Examining Factors Influencing Cyber Bullying Among Canadian Youth: Appraisal of the I³ Model

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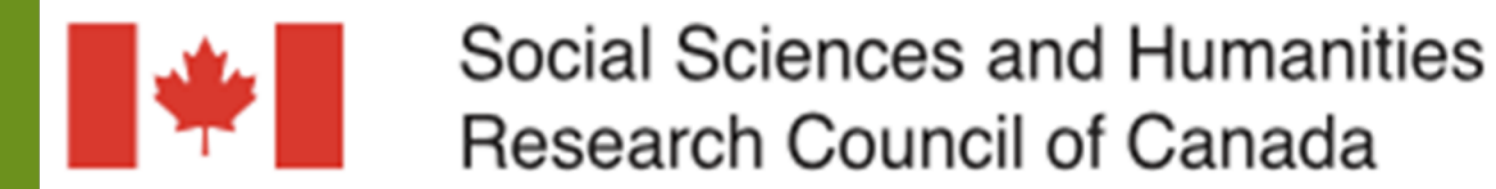
Abstract

Purpose: Drawing on the I³ Model as our theoretical framework, the purpose of this study was to examine the push and pull factors that may intensify or mitigate instances of youth cyber bullying. **Methods:** Data were collected from school personnel and community stakeholders in a western Canadian province utilizing semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. **Results:** Multiple triggers (*n*=5), impelling influences (*n*=2) and inhibiting forces (*n*=3) were identified. **Discussion:** Our study is one of the first to examine the utility of the I³ Model as a theoretical lens in which to view cyber bullying. This study was based on the perspectives of important stakeholders who rarely are asked to provide input.. Similar to Wong et al. (2018), results identified online disinhibition as an impelling force and suggested that empathy building would act as an inhibiting force. Further research is needed in other contexts and global locations to more fully investigate the efficacy of the I³ Model to cyber bullying.
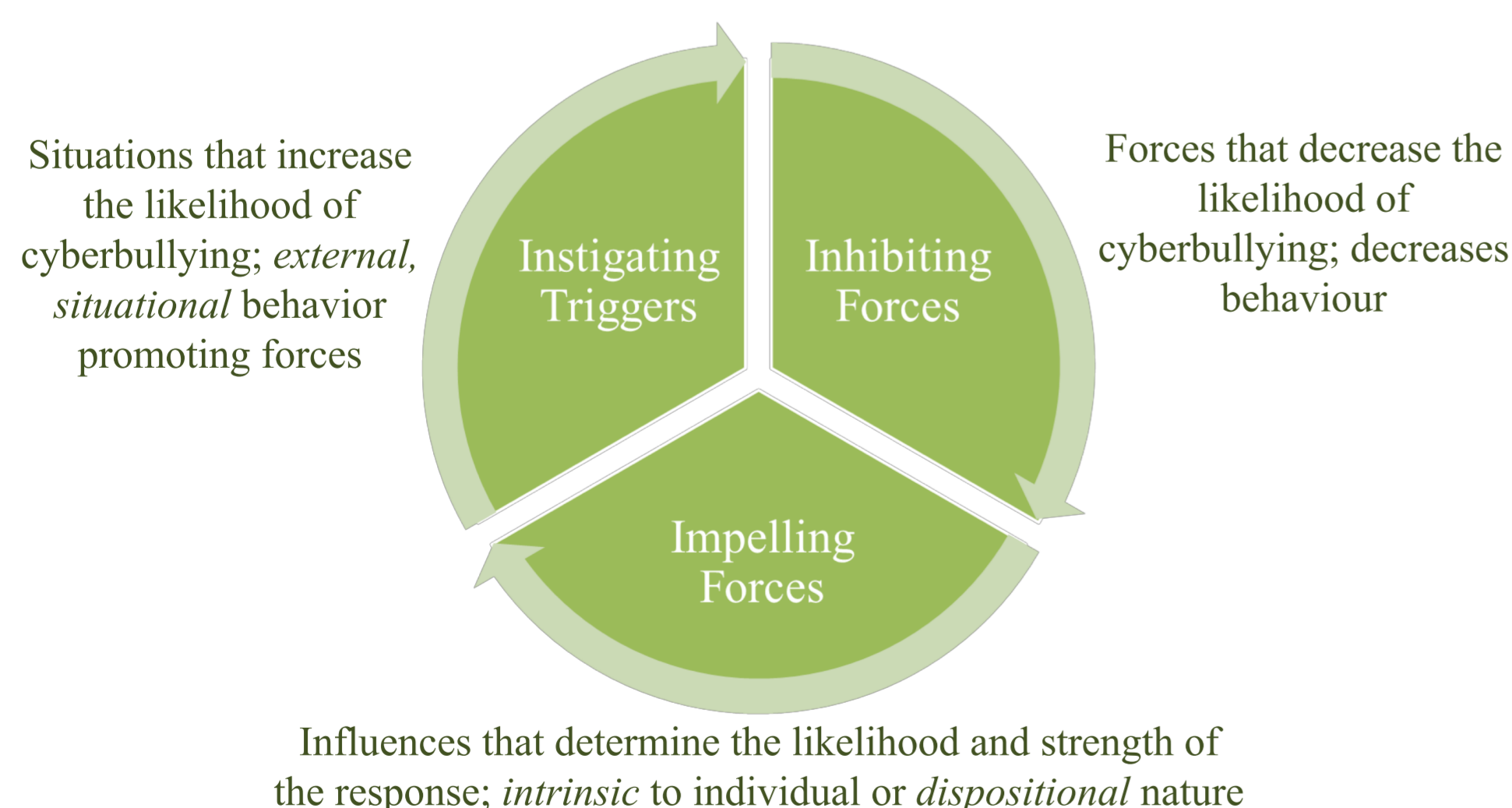
Introduction

- *Cyber bullying* is a term often used to describe any behaviour "performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others" (Tokunaga, 2010, p. 278).
- These behaviours have been linked to negative outcomes for both victims and perpetrators (Bottino et al., 2015).
- Cyber bullying is a common issue among adolescents (Ybarra, et al., 2012)
- A recent nationally-representative study found that approximately 14% of Canadian youth (ages 10 to 17) have been cyber bullied in the past month, while approximately 8% cyber bullied another others during the same time period (Beran et al., 2015).
- While the study of this phenomenon has grown exponentially, until recently, few studies have relied on theory to explain findings (Berne et al., 2013).

I³ Model

The I³ Model explains the processes by which non-aggressive interactions can become aggressive and is based on three core interrelated stages (see Figure 1):

- *Instigating Triggers* (situations that increase the likelihood of an aggressive response);
- *Impelling Influences* (influences that determine the likelihood and/or strength of the response); and
- *Inhibiting Forces* (forces that decrease or inhibit the likelihood of an aggressive response) (Slotter & Finkel, 2011).
- According to the perfect storm theory, cyberbullying is most likely to occur when instigation and impellance are strong and inhibition is weak (Finkel, 2014).

Figure 1. I³ Model

Situations that increase the likelihood of cyberbullying; *external, situational* behavior promoting forces

Forces that decrease the likelihood of cyberbullying; decreases behaviour

Instigating Triggers | Inhibiting Forces | Impelling Forces

Influences that determine the likelihood and strength of the response; *intrinsic* to individual or *dispositional* nature

Methods

- 16 stakeholders from across one western Canadian province.
- Participants included school personnel (e.g., vice principals, principals, superintendents, teachers, school and guidance counsellors, and instructional technology consultants; *n*=12) and community stakeholders (e.g., police officers and leaders from private organizations that conduct bullying education for youth; *n*=4).
- Participation in interviews or focus group interviews between June 2015 and May 2018.
- The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended and probing questions.
- Interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis was conducted based on the six-step guideline outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Results

- Analysis suggests multiple instigating, impelling, and inhibiting forces are at play (see Figure 2).
- Example participant quotes are located in Tables 1-3.
- Some forces can be characterized as *either* a trigger/impelling force or as an inhibiting force depending on direction (e.g., adult digital illiteracy is a trigger; adult digital literacy is an inhibitor).
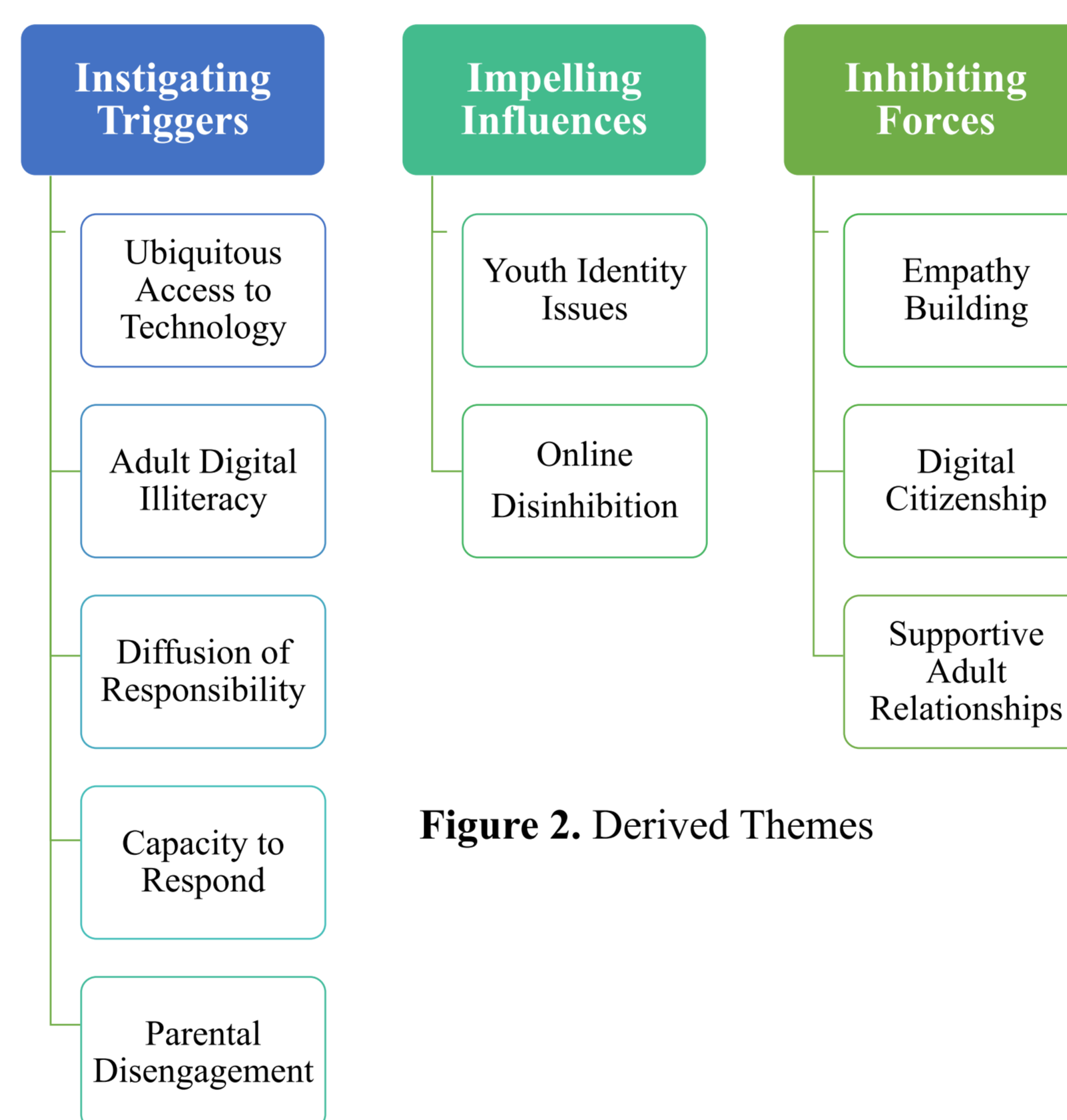
Instigating Triggers	Impelling Influences	Inhibiting Forces
Ubiquitous Access to Technology	Youth Identity Issues	Empathy Building
Adult Digital Illiteracy	Online Disinhibition	Digital Citizenship
Diffusion of Responsibility		Supportive Adult Relationships
Capacity to Respond		
Parental Disengagement		

Figure 2. Derived Themes

Table 1. Example Participant Quotes: Instigating Triggers

Ubiquitous Access to Technology	Youth today have 24-7 access to each other and sleep with their phones under their pillows.
Adult Digital Illiteracy	The level of technology is so beyond us as adults, even the most technological savvy adult can't keep up with what these kids are doing… These kids know more than we do about it…They're digital natives and we're digital immigrants.
Diffusion of Responsibility	There is kind of a belief among policing that this is an issue that should be dealt with in the schools, but the schools are saying 'no this is not a school issue. This is a parenting issue, deal with it at home.' So everybody's passing the buck and nobody's doing anything!
Capacity to Respond	…very few kids can take up a lot of resources if we are continually responding to cases like this [cyberbullying]… they could easily have consumed 80% of our counselling and administrative time at times.
Parental Disengagement	The kids that are getting in trouble are not often being monitored… It reaches the stage where the police are involved and often the parents knew nothing about it.

Table 2. Example Participant Quotes: Impelling Influences

Youth Identity Issues	I think then in terms of the true self and the real self and also the projected self in the cyber world. …these kids literally have the chance to be whoever they choose online.
Online Disinhibition	[Bullying] in person - it's a little bit harder. If you're being mean to somebody and you see it, it might be a little bit easier to recognize… and maybe you might stop yourself, but online you're getting away with it.

Table 3. Example Participant Quotes: Inhibiting Forces

Empathy Building	Talk to each other about why we're doing this to each other… it helps them to put a face, to somehow show some empathy or to connect them somehow cause sometimes they don't even know each other. I think it's just harder to be mean to somebody when you know something about them.
Digital Citizenship	Anytime we are using technology, specifically online technologies with students, we always have to make sure that we're educating them on how to behave appropriately online…
Supportive Adult Relationships	It's more the conversations that happen within a classroom and the relationship that those kids have with a classroom teacher that probably makes the biggest difference.

Discussion

- Results of our study was promising – we identified multiple instigating triggers, impelling influences, and inhibiting forces.
- A recent study examining the I³ Model and cyber bullying found that, in a sample of 211 university students, the I³ Model significantly predicted the pathway from cyber bullying victimization (an instigating trigger) to cyber bullying perpetration, while subjective norms (inhibiting factor) and online disinhibition (impelling force) moderated the strength of the relationship (Wong et al., 2018).
- Similar to the Wong et al (2018) study, we identified online disinhibition as an impelling force and suggested that empathy building could act as an inhibiting force (likely through peer subjective norms). In contrast, stakeholders in our study did not specifically identify previous cyber victimization as an instigating trigger.
- Future research should further examine the factors identified in our study using a quantitative study similar to Wong et al. (2018).
- Future research also needs to explore impelling forces in more detail. Our study highlighted many potential instigating triggers (situational factors that enhance cyber bullying) but less evidence of impelling forces (the internal or dispositional context).
- Future research should also apply the I³ Model directly to youth perspectives of cyber bullying – *what instigating triggers, impelling influences, and inhibiting forces do youth identify*?

Conclusions

- This study is a preliminary exploration of the I³ Model as applied to cyber bullying.
- The current application of the I³ Model appears to have some utility in exploring and refining constructs related to cyber bullying instigation, impellance, and mitigation.
- Building on this work and the work of Wong et al. (2018), a more thorough test of this framework should be carried out to confirm the dimensions of the interrelated concepts found.

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