

Cyberbullying Across the Globe

Raúl Navarro • Santiago Yubero • Elisa Larrañaga
Editors

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Gender, Family, and Mental Health

 Springer

Editors

Raúl Navarro
Santiago Yubero
Elisa Larrañaga

Department of Psychology
University of Castilla-La Mancha
Cuenca
Spain

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Foreword: An International Perspective on Cyberbullying

Over the past 30 years, a revolution has occurred in how we understand and deal with bullying in schools. No doubt bullying has occurred ever since schools came into being; but for many decades it was ignored or denied. Since the 1980s however, social scientists, educators, teachers, and parents have combined efforts to raise awareness of the negative effects that school bullying can have, and to find ways to reduce and prevent it. In fact, a very considerable research program on school bullying has developed over this period. I have argued (Smith 2014) that this has gone through four phases. The first, origins (from 1970s to 1988), occurred in western cultures in Scandinavia, notably through the work of Dan Olweus, including the beginning of measurement techniques and intervention procedures; however, separate origins in eastern cultures such as Japan should be noted. The second (1989–mid-1990s) involved the spread of these ideas to many other countries, and a bringing together of western and eastern studies into one international endeavor. The third (1990s–2004), saw a well-established international research program on bullying which by now commanded considerable attention in academic circles and which had resulted in many publications, but also resources for anti-bullying programs, which have been shown to have some degree of success (Ttofi and Farrington 2011).

The fourth phase has been the advent of cyberbullying. This will have been present more or less since mobile phones and the Internet were invented; but the spread of these devices and the awareness of cyberbullying have happened this century. Press reports and academic publications on cyberbullying took off rapidly from around 2004. This has had ramifications for both academic research and for anti-bullying practice.

So far as academic research is concerned, cyberbullying has both revitalized the bullying research program and challenged it. It has revitalized it in part by bringing in a new mix of disciplines and researchers, from for example, media, communication, and legal studies, to complement the work of (mainly) psychologists and (sometimes) sociologists up to that time. Publications on cyberbullying have rocketed in the past decade as this influx of research and researchers has borne fruit. It has also challenged the research program in several ways. One is definitional—can

we apply the usual criteria for school bullying, namely repetition and imbalance of power, to the cyber domain? Another is in terms of scope. The school bullying research stuck rather narrowly to peer–peer bullying in school (with, for example, workplace bullying as a largely separate research area). Such a narrow focus is difficult to sustain when studying cyberbullying, much of which is instigated outside school, and a great deal of which may involve adults as well as children or young people as victims or perpetrators. There are also challenges for practitioners, and for academics seeking to make their research relevant, to ensure that useful resources for coping with cyberbullying become available and disseminated.

The available research on school bullying, including findings from regular surveys such as Health Behavior of School-Aged Children (HBSC), indicate that rates have been in decline in a majority of countries surveyed, over the past 10–15 years. It is plausible that the school bullying research program and its practical applications has been a major contributor to this. But the evidence regarding cyberbullying, although much more limited, does not show any clear decrease and indeed sometimes shows an increase in recent years. Developing awareness and resources to cope with cyberbullying is a work in progress. It may be a work in progress for some time, as modes of use of mobile phones and the Internet change rapidly and is measured in years rather than decades.

This book brings together contributions from seven countries across the globe, to focus on a range of issues around cyberbullying. It includes issues around family and gender; research perspectives from different countries; and practical contributions on prevention and intervention. The authors are experts in their respective areas, and this will surely be a most useful book for researchers and practitioners concerned about understanding cyberbullying and ameliorating or preventing the negative and sometimes devastating consequences it can have.

Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK

Peter K. Smith

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About the Editors

Raúl Navarro Ph.D. is a lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of Castilla-la Mancha, Spain. He received his bachelor's degree in education and psychology from the University of Castilla-la Mancha, a master's degree in social education from the University Pablo Olavide and his Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Castilla-La Mancha. Dr. Navarro's research has focused on relationships among bullying behaviors and gender, aggression and school adjustment, online communication, antecedent factors of cyberbullying, and parental mediation and Internet victimization. He has coauthored several book chapters on gender socialization and bullying, and has written articles about cyberbullying, which have been published in international journals. Dr. Navarro has given conferences and seminars with adolescents, teachers, and parents about how to deal with bullying. He has been on research stays in Goldsmith College, London, with Peter K. Smith, Ph.D., and at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, with Martha Montero, Ph.D., to analyze bullying behaviors. He is currently teaching courses about social psychology, gender development and psychology values in the Social Education Degree and the Master of Psychology.

Santiago Yubero Ph.D. is the dean of the Faculty of Education and Humanities at the University of Castilla-La Mancha, Spain. He obtained his bachelor's degree and his doctorate degree in psychology from the Complutense University in Madrid. In the past few years, he has been teaching courses about social psychology, social intervention, and intergroup relations in the Social Work and Social Education Degree as a member of the Department of Psychology at the University of Castilla-la Mancha. His research interests include group conflict, workplace aggression, bullying and socialization processes. He has edited several books about social education, intergroup conflict, violence and bullying with Professor Peter K. Smith, Ph.D., at Goldsmith College, London, Professor Anastasio Ovejero, Ph.D., at the University of Valladolid, and Professor Francisco Morales, Ph.D., at the National University of Distance Education. He is also the deputy director of the Centre of Studies for the Promotion of Reading and Children's Literature at the University of Castilla-

La Mancha. He has given conferences about reading promotion in diverse Latin-American countries like Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, or Brazil. Dr. Yubero has worked in a private practice as a counseling psychologist.

Elisa Larrañaga Ph.D. is the dean of the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Castilla-La Mancha, Spain. She obtained her bachelor's degree in psychology at the Complutense University in Madrid, and her doctorate degree from the University of Castilla-La Mancha. She has been teaching courses about developmental psychology, psychopathology, and language acquisition in the Social Work and Education Degrees as a member of the Department of Psychology at University of Castilla-La Mancha. Her research interests include reading practices, sexism, behavioral problems, gender, and cyberbullying. She has edited several books on violence and social exclusion working with Amalio Blanco, Ph.D., at the Complutense University in Madrid. She has coauthored several book chapters on reading promotion, violence and traditional bullying. She collaborates with the Centre of Studies for the Promotion of Reading and Children's Literature at the University of Castilla-La Mancha. She has been working with teachers and parents about promotion of reading as a tool to prevent and intervene in sexist attitudes, violence behavior, and resilience. Dr. Larrañaga has also worked in a private practice as a counseling and clinical psychologist focusing on language problems.

Contributors

Sofía Buelga Department of Social Psychology, University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain

Fabiola Cabra Torres Facultad de Educación, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia

Cristina Cañamares Department of Philology, University of Castilla-La Mancha, Cuenca, Spain

Wanda Cassidy Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, Canada

Lucie Corcoran School of Arts, Dublin Business School, Dublin 2, Ireland

Susan Hanley Duncan University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA

Steven Eggermont School for Mass Communication Research, University of Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

Chantal Faucher Centre for Education, Law and Society, Simon Fraser University, Surrey, BC, Canada

Gary W. Giumetti Department of Psychology, Quinnipiac University, Hamden, CT, USA

Wannes Heirman Department of Communication Studies, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium

Margaret Jackson School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, Canada

Robin M. Kowalski Department of Psychology, Clemson University, Clemson, SC, USA

María de la V. Moral Department of Social Psychology, Universtiy of Oviedo, Oviedo, Spain

Elisa Larrañaga Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Work, University of Castilla-La Mancha, Cuenca, Spain

Seung-Ha Lee Department of Early Childhood Education, Yeungnam University, Gyeongsan-si, Gyeongsangbuk-do, South Korea

Gloria Marciales Vivas Department of Psychology, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia

Belén Martínez-Ferrer Department of Education and Social Psychology. Pablo de Olavide University, Seville, Spain

Conor Mc Guckin School of Education, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland

Gonzalo Musitu Department of Psychology, Pablo de Olavide University, Seville, Spain

Raúl Navarro Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education and Humanities, University of Castilla-La Mancha, Cuenca, Spain

Anastasio Ovejero Department of Psychology, University of Valladolid, Valladolid, Spain

Sara Pabian Department of Communication Studies, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium

Sandra Sánchez-García Department of Philology, University of Castilla-La Mancha, Cuenca, Spain

Cristina Serna Department of Psychology, University of Castilla-La Mancha, Faculty of Social Work, Cuenca, Spain

Heidi Vandebosch Department of Communication Studies, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium

Michel Walrave Department of Communication Studies, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium

Denis Wegge Department of Communication Studies, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium

Santiago Yubero Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education and Humanities, University of Castilla-La Mancha, Cuenca, Spain