to be more likely to engage in bullying or be victimized by peers (Bowes et al., 2009; Low & Espelage 2013). Being a victim of abuse may also be an intervening variable that manifests itself through internalizing behaviors in the causal chain from child mistreatment to aggression. For example, both childhood maltreatment and domestic violence have associations with childhood depression and anxiety, which in turn is a risk factor for bully victimization. It is possible, then, that a child’s individual traits act to confound the direct relation between socio-familial characteristics and the likelihood of being involved in bullying, but future research must be done to parse out the relative influences of each.

Drawing on an ecological perspective, Osofsky (2003) concludes that violence exposure is a prerequisite risk for future aggression but children must also come to view aggression as functional in their relationships and subsequently believe violence is an acceptable method of conflict resolution (Holt, Buckley & Whelan 2008). Children exposed to violence in the home often learn that violence is a normal way to be treated or respond to conflict and in turn become aggressive toward peers. In this regard, domestic violence is relevant for explaining aggressive behavior as learned phenomena whereby poor social skills moderate the relationship between violence exposure in the family and involvement in bullying. According to Lundy and Grossman (2005), the development and preservation of friendships at a critical developmental period is compromised by poorly developed social skills. They may either pick up on and react to aggressive cues in their interactions with other children and consequently be at risk of bullying or tune out from such cues and be at increased risk of being bullied (Bauer et al., 2006; Cunningham & Baker, 2004). One-third of Lundy and Grossman's (2005) sample of 4,636 children who were exposed to domestic violence were described as frequently aggressive, and one-fifth had difficulties adhering to the rules of the school, with the acting out, peer difficulties, sadness, and depression, frequently bringing them to the attention of the teachers. Deficient parenting impairs a child's social competence and consequently the ability to develop positive friendships, whereas parents who are involved in their children's lives and supervise them are instrumental in reducing aggressive behavior both within and outside of the family (Duman & Margolin 2007; Knutson, DeGarmo & Reid 2004; Mazefsky & Farell 2005).

### **EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION AND CHILD EXPOSURE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE**

On the basis of social learning theory and emotional dysregulation, children who are exposed to violence in the home are more likely to develop negative relationship patterns and model them with peers (Low & Espelage 2013). Concurring with this hypothesis, Graham-Bermann and Brescoll's (2000) research with 221 children between 6 and 12 years of age and their mothers found a direct relationship between the level of physical and emotional abuse of mothers and children's belief systems regarding the acceptability of violence in family interactions. Reflecting on family systems theory, these authors surmise that children in abusive families have internalized belief systems that are conditioned through acts of physical abuse. Taken together, these findings suggest that perceived parenting behaviors are in fact related to adolescents' engagement in cyberbullying. An important qualification, however, is that family context is neither monolithic nor does it exist in a cultural vacuum. A family's cultural values and belief systems underlie their social contexts and will govern online social interactions in much the same way they do face-to-face communications (Shapka & Law 2013).

While highly variable, a simplified way of understanding parenting styles is to view them in two dimensions: (a) how responsive are parents to the behavior of their children, and (b) how demanding are parents in limiting their bad behavior. The former dimension is characterized by warmth, support, acceptance, and affection, while the second refers to supervision, control, and monitoring (Baumrind 1991; Spera 2005), and both dimensions

include aspects of the child-parent relationship that are predictive of both face-to-face bullying (Baldry & Farrington 1998, Rigby 1996; Smith & Myron-Wilson 1998) and cyberbullying behaviors above and beyond violence exposure and parental conflict. Parents who interact with their children in a hostile, cold, and indifferent manner encourage their children to interact with others in a similar way, which affects the socialization of their children and may increase a child's likelihood of becoming a bully (Pontzer 2010). In an online environment, parenting styles are particularly important (Law et al., 2010). In this vein, research has found that children who cyberbully experience limited parental monitoring, stronger parental discipline, and a weaker emotional bond with their parents than children who do not cyberbully (Ybarra & Mitchell 2004; Wang, Ianotti & Nansel 2009; Wong 2010). For youths who are involved in traditional bullying and in cyberbullying, bullies, victims, and bully-victims report less responsiveness and demanding behaviors by parents than non-involved youths. Research findings have consistently found a negative association between authoritative parenting styles and both online and face-to-face bullying; simply put, unresponsive parents have children who exhibited higher levels of cyberbullying perpetration and cyberbullying victimization.

Due to parents' lack of sophistication or knowledge about technology, some have speculated that parents may feel uneasy about their adolescents' proclivity to engage in online activities (Livingstone 2002; Stanaland et al., 2009). Consequently, greater efforts to monitor and control their children's online activities (Smetana 2000) are frequently implemented. Children of parents with inadequate supervision, inconsistent discipline and lack affection and support are more likely to have children who engage in bullying behaviors. In contrast, when parenting is characterized as warm and consistent children display much lower levels of antisociality (Bacchini, Miranda & Affuso 2011; Brown, Arnold, Dobbs & Doctoroff 2007; Demetriou & Christodoulides, 2011; Getachew & Sintayehu, 2007; Knutson et al., 2004; Luyckx et al., 2011). However, Stattin and Kerr (2000) found that controlling and monitoring adolescents' Internet use was not associated with fewer reported incidences of cyberbullying. Similarly, Mesch (2009) found that parental use of restrictive mediation (limiting and controlling adolescent's online activities) was not effective for reducing reports of cyberbullying, but those that engaged in evaluative mediation (open discussion about the internet and the co-creation of rules) had children with less risk for exposure to cyberbullying. Adolescents who feel supported (Park, Kim & Cho 2008) and comfortable disclosing their online experiences to their parents were less likely to report engaging in online risk behaviors (Law et al. 2010; Shapka 2011). These findings are consistent with a larger body of work on the parental mediation of children's online behavior that was discussed above or the activities carried out by parents to protect their children from exposure to online dangers (Dehue et al., 2012). Research has shown that when parents closely monitor their children's online activities, they are less likely to disclose personal information, less likely to seek out inappropriate sites, and less likely to conduct chat conversations with strangers. Researchers posit that when parents do not engage in these practices, they indirectly promote aggression and victimization by dampening the social competencies of their children (Duman & Margolin 2007; Knutson et al., 2004; Mazefsky & Farell 2005; Pontzer 2010). Thus, it has been suggested that the lack of responsiveness and demanding behaviors of parents as role models impairs the social competence of both bullies and victims (Perren & Hornung 2005; Stevens et al., 2002).

This is especially true in the case of cyberbullying since peers and teachers, as possible role models, are frequently unaware that a child is a cyberbully or is being cyberbullied (Arıcak et al., 2008; Dehue et al., 2008).

## **SOCIALIZATION AND PARENTING STYLES**

The broader familial context, including the role of socialization and parenting styles, needs further investigation, given its relative dearth in the bullying literature. According to Low & Espelage (2013), the field would benefit from a deeper unraveling of family conflict in order to understand the potential additive and synergistic role of violence and conflict in the family. Nevertheless, the current research suggests several points of prevention and intervention of aggressive online behaviors. First, a holistic and ecological approach would integrate family and individual levels, as well as negative outcomes of family violence and poor parental practices to better unravel their role in developing social competencies (e.g., positive assertiveness, empathy) and emotion management. These programs should also consider cultural underpinnings associated with parenting styles and in particular the cultural values that create vulnerability to cyberbully victimization or perpetration. This includes a consideration of gender and race/ethnicity since subgroup differences exist with respect to both family violence and parental treatment of children.

## **THE FAMILY CONTEXT AND CONTEXTS BEYOND THE FOCAL ADOLESCENT-PARENT RELATIONSHIP: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND INTERVENTION**

An effective adolescent parent relationship is both a potential venue for reducing cyberbullying, a powerful asset for promoting positive adolescent development and a basis for preventing or reducing cyberbullying. In fact, it has become increasingly apparent that many existing programs for reducing standard bullying and quite possibly cyberbullying, end up emphasizing dimensions of positive youth development, including the enhancement of adaptive individual characteristics and individual connection to positive family and community resources.

This points to the importance of an ecological perspective to prevention and reduction of cyberbullying, directed at the multiple ecological contexts of cyberbullying, including the family and contexts beyond the family (including the community/neighborhood or the school). Building on existing models of traditional or face-to-face bullying emphasizing the bi-focal bully-victim relationship as the basic microsystem context of bullying (Barboza et al., 2009; Espelage & Swearer 2011; Veenstra et al., 2007), an enhanced ecological approach to policy and intervention, for both in traditional bullying and cyberbullying, includes a Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework (Lerner et al., 2005). Specifically, an emphasis on adolescent internal assets (e.g., competence, caring, connection) and external assets (e.g., family, school, community) in honing and shaping internal assets essential for Positive Youth Development (PYD) are, in turn, essential for preventing/reducing both traditional and cyberbullying as well (Theokas & Lerner 2006).

## THE ECOLOGY OF BULLYING AND POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT (PYD)

### The Ecology of Bullying

Using the bully-victim relationship as the focal context of both face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying, ecological models have been developed which provide a basis for understanding the dynamic character of bullying as a contextual phenomenon (Barboza et al., 2009; Espelage & Swearer 2011; Veenstra et al., 2007). Barboza et al. (2009) examined risk factors of bullying for a sample of adolescents, ages 11-14 ( $N = 9,816$ ), from *Health Behavior in School Children: WHO Cross National Survey*. The study modeled the relationship between bullying and media effects, peer relationships, family support networks, and self-efficacy, supporting the significant role played by contexts within and beyond the bully-victim relationship. Many of these individual characteristics and contextual supports, including the family, are associated with constructive PYD positive youth developmental outcomes, which, in turn, provided evidence-based support for some existing and future directions in prevention, remediation, and policies for both traditional bullying and cyberbullying.

### Incorporating Positive Youth Development (PYD)

The incorporation of positive youth development (PYD) is particularly relevant as it underlies the internal and external assets of PYD which are the very goals of many existing and effective bullying and cyberbullying programs. From a PYD framework, positive individual assets or adaptive individual characteristics are frequently described as the 5C's (Benson, Mannes, Pittman & Ferher 2004). These internal assets include the following (5C's): *competence* (intellectual ability/social behavioral skills), *connection* (positive bonds with people and institutions), *character* (integrity and moral centeredness), *confidence* (positive self-regard, self-efficacy, courage), and *caring/compassion* (empathy, sense of social justice). When all 5Cs are present, *contribution to civil society* (i.e., youth actions in support of social institutions and other individuals) is made more likely (Lerner et al., 2000). These internal assets are made possible by, and occur in the context of, external assets in the form of *support* (e.g., positive family support/communication, other adult relationships, a caring community, positive/caring school climate), *empowerment* (e.g., community values youths as resources), *clear expectations/boundaries communicated in context* (e.g., family has clear rules, schools communicate rules and expectations, positive peer influences, available adult role models), and *constructive use of time* (youth programs, creative activities).

While most research on bullying has focused on the negative indicators and outcomes of adolescent bullies and victims, more recent studies have taken a strength-based approach to bullies and victims of bullying (Hilliard, Bowers, Greenman, Hershberg, Geldhof, Glickman, Lerner & Lerner 2014; Ma, Phelps, Lerner & Lerner 2009a; Ma, Phelps, Lerner & Lerner 2009b). For example research on moral virtues compared the trajectories of moral character (e.g., doing the right thing, staying out of trouble), performance character (e.g., persistence, self-discipline, self-regulation), and civic character (e.g., leadership, helping, service) by



bullying status (e.g., bullies, victims, and adolescents not involved in bullying) from middle school to high school (Hilliard et al., 2014). Adolescents who reported being bullies and being victims had lower levels of moral and civic character while bullies reported higher levels of performance than youths who did not experience bullying. Although there was individual variability in these character virtue trajectories, the general study findings suggest potential opportunities for maximizing on character virtues for bullies and victims at, or even earlier than, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade level and, including the potential redirection of increased bully performance character in positive and more constructive directions.

Other studies focusing on PYD are also illustrative of opportunities for tapping individual internal assets and community and family external assets in the social ecology of youth involved in bullying. Ma et al. (2009a) focused on the interplay of expectations for school success, and they found that engagement in school encouraged academic competence in youth Grades 5 - 7. In a related study, Ma and colleagues (2009b) found that both teacher and parent support independently predicted the PYD individual asset of academic competence for both bullies and victims in grades 5<sup>th</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup>. It is important to keep in mind the importance of individual differences in trajectory patterns such that the development of positive characteristics does not automatically imply that negative and problematic behaviors such as bullying will be eliminated (Hilliard et al., 2014). This means that strength-based efforts to diminish cyberbullying, specifically the promotion of PYD, needs to be included, in a comprehensive effort, with programs designed to specifically eliminate or prevent cyberbullying (e.g., teaching about cyber security).

## **THE ROLE OF FAMILY IN CYBERBULLYING INTERVENTIONS**

The nature and quality of the parent-adolescent relationship provides a critical ecological context for understanding both the dynamics of cyberbullying victimization and, in turn, for developing effective intervention and prevention strategies. However, there is limited research on the critical details of this vital role, particularly in adolescent social media involvement and effective parental responses. There is some agreement that involving families as either the primary adolescent asset in an intervention or as part of a comprehensive community effort including community/neighborhood or school resources may be useful in reducing cyberbullying. While such programs appear to have had some level of success in combating cyberbullying, it is not clear exactly how the dynamics of the adolescent-parent relationship create outcomes which may successfully reduce cyber bullying.

A recent investigation using data from a Pew study which involved telephone interviews of a representative sample of adolescents aged 12-17 and their parents examined the relationship of youths' self-reported bullying victimization with parental strategies for preventing adolescent online victimization (Schiamberg & Barboza 2014). The analytical sample for the study included those adolescents, and their parents, who reported cyberbullying victimization, via a social media website or text message in the past 12 months ( $n = 509$ ). Results of the study addressed patterns of adolescent-parent communication, parental knowledge and monitoring of youth online activities, and adolescent knowledge of their parents' monitoring of their online behavior on cyberbullying victimization. The

findings revealed that (a) youth whose parents reported monitoring their child's use of the Internet by blocking or filtering websites were significantly less likely to be victims of cyberbullying, (b) youth who perceived that their parents used the internet to check websites they visited were also less likely to be bullied, and (c) adolescents whose parents reported talking to them about internet safety were significantly less likely to be cyber bullied. Other forms of communication and monitoring (e.g., suggesting ways to behave, discussing online activities, checking online profiles, or checking to see what information is available) were unrelated to cyberbully victimization.

These results suggest the complex nature of the interaction between the parent-adolescent relationship and cyberbullying victimization. While adolescent-parent communication about online activities is essential, the form of the communication is what really matters. The most effective form of communication is about being safe *in general*. While parental monitoring is a protective factor, children's perception that controls are in place (i.e., by blocking or checking websites) is also effective at minimizing the likelihood of cyberbully victimization. While important, an awareness of adolescent online activities is not as effective as parents' knowledge and use of the Internet. Preventing cyberbully victimization requires that parents themselves have knowledge about the types of activities their children are doing online.

### **PYD AFTER-SCHOOL CYBERBULLYING INTERVENTIONS: ACROSS FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL**

While bullying of children and youth is a serious social problem, attempts to address the problem have tended to focus almost entirely on the role of the school as both a focal point for bullying relationships and for intervening in those relationships. Although of considerable importance in providing a positive environment for adolescent development and support, a full understanding of the complexity of bullying involves the appreciation of contexts beyond the school such as community and family as places for bully-victim relationships as well as for interventions designed to prevent bullying. In fact, there is good reason to believe that many youth can be served effectively in after school programs, perhaps in conjunction with school programs.

While schools represent an obvious location for some bullying events, it is important to recognize the role of out-of-school organizations and programs in reducing and preventing face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying. Working in collaboration with formal schools, out-of-school programs represent a significant opportunity for many youth to reach out to trained and caring adults to build positive youth assets (e.g., individual characteristics and community connections for preventing and reducing bullying) (Barboza et al., 2009; Durlak, Weissberg & Pachan 2010).

According to the 2010 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, nearly 23 percent of public high school students in Michigan reported being bullied at school one or more times during the previous 12 months (CDC, 2011). While these statistics reflect school-based bullying experiences, peer-perpetrated events very often occur outside school environments, particularly when accounting for the presence of electronic aggression or cyberbullying behaviors (Turner, Findelhor, Hamby, Shattuck & Ormrod 2011). While concerns about the prevalence and consequences of bullying are valid, an exclusive focus on a deficit

perspective, focusing on bullying as a set of problem behaviors to be eliminated and prevented, may be necessary but is not sufficient. Such efforts often frame the issue as a generic youth problem, rather than examining the complex issues surrounding both traditional and cyberbullying through the ecological frame of the intersection of social contexts and youth development. In short this means viewing the solution to the problem of both traditional and cyberbullying as the connection of bullying programs to the internal and external assets of Positive Youth development (PYD).

*Be SAFE: Addressing Bullying Across Community Settings* is an after school program based on Positive Youth Development (PYD), reflecting an ecological, community-wide approach to addressing the complex issues of bullying (Olsen and Pace, MSU Extension and Outreach, 2012). The initiative improves knowledge about healthy and unhealthy relationships and settings while building skills and strategies for addressing bullying behaviors. Be SAFE involves after school partnerships among adolescents, educators, volunteers, families, and other community members who are involved in a variety of opportunities through the *Be SAFE* curriculum for early adolescents, adult leadership development, parent/caregiver education, collaborations with schools, and other youth and family organizations. Preliminary focus group evaluations of the program (involving youths and cooperating adults) on a variety of dimensions related to bullying and cyberbullying indicated the emergence of successful group processes in both developing specific steps for reducing/preventing cyberbullying (e.g., ensuring cyber safety and awareness among participating parents and youth) and specific collaborations to promote PYD.

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