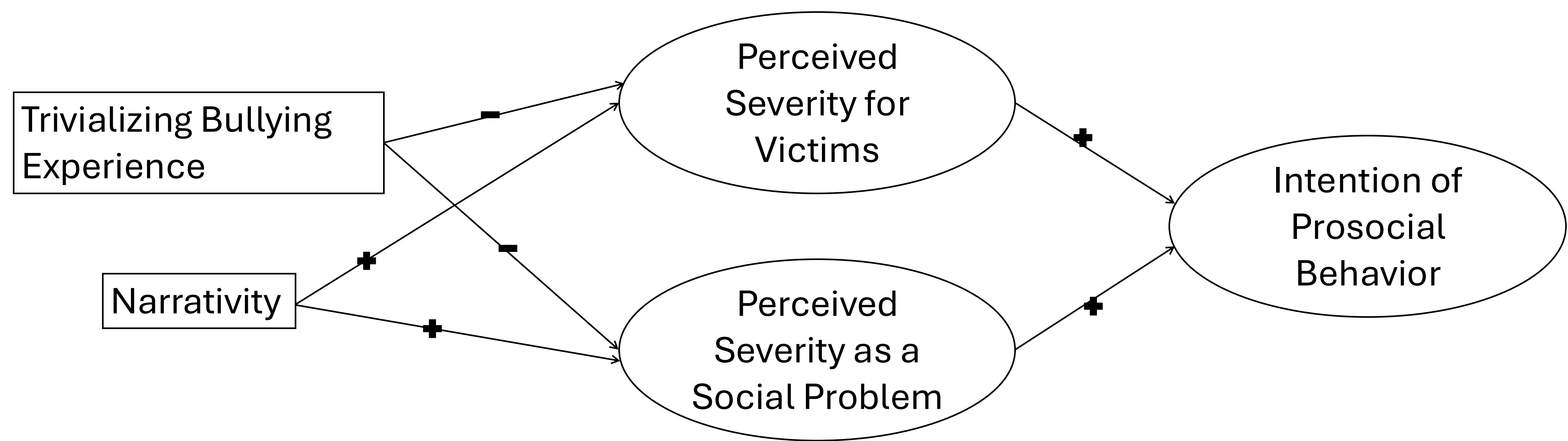


When Stories Downplay Harm: Effects of Trivialization and Narrativity in Bullying Stories on Perceptions and Intention

Hypothesis & Research Questions



Method: Between-Subjects Online Experiment

2 (trivialization: presence vs. absence) × 2 (narrativity: high vs. low) × 2 (context: school vs. workplace)

Participants

- Recruited via CloudResearch
- N = 809
 - $M_{age} = 45.67$
 - 400 male, 398 female, 11 others

Procedure

- Consent
- Questionnaire measuring covariates
- Random assignment to 1 of 8 conditions
- Exposure to stimuli
- Questionnaire measuring variables of interest

Examples of Stimuli

I got bullied at school

From age 11 to 16, I was bullied almost every day at school.

It started with name-calling and mocking how I looked or spoke, but it didn't stop there. One day, I found my locker forced open, and all my things were dumped on the floor. In PE, classmates would steal my bag or toss it like a joke. I once pulled my homework out of the trash, torn in half.

Girls would whisper and laugh behind my back. Once, someone sitting behind me cut a piece of my hair during class. My glasses were broken more than once. I used to go home with bruises from being jabbed with book corners during lessons.

I told myself things might get better if I stayed quiet. But they didn't. When I finally reported it to teachers, nothing changed. They didn't intervene. I felt invisible to the adults and powerless around the other students. I dreaded school. That experience and its resulting harm stayed with me for a very long time.

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Workplace bullying

I worked as a nurse in a hospital where I faced constant emotional abuse for over a year.

Workplace bullying can happen in various settings and may involve persistent patterns of mistreatment. Common behaviors include social exclusion, excessive or unjustified criticism, and manipulation of work schedules. These actions often create a hostile environment and can escalate over time if left unaddressed.

For example, an employee might be often called into meetings where a supervisor focuses only on negative feedback, excluded from team communications, or assigned back-to-back double shifts. In some cases, the mistreatment continues beyond the workplace, like through unwanted contact on social media such as Facebook or LinkedIn. Reporting these issues does not always result in effective intervention.

These behaviors can persist over extended periods and have serious psychological consequences. Long-term exposure to workplace bullying is associated with chronic stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. In some cases, the effects may be severe enough to contribute to a clinical diagnosis, such as PTSD, even after leaving the work environment.

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No trivialization, high narrativity, school context

Trivialization, high narrativity, school context

No trivialization, low narrativity, workplace context

Trivialization, low narrativity, workplace context

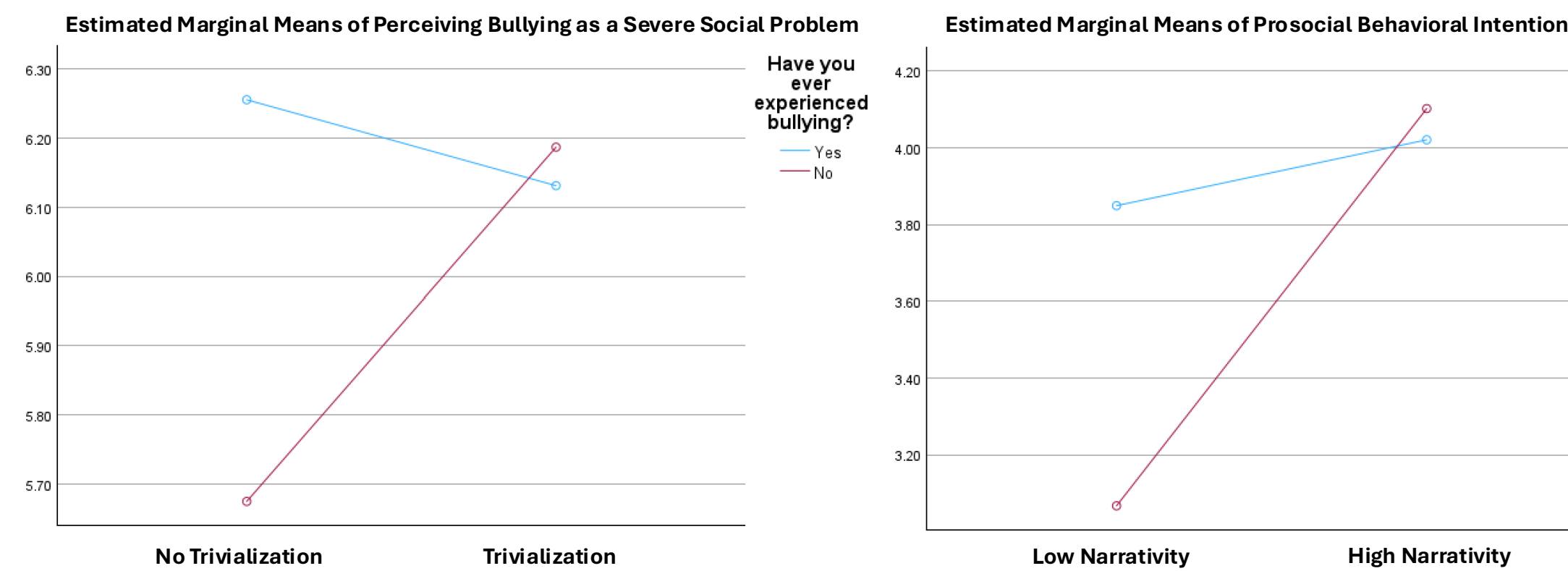
Results

School Context

- Trivialization did not affect perceptions or intention of prosocial behaviors.
- Higher narrativity led to greater perceived severity of bullying.
- Perceiving bullying as a severe social problem positively mediated the impact of high narrativity on behavioral intention.
- Previous experience moderated the main effect of trivialization on perceived severity of bullying (as social problem) and main effect of narrativity on behavioral intention.

Workplace Context

- Trivialization led to a lower level of perceived severity of bullying experienced by victims.
- Perceiving bullying to be severe for victims mediated the impact of trivialization on behavioral intention.



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