When parents are inconsistent: Parenting style and adolescents' involvement in cyberbullying

# Details

## Year

2019

## DOI

10.1016/j.adolescence.2019.04.006

## Issued

2019

## Language

English

## Volume

74

## Start Page

## End Page

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## Type

Journal article

## Journal

Journal of Adolescence

## Publisher

Elsevier BV

## Topics

Risks and harms

## Sample

The sample was composed of 180 7th and 8th-grade students (86 males, 89 females, 5 did not indicate gender) ranging in age from 12 to 14.5 (M=13.25, SD=0.81). The students were recruited from a regional middle school catering to mid to high SES families in the southern part of Israel.

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

# Abstract

The prevalence of cyberbullying among adolescents is globally on the rise. This study examined how general and cyber-specific parenting styles impact the prevalence of young adolescents' involvement in cyberbullying as victims and/or perpetrators.
Methods: One hundred and eighty 7th and 8th-grade Israeli students participated (Mean
age=13.25, SD=0.81; 86 males, 89 females, 5 did not indicate gender). Adolescents reported
the frequency of their involvement in cyberbullying, and whether their parents were using
“autonomy-supportive” or “psychologically controlling” strategies generally and specifically
when mediating internet use.
Results: A controlling parenting-style as well as an inconsistent internet-mediation style were
associated with a higher prevalence of adolescent involvement in cyberbullying as victims and as
perpetrators. Prevalence was higher when parents who generally use a controlling style were less
controlling or consistent when mediating internet use. Conclusion: Despite the caveats related to parental control, parents who generally use a controlling style should consistently use this style while mediating cyber. Inconsistent parenting style conveys messages concerning internet activities that contradict what teens are accustomed to receiving in other contexts. This inconsistency may encourage them to exploit their relative freedom in the cyber context and act irresponsibly.

# Outcome

The data suggest that the frequency of parental use of restrictive mediation strategies was not a predictor of lower reported involvement in cyberbullying. However, the style parents implemented when applying these mediation strategies was a predictor. Specifically, the results suggested that parents who are inconsistent in their cyber mediating style (i.e., setting rules but not enforcing them or not following through on their application) greatly increase the likelihood of involvement in cyberbullying on the part of their teens (Katz, Lemish, Cohen Arden, 2019). The importance of consistency in parental approaches to their children also emerged in the moderation analysis that assessed the impact of parental differences between their general and cyber-specific parenting styles. Parents who were generally controlling but used a less controlling style when mediating cyber activities further increased the likelihood that their teens would be either perpetrators or victims in cyberspace. Specifically, the significant interaction between parents' general and specific styles, but above all the quality of parents' cyber-specific controlling style suggests that the effect of this variable in itself may be different when examined alone than when examined in light of the general parenting style. The correlations showed that parents' use of controlling restrictive mediation was positively associated with cyberbullying and with cyber victimization. In other words, the more parents were controlling when mediating cyber, the more their teen tended to report being involved in cyberbullying. When this mediating style was investigated in the regression analysis as a predictor alongside the general parenting style, it turned out to be a negative predictor of involvement in both cyberbullying as a perpetrator and as a victim. When examining this variable in light of the general controlling style, this style emerged as a moderator. Finally, the findings showed that parental autonomy support was not a negative (or a positive) predictor of cyberbullying and/or victimization; in other words, being an autonomy-supportive parent did not increase or decrease the likelihood of self-reports of being a bully or a victim.