



A Complex Understanding of Bullying Perpetration: The Role of Individual, Social, and Environmental Factors

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University at Buffalo
Alberti Center
for Bullying Abuse Prevention

thank you!

Learning Objectives

01

Understand the individual differences that contribute to bullying perpetration in young people

02

Examine the ways that individual differences work alongside various social and environmental factors to directly and indirectly contribute to bullying

03

Reflect on the implications to help effectively mitigate these factors and reduce bullying perpetration

The strongest predictor of future bullying is previous bullying.



What is bullying?

Intentional and systematic abuse of power for self-gain

- Olweus, 1996; Volk et al., 2014

30-40% of youth affected, peak in adolescence

- UNICEF, 2017

Bullying and Social Relationships: Benefits

- Bullying perpetration has been associated with:

Status:	Dating:	Valued Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Popularity, status, and dominance both cross-sectionally and longitudinally• Reijntjes et al., 2013; Vaillancourt et al., 2003; Volk et al., 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dating and romantic relationships• Arnocky & Vaillancourt, 2012; Dane et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2018; Volk et al., 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self- and peer-perceived attractiveness, peer-valued characteristics, self-efficacy• Vaillancourt et al., 2003

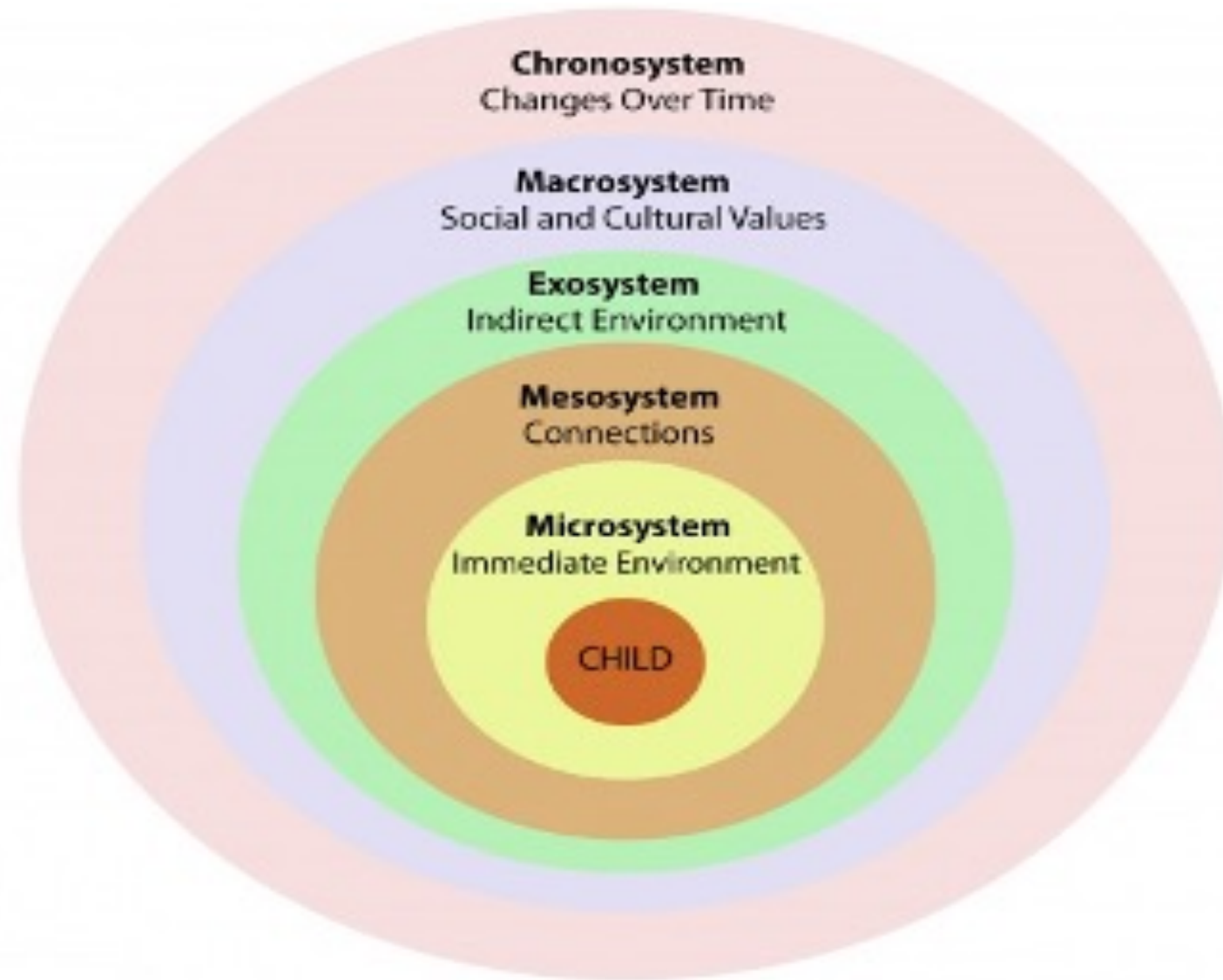
Bullying and Social Relationships: Costs

- Although popular, perpetrators of bullying can have lower likeability
 - Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Reijntjes et al., 2013
- May be due in part to power: high power perpetrators were better liked than moderate power perpetrators
 - Viewed more favorably, attractive, and better leaders
 - Vaillancourt et al., 2003
- However, victimization has also been associated with attractiveness or dating status
 - Dane et al., 2016; Vaillancourt & Sharma, 2011; Volk et al., 2015



What factors
contribute to
bullying
perpetration?

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1979)





Bullying from a Social-Ecological Perspective

Reviewed by Hong & Espelage (2012):

- Youth characteristics: age, gender, race/ethnicity, health status
- Micro: parents, peers, schools
- Meso: teacher involvement, youth-teacher, youth-peer
- Exo: media violence, neighbourhood
- Macro: cultural beliefs, opportunity structures, politics, religion
- Chrono: changes in family structure

Bullying from a Social-Ecological Perspective

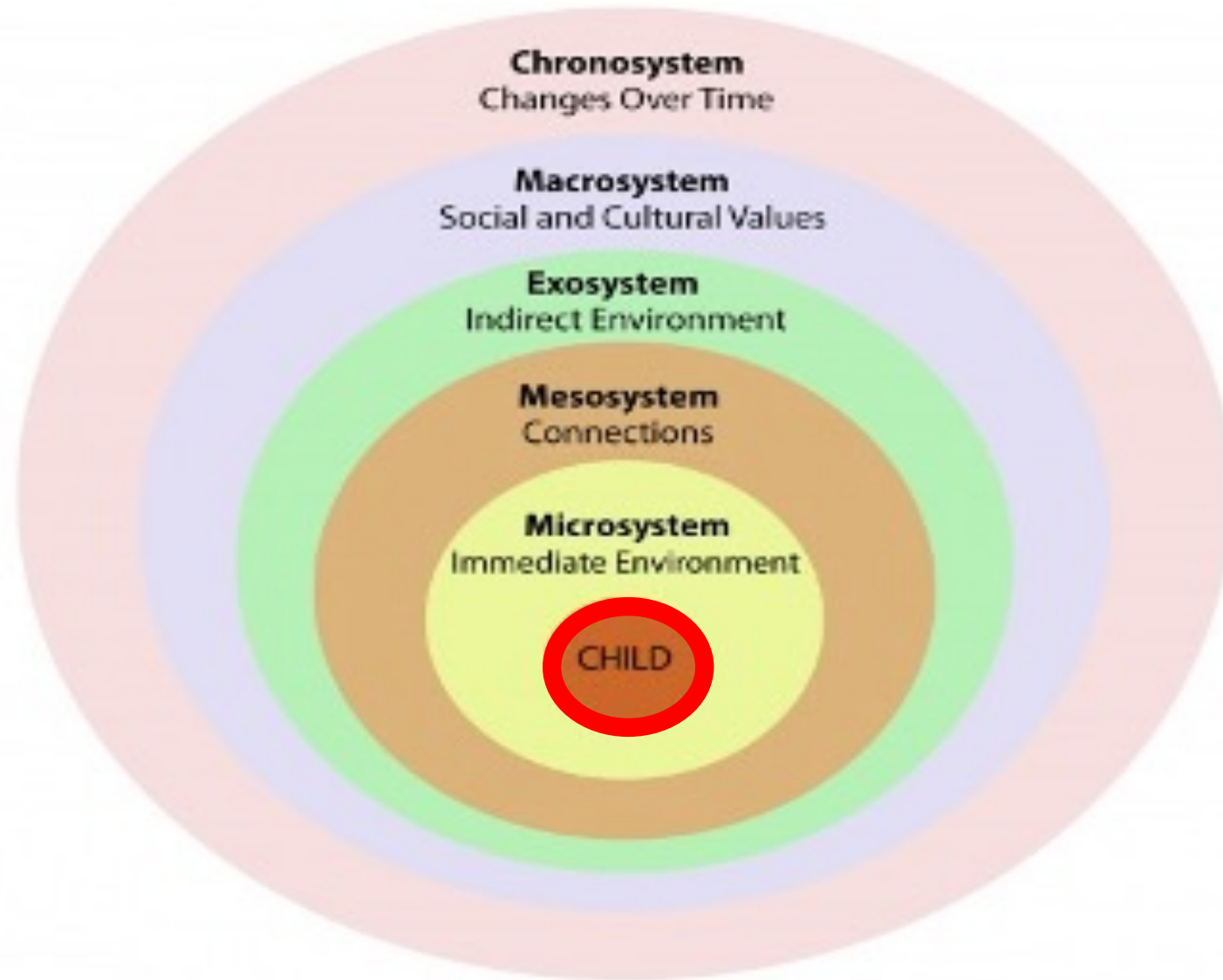
Moderating Factors

- Empathy, social status
 - Caravita et al., 2009
- School climate
 - Nickerson et al., 2014; 2022
- Positive peer and parenting relationships
 - Ostrov et al., 2022

Mediating Factors:

- Delinquency
 - Low & Espelage, 2014
- Emotion regulation, social skills
 - Hong et al., 2012
- Between and Within Person Effects
 - Merrin et al., 2018

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1979)



What individual differences contribute to bullying
perpetration among youth?

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Developmental Trends

- Evidence for rank-order stability in personality across life
 - Bleidorn et al. 2022; Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000
- Adolescence may be a time when personality changes are evident as a result of biological, social and psychological changes
 - Caspi et al., 2005; Soto & Tackett, 2015



Bullying and Individual Differences

Bullying can be explained by genetics and by social contexts

- Ball et al., 2008; Hong & Espelage, 2012

Bullying may partly be a behavioral expression of personality and temperament traits

A person with a given trait may be more likely to use bullying as opposed to other strategies

- Del Giudice & Belsky, 2011

An individual can consider their own traits in a context to evaluate costs and benefits

- Dane et al., 2017

Bullying and Individual Differences



Temperament Traits:
Callous-Unemotional,
Low Inhibitory/Effortful Control



Dark Triad:
Psychopathy,
Machiavellianism,
Narcissism



Lack of Empathy:
Empathic Concern,
Perspective Taking

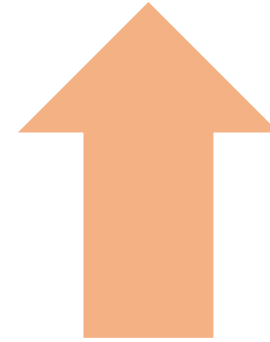
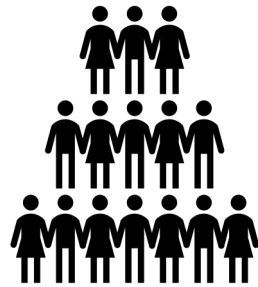


Manipulative/Exploitative Traits:
Low Honesty-Humility,
Low Agreeableness

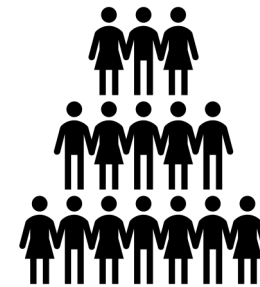
Bullying and Individual Differences



Antisocial Traits



Bullying Perpetration



Antisocial Traits

Bullying Perpetration



Antisocial Traits

Bullying Perpetration



Heterogeneity in Bullying

Perpetration:	Victimization:	Evidence of a victim-to-bully developmental pathway
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Majority follow low bullying perpetration (37-87%)• Minority follow moderate/high bullying perpetration (11-16%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Majority follow low victimization (85%)• Minority follow moderate/high victimization (5-14.5%)• Minority follow high/decreasing trajectory (10%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Barker et al., 2008• Haltigan & Vaillancourt, 2014

Heterogeneity in Personality

- Reijntjes et al. (2016) followed youth across 3 years from age 10 and found heterogeneity in bullying and narcissism:

Low Risk:	High Risk:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low bullying & low to medium narcissism• 24-28% boys• 31-42% girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High bullying & high narcissism• 4-6% boys• No girls



Bullying Perpetration and Narcissistic Personality Traits across Adolescence: Joint Trajectories and Childhood Risk Factors

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¹ Counselling Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON, Canada, ² School of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON, Canada

Farrell, A. H., and Vaillancourt, T. (2020). Bullying perpetration and narcissistic personality traits across adolescence: Joint trajectories and childhood risk factors. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11, 483229.

Study Objectives

1. Examine heterogeneity in bullying and narcissism across full range of adolescence (Grades 7-12; ages 13-18)

a. Expected at least 2 trajectories for each

b. Primary interest was in joint high group



2. Examine childhood predictors of joint trajectory groups (Grades 5-6; ages 10-12)

Methods

- Participants:
 - McMaster Teen Study
 - $N = 616$ (54.2% girls)
 - $M_{\text{age}} = 10.91$ in Grade 5, Time 1 ($SD_{\text{age}} = 0.36$)
 - Primarily White (76.1%); income > \$80,000
- Procedure:
 - Consent and assent received annually from participants either in paper and pencil or online

Results

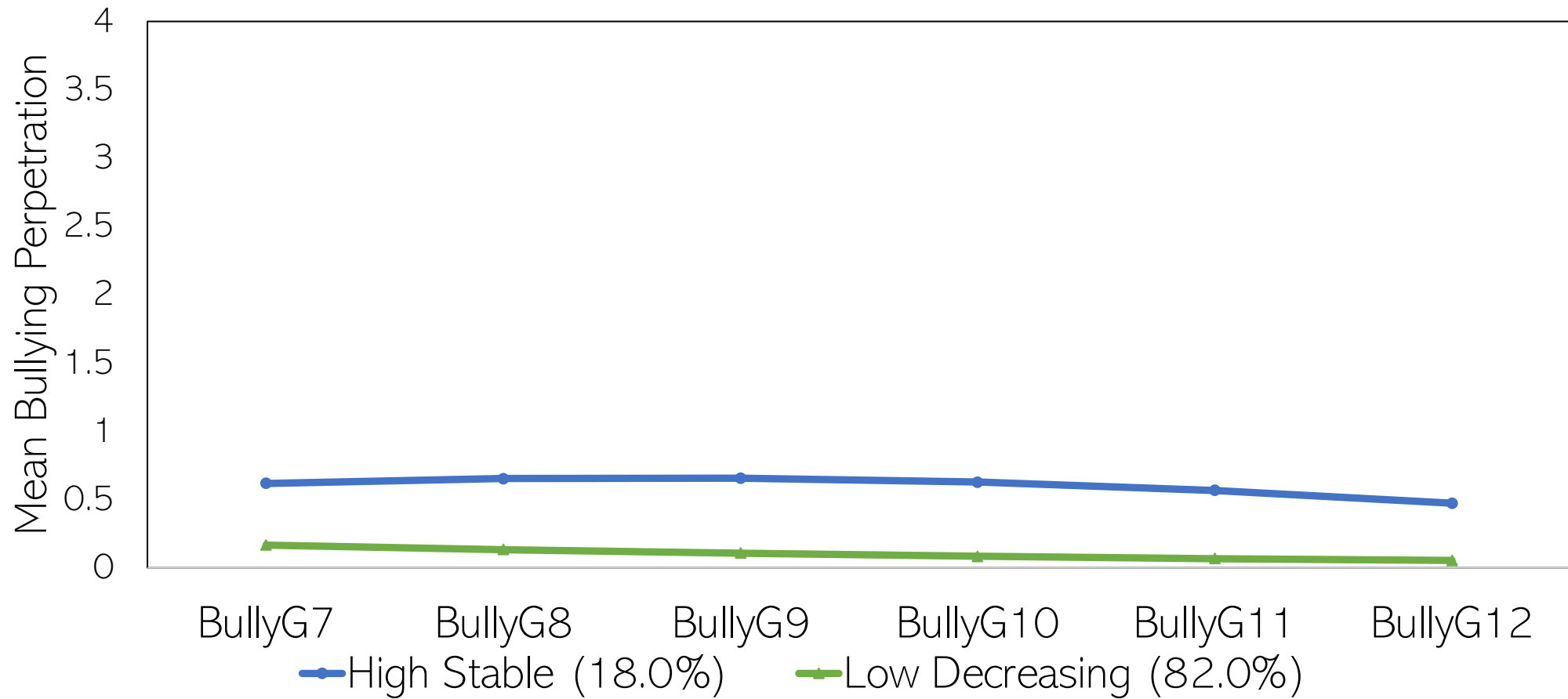


Figure 1. Developmental trajectories of bullying across Grades 7 to 12.

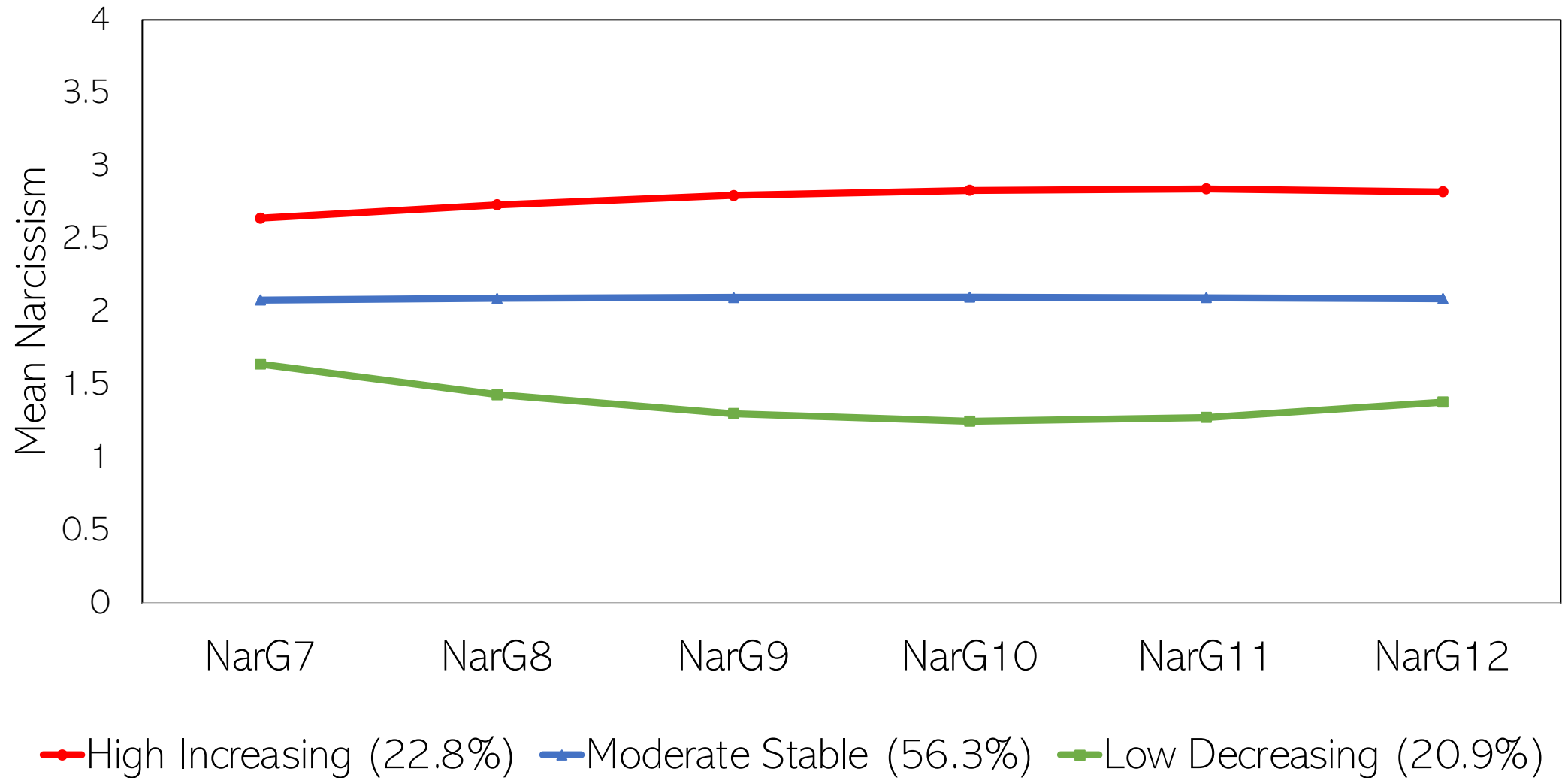


Figure 2. Developmental trajectories of narcissism across Grades 7 to 12.

Results

- Relative to the low risk group (19%):

High-Risk Group:	At-Risk Group:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High stable bullying, high increasing narcissism (6%)• Anxiety ↓• OR = 0.51, 95% CI [0.28, 0.93]	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High stable bullying, moderate stable narcissism (10%)• Hyperactivity ↑• OR = 1.62, 95% CI [1.05, 2.51]• Empathic Concern ↓• OR = 0.64, 95% CI [0.43, 0.95]

Results

- Sex differences:
 - Boys > girls in low decreasing bullying/high increasing narcissism
 - Girls > boys in the low-risk group
- High stable bullying group was a slightly better indicator of the moderate stable (.57) and high increasing (.32) narcissism groups than the reverse

Conclusions

Consistent with previous studies on heterogeneity of bullying and narcissism, but evidence for developmental changes in narcissism across adolescence

- Barker et al., 2010; Reijntjes et al., 2016

Bullying as a better indicator of narcissism suggests behavioral manifestation of personality, but not all adolescents high in narcissism engage in bullying

- Fanti & Henrich, 2015; Salmivalli, 2001

Conclusions

Two at-risk groups differed from low-risk group but not one another

Difficulty regulating behavior and emotions (e.g., hyperactivity) while lacking fear and anxiety can be risk factors

Previous evidence linking callous-unemotional traits with low anxiety and antisocial tendencies

- Kahn et al., 2007; Vaillancourt & Brittain, 2019



Implications

Not all young people are the same; differences would have averaged out in variable centered approaches.

Young people can change in their traits and behavior; person-centered approaches may help to observe these changes



Childhood Predictors of Adolescent Joint Trajectories: A Multi-Informant Study on Bullying Perpetration and Hypercompetitiveness

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^aCounselling Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa; ^bSchool of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa

ABSTRACT

Farrell, A. H., & Vaillancourt, T. (2021). Childhood predictors of adolescent joint trajectories: a multi-informant study on bullying perpetration and hypercompetitiveness. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 1-13.

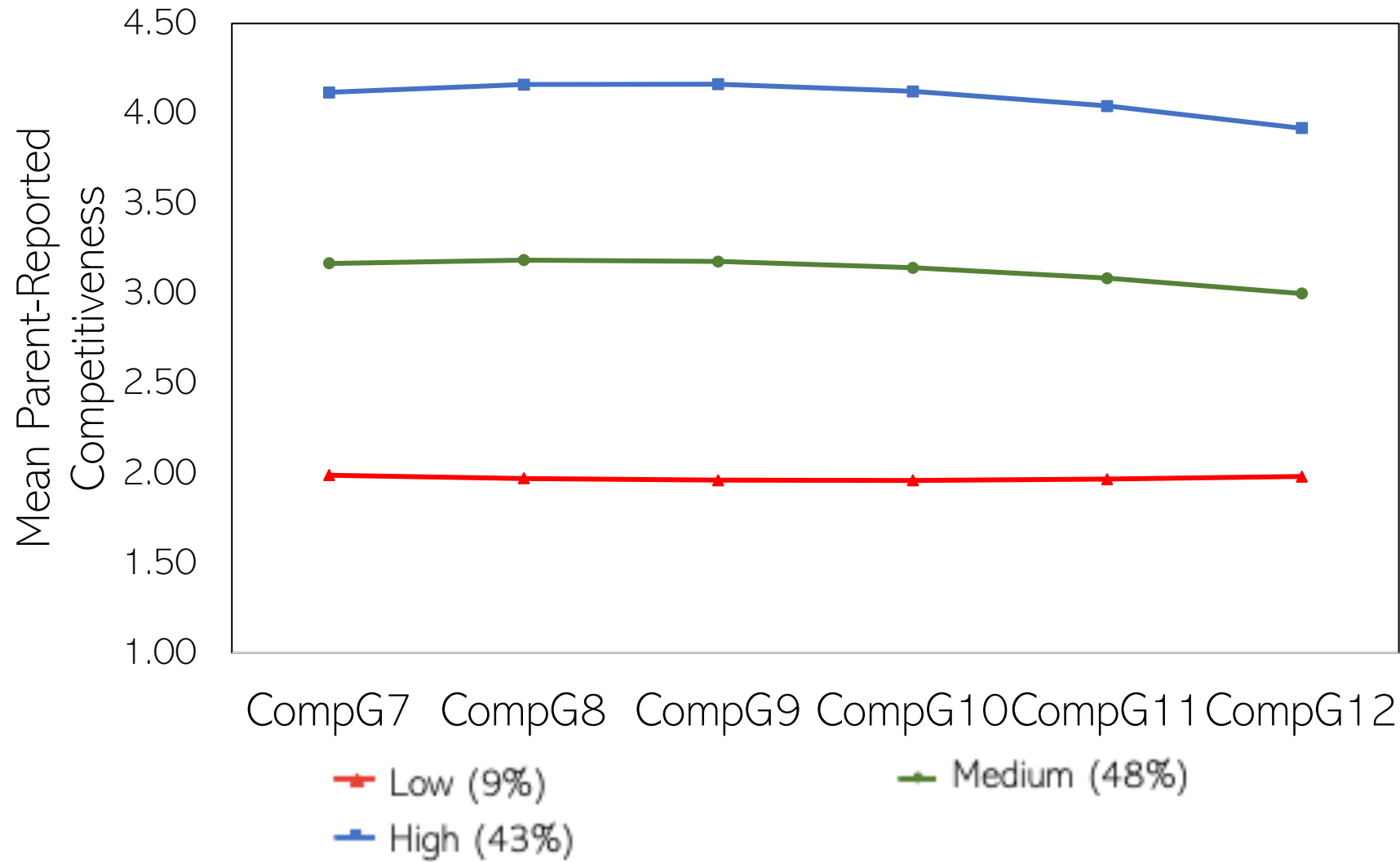


Figure 3. Developmental trajectories of parent-reported competitiveness across Grades 7 to 12; $n = 607$.

Bullying Perpetration & Competitiveness

High-risk:

- High bullying, high competitiveness (9%)

Competitive only:

- Low bullying, high competitiveness (34%)

Low-risk:

- Low bullying, low competitiveness (7%)

Why do some young people bully and others do not?

Bullying Perpetration & Competitiveness

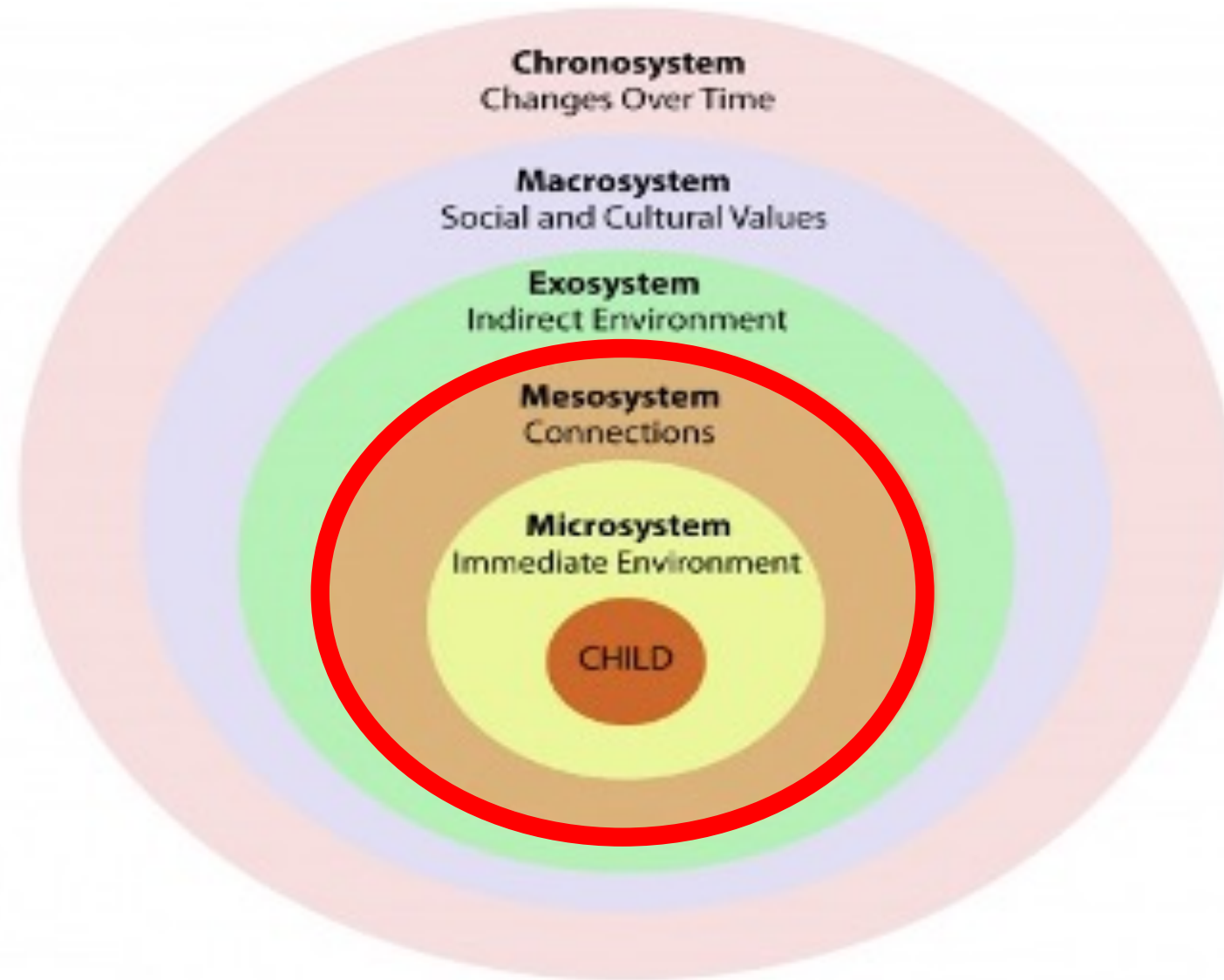
- High-risk:
 - High bullying, high competitiveness (9%)

In Grade 5 & 6 :



Family Functioning
School Climate

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1979)



How do individual differences work alongside social and environmental factors?

Learning Objectives

01

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Reflect on the implications to help effectively mitigate these factors and reduce bullying perpetration

Empathy, Exploitation, and Adolescent Bullying Perpetration: a Longitudinal Social-Ecological Investigation



Ann H. Farrell¹ • Anthony A. Volk² • Tracy Vaillancourt^{1,3}

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Abstract

Farrell, A. H., Volk, A. A., & Vaillancourt, T. (2020). Empathy, exploitation, and adolescent bullying perpetration: a longitudinal social-ecological investigation. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 42(3), 436-449.

Study Objectives

1. Examine empathic concern and exploitation with bullying perpetration (Grades 9-11; ages 15-17)

a. Expected negative association with empathic concern

b. Expected positive association with exploitation



2. Examine self-perceived social-ecological factors (social status, school climate) including any indirect effects ($n = 531$)

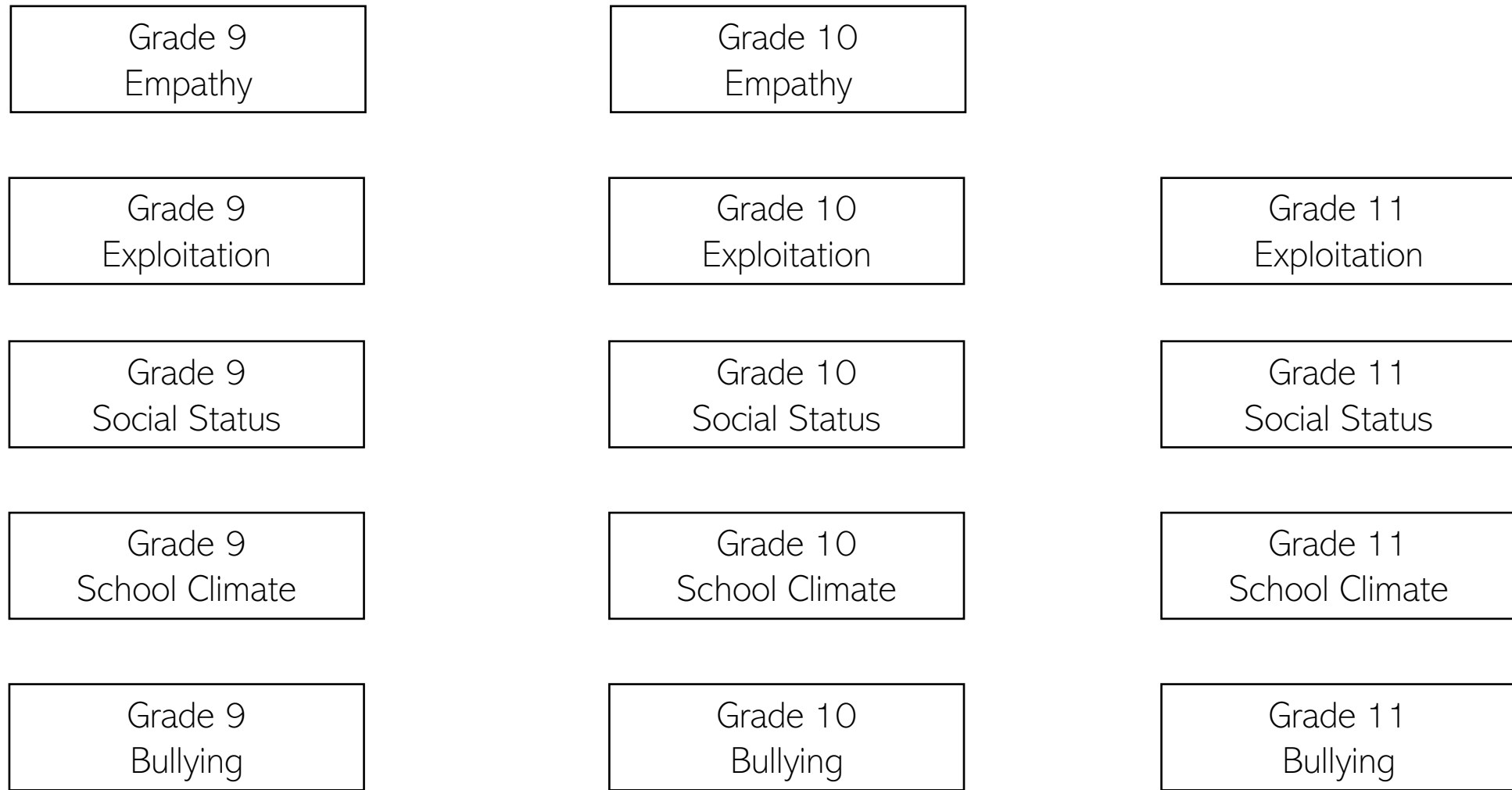


Figure 4. Path model of personality, social status, and school climate with bullying perpetration.

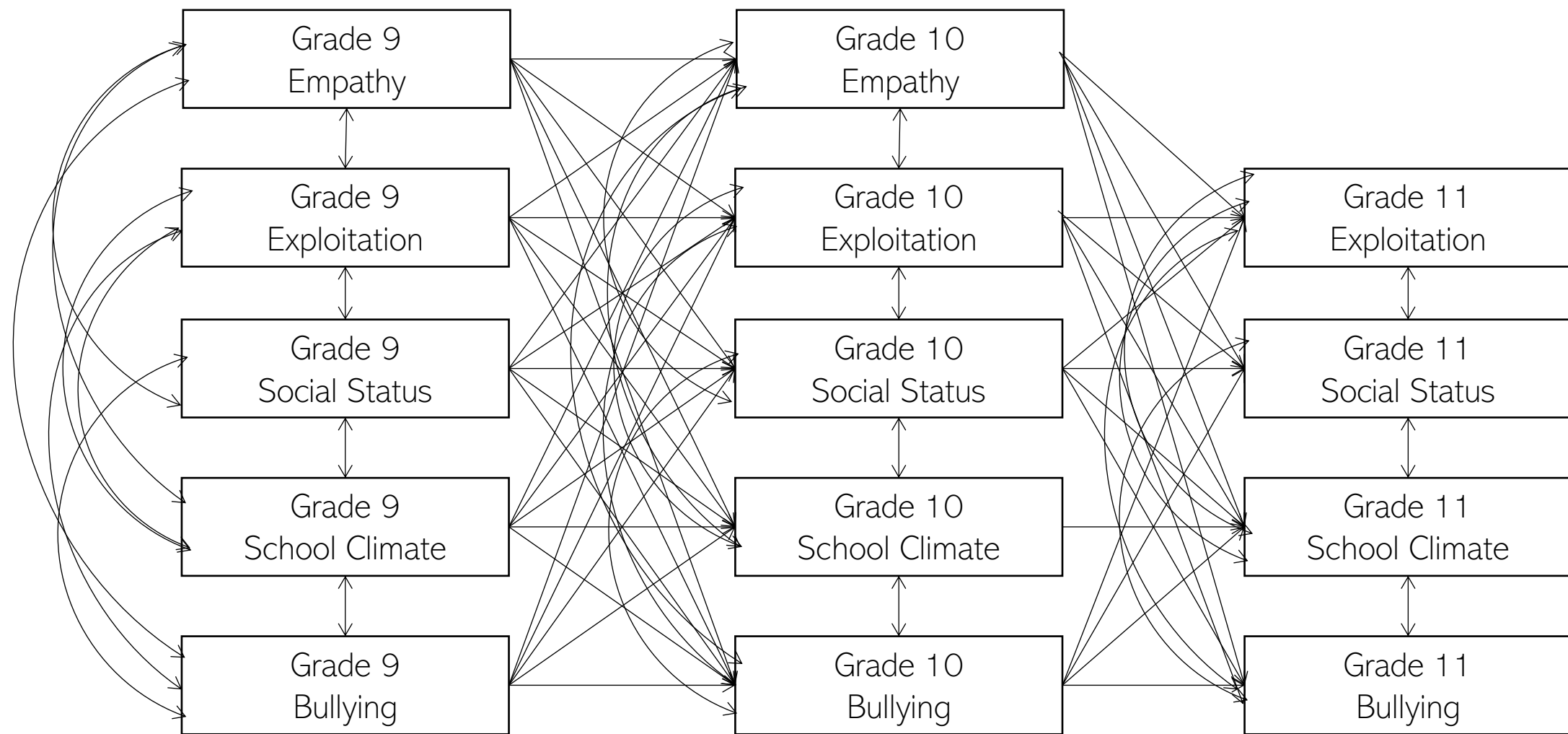


Figure 4. Path model of personality, social status, and school climate with bullying perpetration.

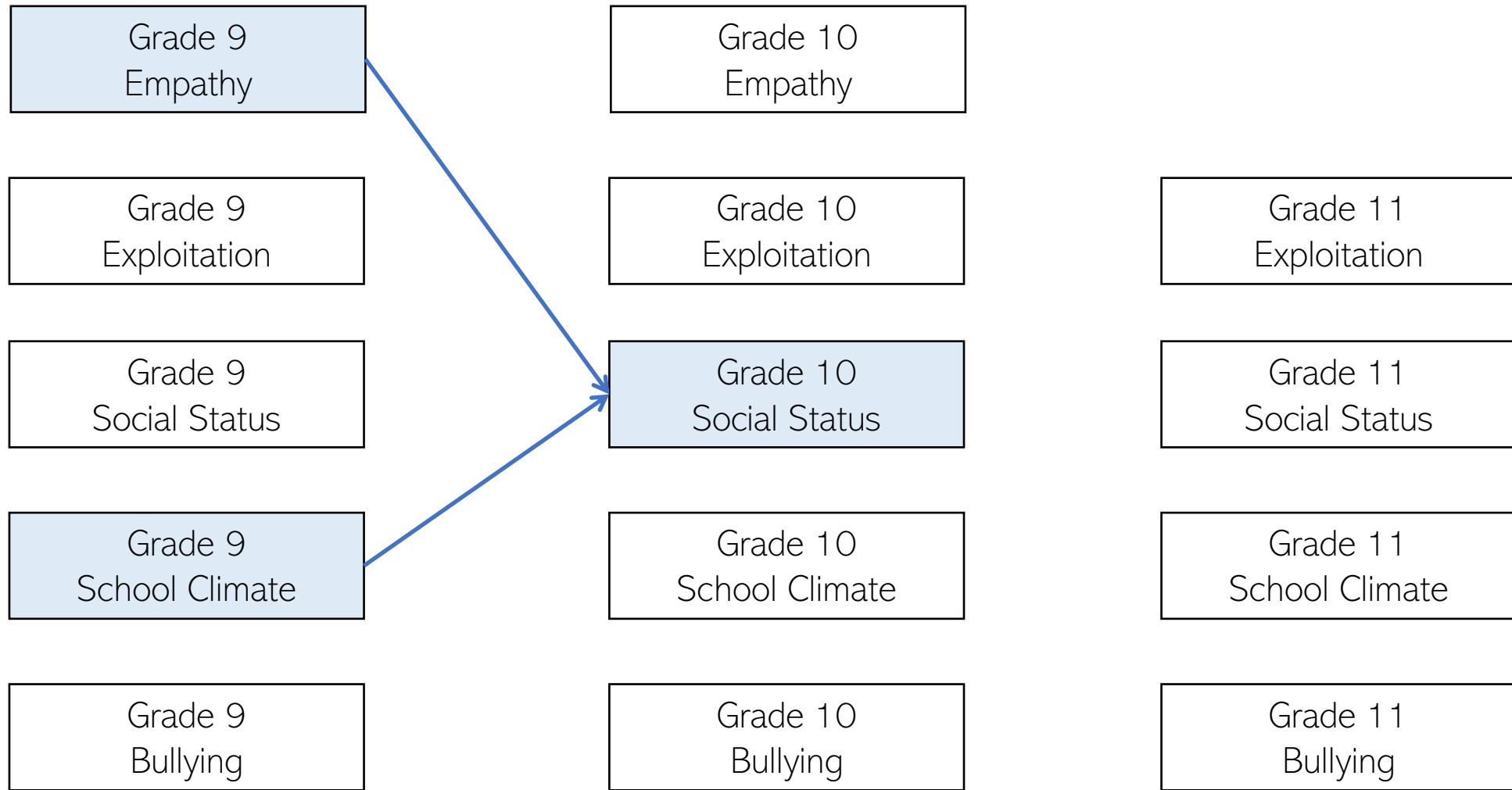


Figure 4. Path model of personality, social status, and school climate with bullying perpetration.

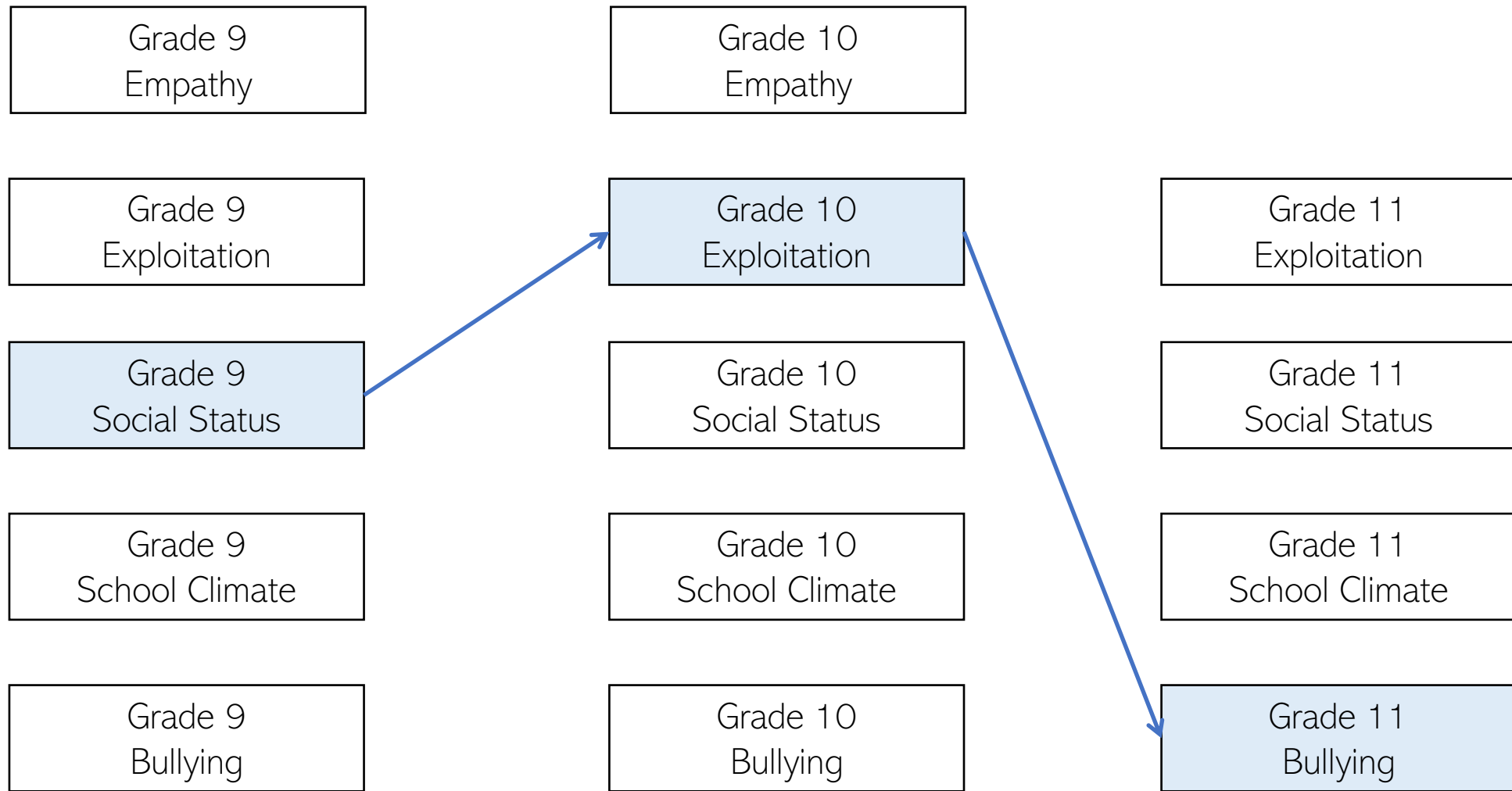
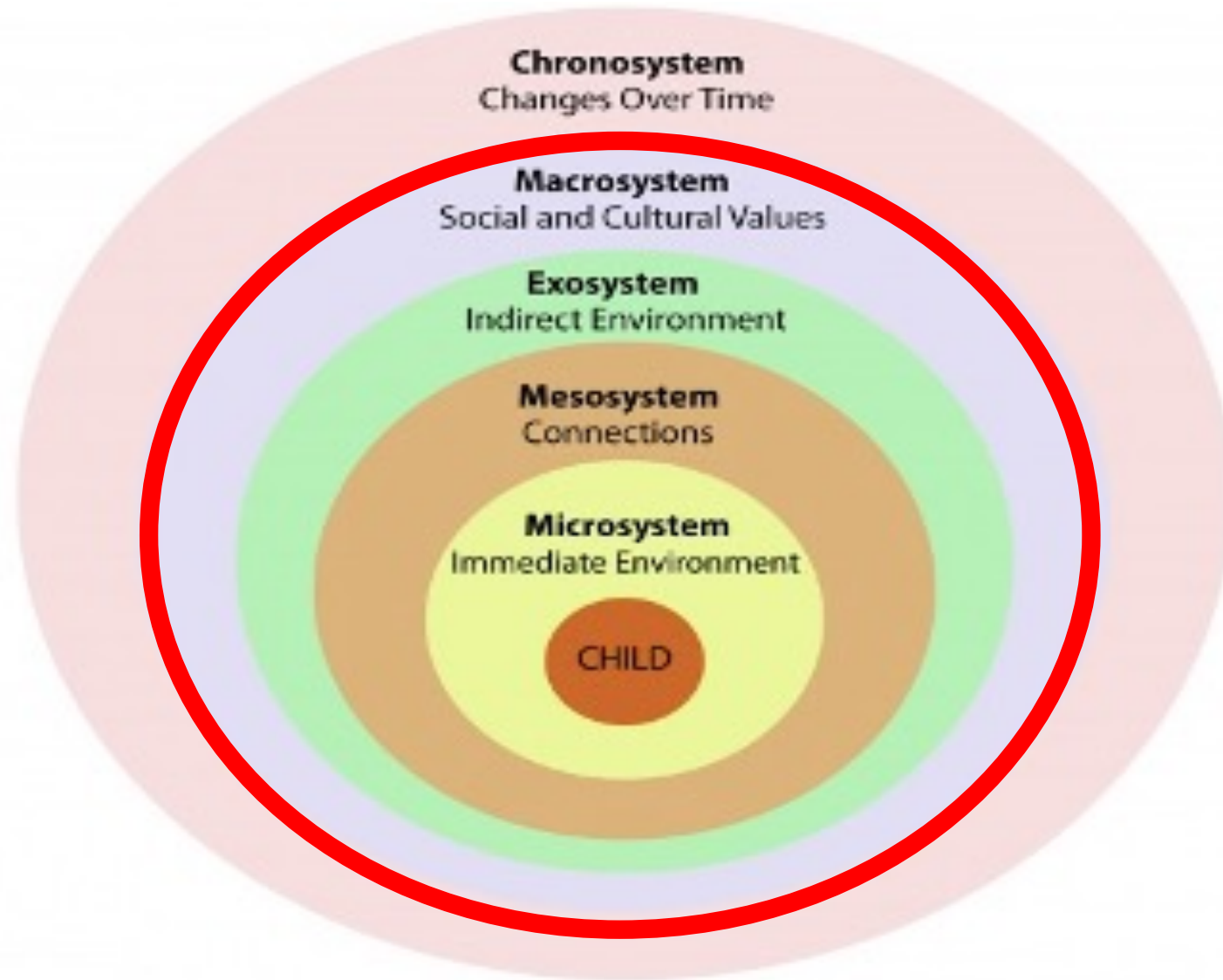
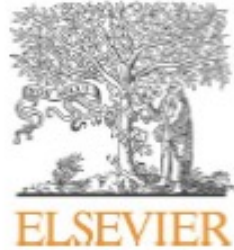


Figure 4. Path model of personality, social status, and school climate with bullying perpetration.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1979)





Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

Children and Youth Services Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/childyouth



Social ecology and adolescent bullying: Filtering risky environments through antisocial personality



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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Farrell, A. H., & Volk, A. A. (2017). Social ecology and adolescent bullying: Filtering risky environments through antisocial personality. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 83, 85–100.

Study Objectives

1. Examine direct and indirect associations between personality, perceived social environmental factors, and bullying perpetration.



Expected direct associations and indirect associations through antisocial personality traits.

Methods

- Participants:
 - Brock Adolescent Development Study
 - $N = 396$ (58% girls)
 - $M_{\text{age}} = 14.61$ ($SD_{\text{age}} = 1.52$)
 - Primarily White (73.7%); self-perceived middle class (64.6%)
- Procedure:
 - Recruited from extracurricular clubs in southern Ontario
 - Completed measures online

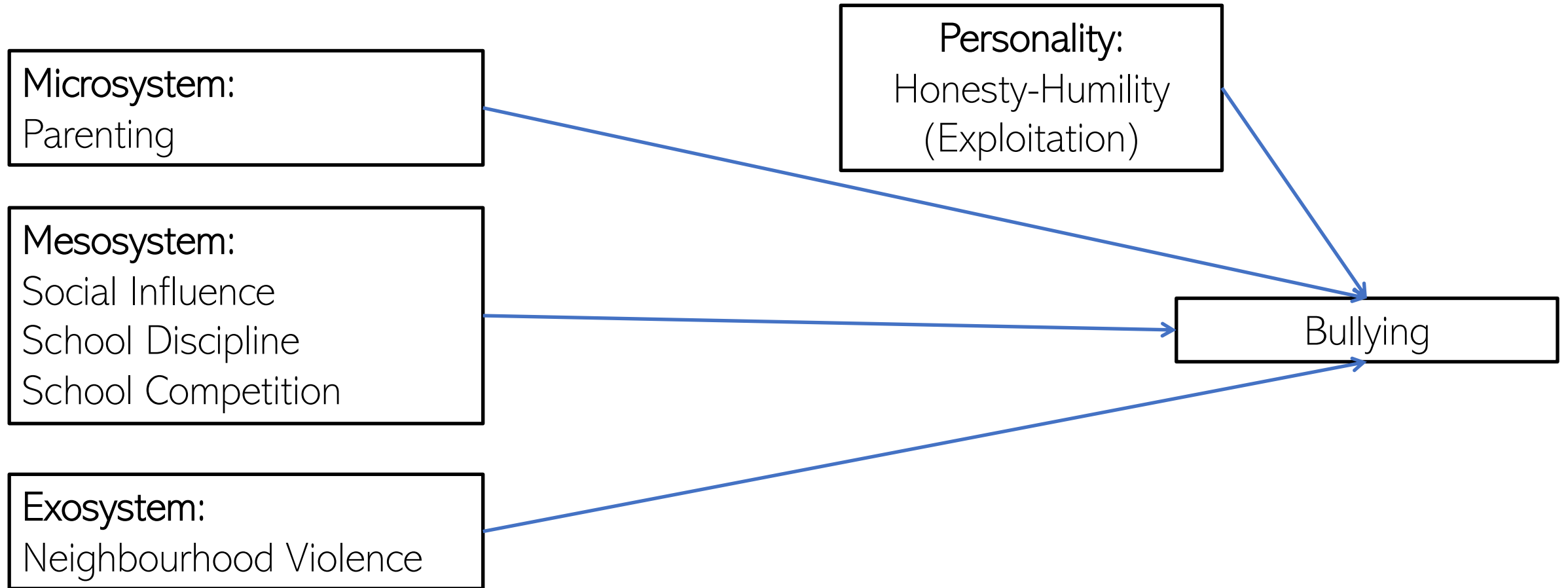


Figure 5. Summary of path models of social-ecological factors and bullying perpetration.

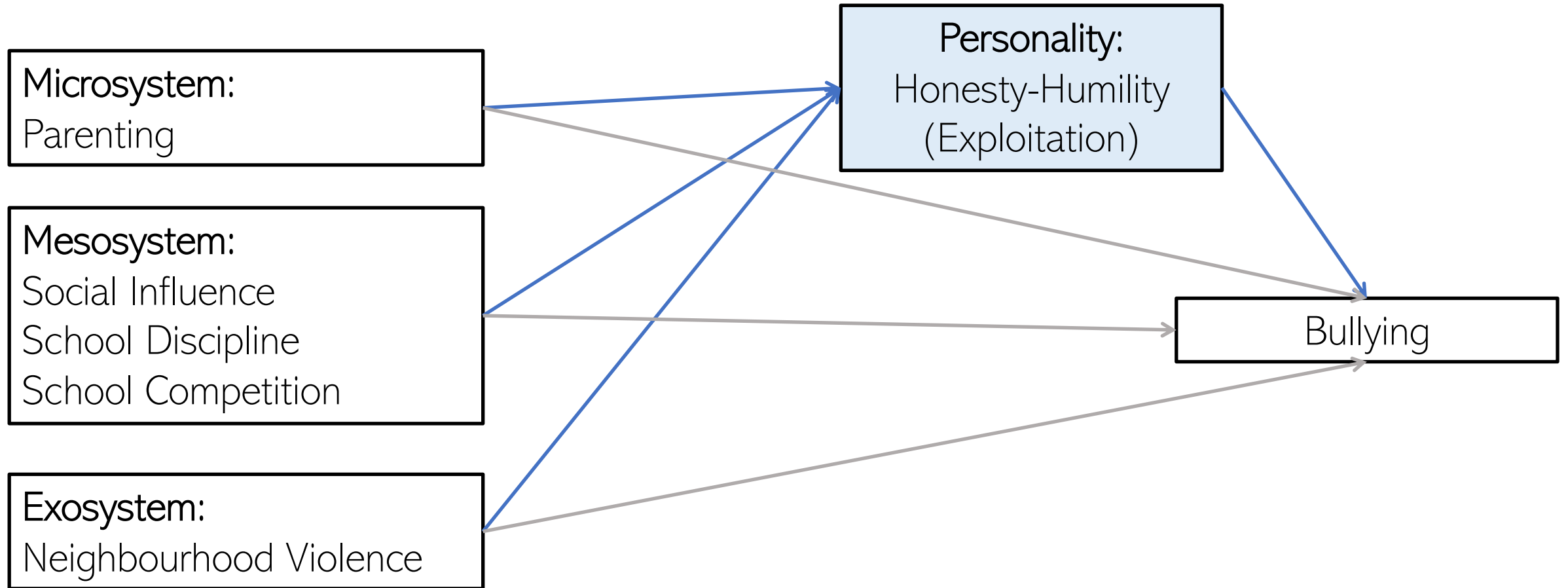


Figure 5. Summary of path models of social-ecological factors and bullying perpetration.



Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/paid



Short Communication

Maternal knowledge, adolescent personality, and bullying



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^b Department of Child and Youth Studies, Brock University, 1812 Sir Isaac Brock Way, St. Catharines, ON L2S 3A1, Canada

Farrell, A. H., Provenzano, D. A., Dane, A. V., Marini, Z. A., & Volk, A. A. (2017). Maternal knowledge, adolescent personality, and bullying. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 104, 413–416.

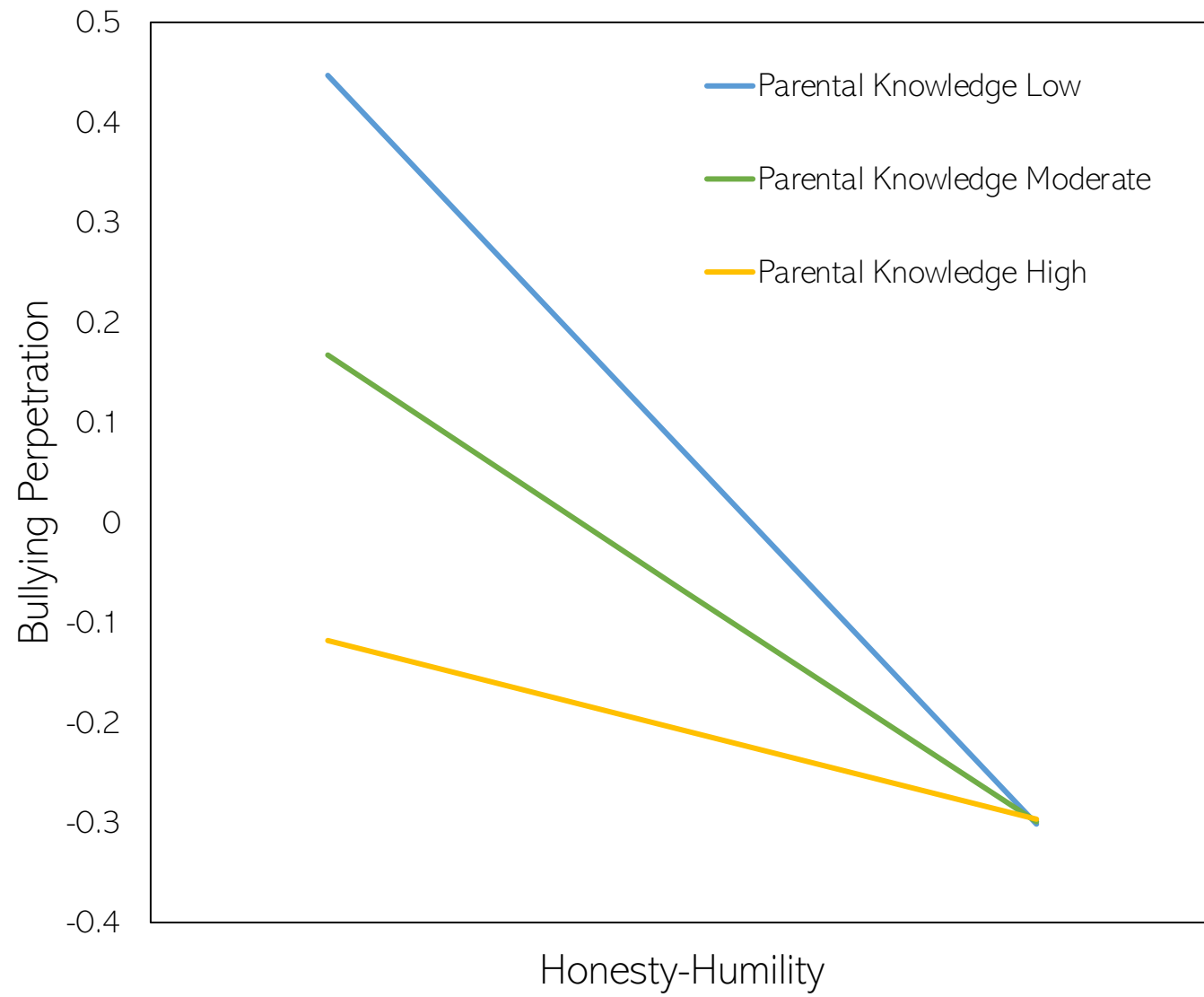


Figure 6. Interaction between Honesty-Humility and Parental Knowledge on Bullying Perpetration.

Bullying and the Macro- and Chrono- systems



Macrosystem:

Social and cultural attitudes

e.g., attitudes toward underrepresented, diverse, and marginalized groups

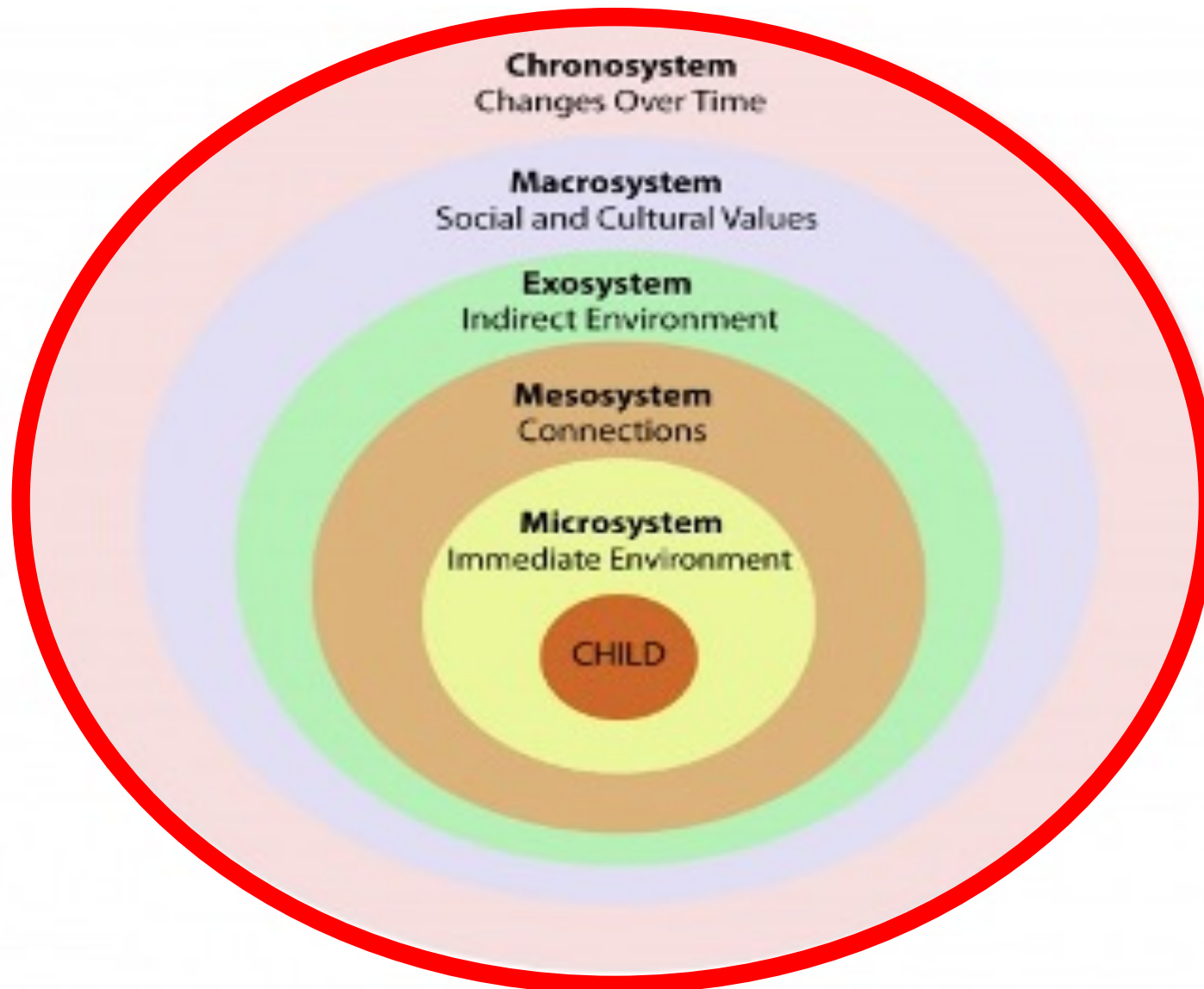


Chronosystem:

Changes across time

e.g., historical events like COVID-19 pandemic

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1979)



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DOI: 10.1002/ab.21986

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**AGGRESSIVE
BEHAVIOR** | WILEY

School bullying before and during COVID-19: Results from a population-based randomized design

Tracy Vaillancourt^{1,2}  | Heather Brittain¹  | Amanda Krygsman¹  |
Ann H. Farrell¹  | Sally Landon³ | Debra Pepler⁴ 

Vaillancourt, T., Brittain, H., Krygsman, A., Farrell, A. H., Landon, S., & Pepler, D. (2021). School bullying before and during COVID-19: Results from a population-based randomized design. *Aggressive Behavior*, 47(5), 557-569.

Study Objectives

1. Examine bullying prevalence rates before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Grades 4-12; cross-sectional) and examine these patterns in known modifiers such as gender, grade, underrepresented populations

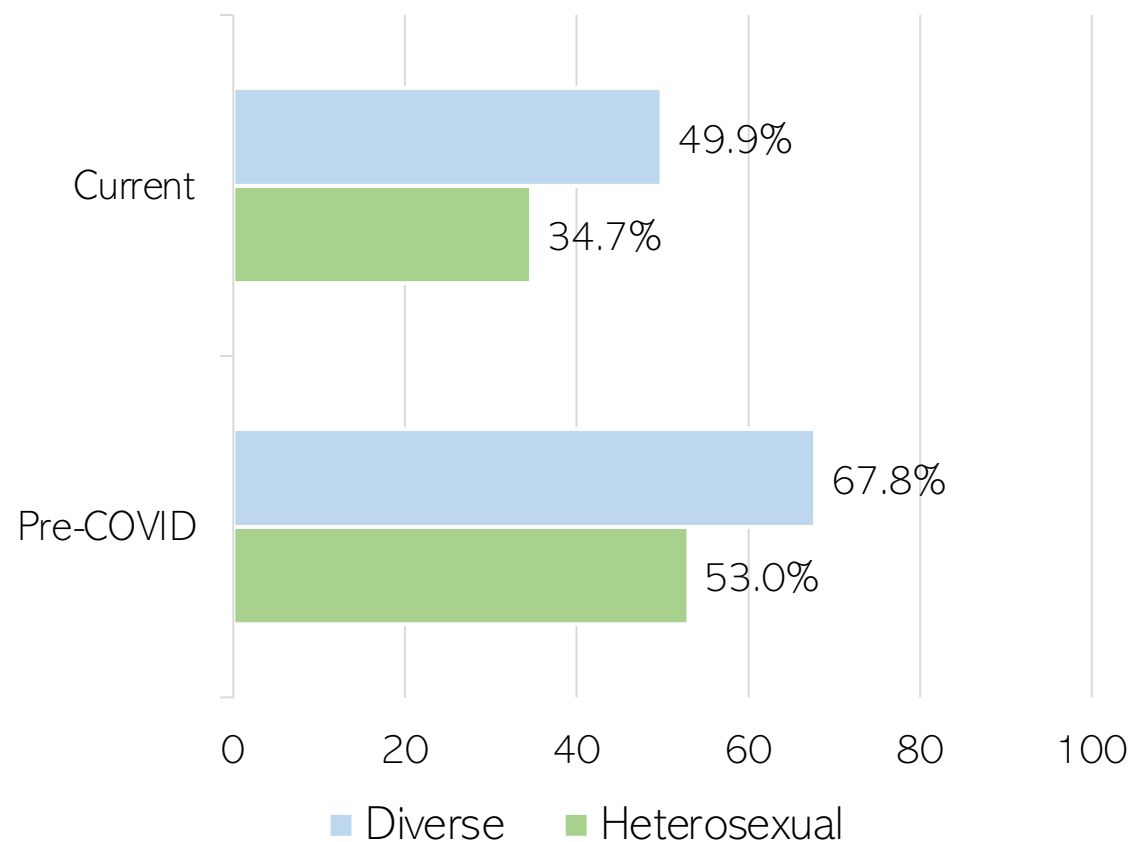


Expected prevalence to be lower during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods

- Participants:
 - $N = 6578$ (54.2% girls)
 - $M_{\text{age}} = 13.05$ ($SD_{\text{age}} = 2.34$)
 - Pre-COVID-19: 3895 (49.3% girls, 44.8% boys, 2.1 % gender diverse)
 - Current: 2683 (44.8% girls, 50.0% boys, 2.6% gender diverse)
- Procedure:
 - Schools in southern Ontario randomized into Pre-COVID-19 condition or current condition (November 2020)
 - Pre-COVID-19: Answered based on September 2019- March 2020 time frame
 - Current: Answered based on September 2020- November 2020 time frame

a) Victimization by Sexual Identity



b) Victimization by Gender Identity

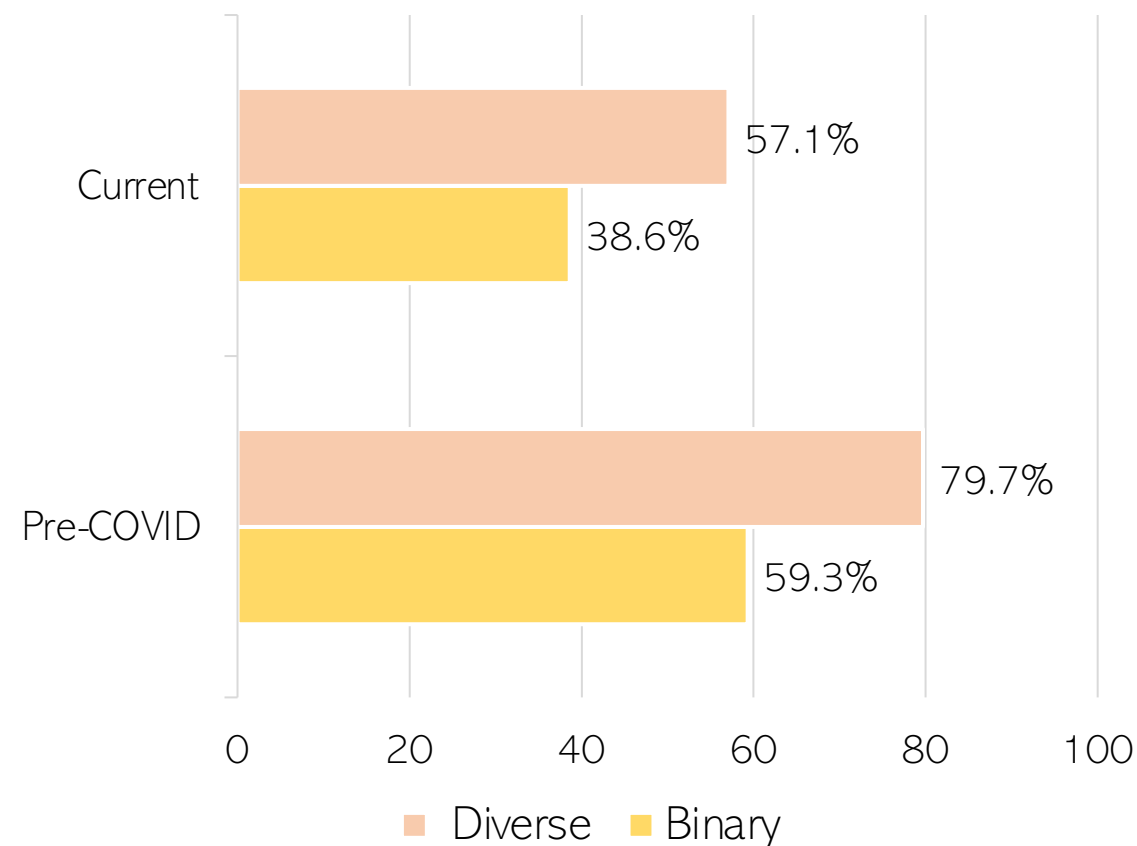


Figure 7. Victimization prevalence rates before and during COVID-19

Limitations and Future Directions

- Longer-term and complex mechanisms and contextual factors
- Long-term outcomes of bullying perpetration
- Diverse and underrepresented populations

What does this all mean?

How can we help effectively mitigate these factors?

How can we reduce bullying?

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Implications

A small proportion of individuals continue to use high levels of bullying and increase in antisocial traits across development

Often these associations can be moderated or mediated by other social-ecological factors, real or perceived

Addressing cognitions and attitudes related to a lack of sensitivity toward others and self-regulation could reduce bullying

However, not all young people use bullying behaviour

Implications

Young people's traits and behaviour are impacted by environmental contexts

Combinations of both individual and environmental contexts are important to prevent continuity of bullying

Methods to increase prosocial climate may be important

Support for socially vulnerable youth along with good quality of interpersonal relationships should be encouraged



Bullying, Victimization, and Prosocial Resource Control Strategies: Differential Relations With Dominance and Alliance Formation

Ann H. Farrell and Andrew V. Dane
Brock University

Farrell, A. H., and Dane, A. V. (2020). Bullying, victimization, and prosocial resource control strategies: Differential relations with dominance and alliance formation. *Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences*, 14(3), 270-283..

Bullying Perpetration

Bullying Victimization

Prosocial Strategies

Prosocial x Perpetration

Prosocial x Victimization

Alliance Formation

Dominance

Figure 8. Bullying and strategies as predictors of dominance and alliance formation

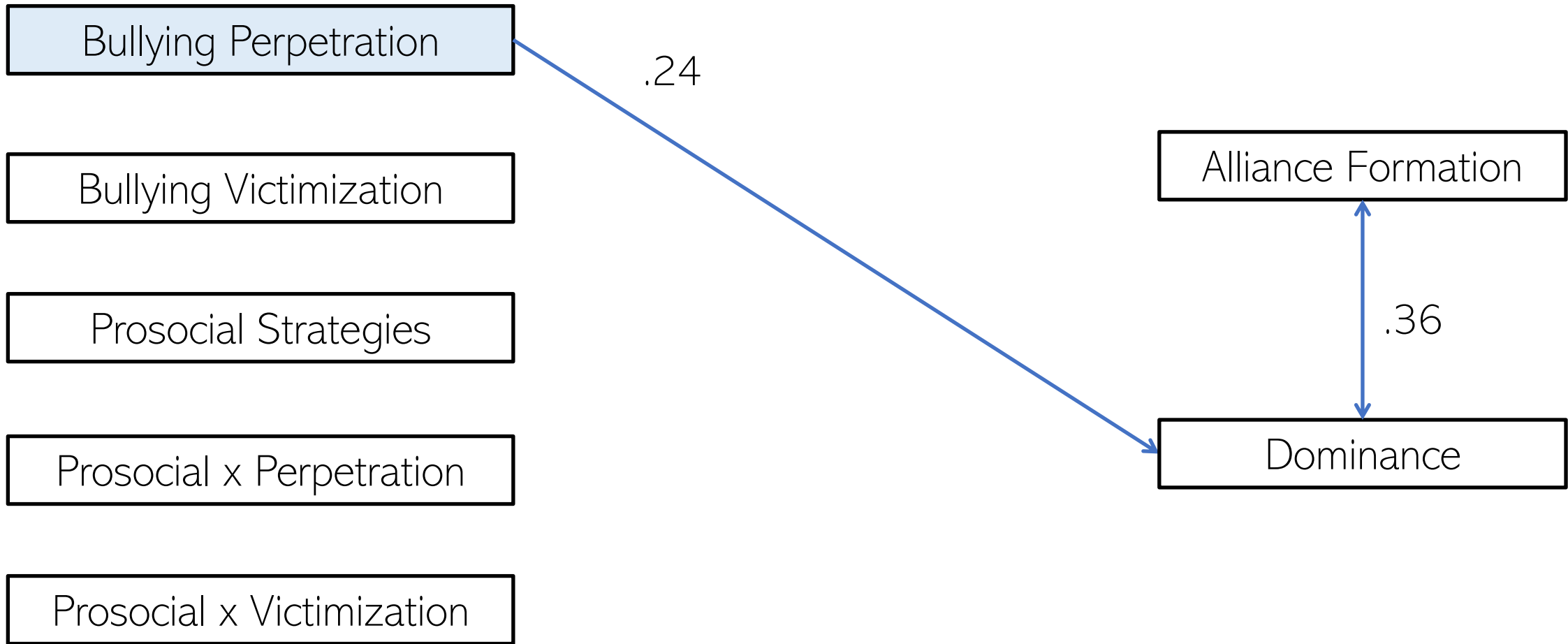


Figure 8. Bullying and strategies as predictors of dominance and alliance formation

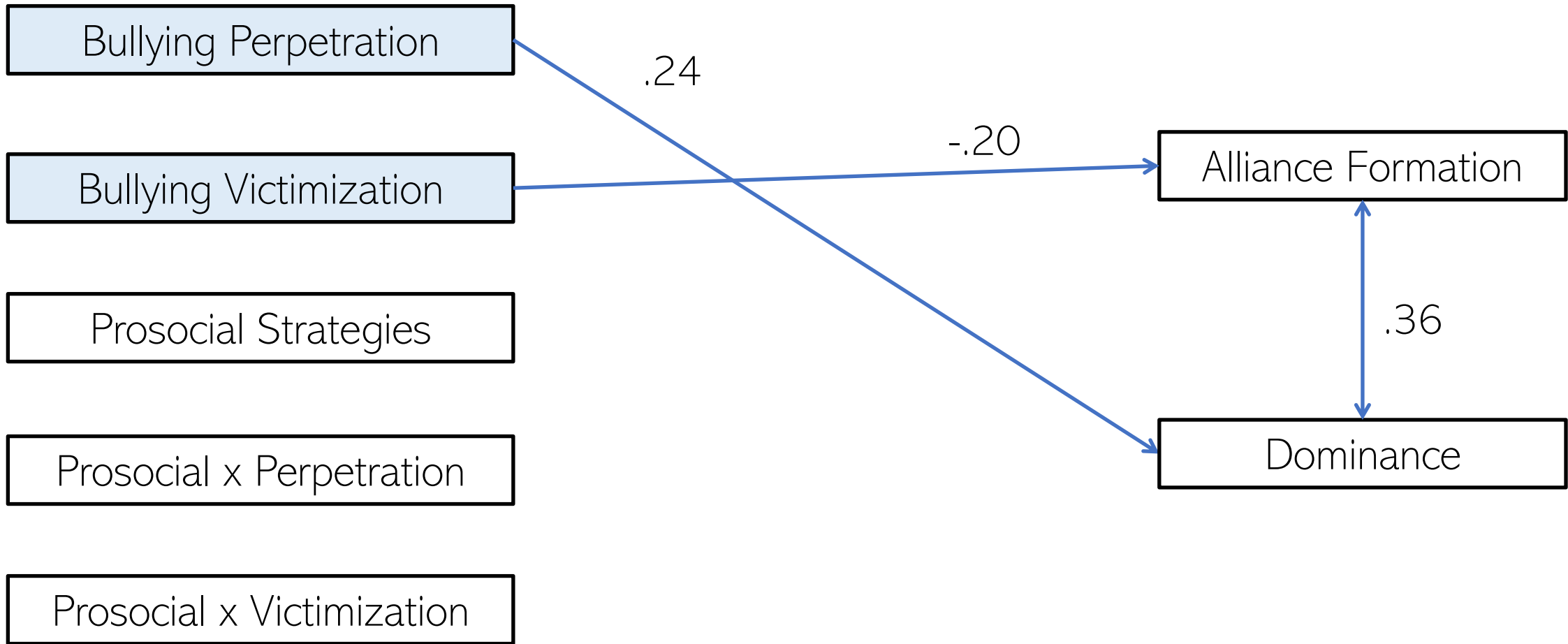


Figure 8. Bullying and strategies as predictors of dominance and alliance formation

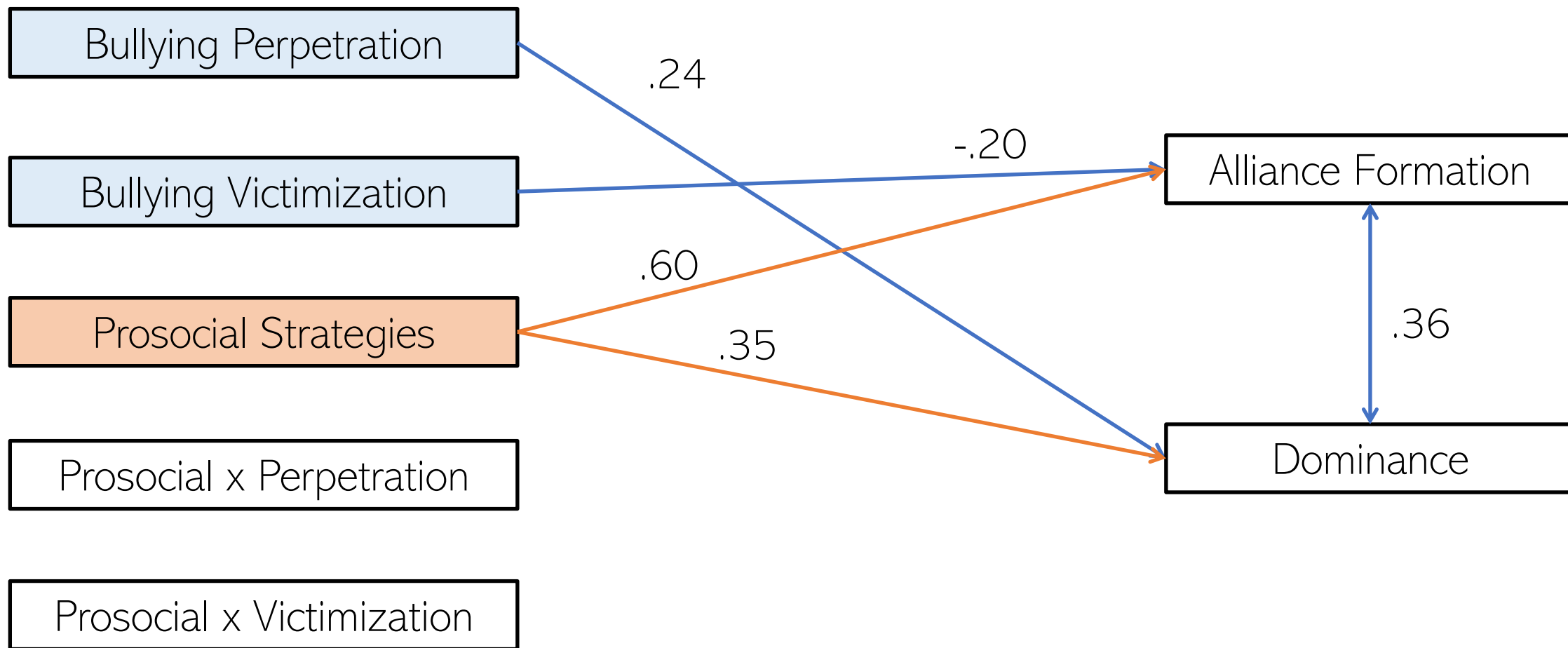


Figure 8. Bullying and strategies as predictors of dominance and alliance formation

Implications

Social Emotional Learning

Nickerson et al. 2019; Taylor et al., 2017

Bystander Interventions

Jenkins et al., 2019; Kärnä et al., 2011; Nickerson, et al., 2022

Prosocial climates and Healthy Relationships

Meaningful Roles; Ellis et al., 2016; The Fourth R; Crooks et al., 2015

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Brock Research on Aggression and Victimization Experiences

Welcome to the Brock Research on Aggression and Victimization Experiences (BRAVE) group webpage! Founded at the start of 2022, we are a team of researchers, professors, graduate, and undergraduate students who study aggression in order to help prevent it and to help those who are its victims.

www.Brocku.ca/BRAVE

thank you!

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