The Protective Role of Friends in the Link between Daily Cyber Victimization and Adjustment Problems among Predominately Latino Adolescents

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Abstract The current study examined whether friendship factors, including time spent with friends and perceived friendship quality, moderate daily associations between cyber victimization and adolescent adjustment (i.e., distress, anger, attendance problems, perceived school safety). The study focuses on the experiences of predominately Latino youth, as they remain an understudied group in cyber victimization research. Participants included 136 high school students (88% Latino) who completed daily checklists across five consecutive school days. Hierarchical linear modeling results revealed that time spent with friends moderated the associations between cyber victimization with distress, anger and attendance problems. For example, on days that adolescents did not spend time with their friends, there was a significant link between cyber victimization and feelings of anger. For adolescents who did spend time with their friends during the day, this association did not exist. Friendship quality only buffered the negative association between daily cyber victimization and feelings of distress.

Keywords Cyber victimization · Adolescence · Protective · Friendships · Latino adolescents

For most youth, the Internet and access to electronic devices are a central and indispensable part of their daily lives. Recent estimates suggest that in the United States, 95% of teens (ages 12 to 17) are connected online (Lenhart et al. 2011) and 24% report that they are online almost constantly (via their

smartphones; Lenhart 2015). Moreover, as adolescent's social lives are rooted and expanding in an online culture, they report communicating online with peers to fulfill a sense of belonging (Huang and Chao, 2010). Although there are numerous benefits to adolescents being connected and developing social relationships with peers online (e.g., Dolev-Cohen and Barak 2013; Guan and Subrahmanyam 2009; Yang and Brown 2013), there is also clear evidence that the online context is increasingly becoming a space where adolescents are targeted by their peers in the form of cyber victimization (Jones et al. 2012). The findings demonstrating that cyber victimization is related to psychological, physical and school adjustment problems are robust (e.g., Bauman et al. 2013; Kowalski and Limber 2013; see Kowalski et al. 2014 for a review). For example, Smokowski et al. (2014) conducted a two-year longitudinal study with over 3000 adolescents from 28 middle schools and found that both current and chronic cyber victimization were related to lower levels of school satisfaction and greater mental health problems. Although cyberbullying research has increased our understanding of how being victimized online impacts adolescents well-being across various domains of adjustment, there are still gaps that exist in this research. For example, few cyber victimization studies have focused on identifying protective factors that may ameliorate the negative adjustment problems that result from being threatened or otherwise targeted online. Another gap in the cyber victimization research is that a majority of studies focus on the experiences of White adolescents, with only a small proportion of studies focusing on the experiences of ethnic minority youth, such as Latino adolescents. Given that Latino youth are at increased risk for mental health problems and of doing poorly in school (e.g., Kohler and Lazarin 2007; Romero et al. 2013), identifying factors that may ameliorate negative victimization-adjustment links should be considered an important public health issue that warrants more attention.

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Thus, the current study aims to extend cyber victimization research by examining whether friendship factors (i.e., time spent with friends and perceived friendship quality) buffer the daily associations between cyber victimization and adjustment problems (i.e., well-being and school outcomes) among a sample of predominately Latino high school students.

Can Friends Serve a Buffering Role? Sullivan (1953) posited that friends play an important role in shaping well-being, particularly among adolescents. Friends help adolescents meet important basic needs, such as companionship and a sense of belongingness and are clearly critical for the psychosocial development of youth (Rubin et al. 2015). Thus, it may be expected that certain friendship factors ameliorate the emotional pain associated with victimization. The “friendship protection hypothesis” indicates that having friends may help buffer against negative incidents and the subsequent consequences (Boulton et al. 1999). Indeed, there is research suggesting that friends buffer from the distress of victimization experiences that occur in the school context. For example, a longitudinal study of fourth and fifth grade students revealed that school-based victimization was associated with an increase in internalizing and externalizing behaviors a year later, but the association was attenuated for students with a mutual friendship (Hodges et al. 1999). More recently, Cuadros and Berger (2016) conducted a one-year longitudinal study with young adolescents and they found that for both boys and girls the link between peer victimization and well-being was moderated by friendship quality. Specifically, adolescents who were victimized but reported high-quality friendships had better well-being compared to adolescents who were victimized and did not have high-quality friendships.

Moreover, there is evidence that factors such as classmate peer support (Davidson and Demaray 2007), friendship quality (Malcolm et al. 2006), friendship self-efficacy (Fitzpatrick and Bussey 2014), and friend support (Schmidt and Bagwell 2007) protect youth from the distress associated with school bullying experiences. In one of the few studies to test the friend buffering hypothesis among Latino youth, Nakamoto and Schwartz (2011) found a moderation effect in school engagement, but not GPA. Contrary to expectations, the effect showed that the association between school victimization and engagement was exacerbated for Latino youth with many friends. The authors conclude that in difficult urban settings, having numerous friends may not buffer youth against the negative effects of bullying and perhaps rather withdrawing from the peer group may be particularly adaptive. An alternative explanation not presented by the authors is that perhaps not all aspects of friendships (e.g., number of friends versus friendship quality) similarly serve to protect youth from the consequences of peer victimization. For example, given that compared to childhood, during adolescence time spent with friends increases (Larson and Richards, 1991), *time spent with*

friends, may be particularly important to examine as a friendship factor that buffers from the negative outcomes of being cyber victimized. Merely spending time with friends, whether it be in-person or online is likely to promote adolescents’ sense of connectedness or belonging, yet, this dimension remains relatively unexamined. One exception is a study by Masten et al. (2012) which found that spending time with friends yielded protective benefits to adolescents by decreasing the degree to which social stressors, such as bullying experiences, were perceived as threatening. Thus, the current study examines both friendship quality, a factor that encapsulates closeness, support and affection, and has been largely examined in peer research (e.g., Cuadros and Berger 2016), and time spent with friends, as factors that may serve a protective role for victimized adolescents.

A vast majority of studies that have looked at friendship factors in relation to cyber victimization have examined only the extent to which friends may increase or decrease the likelihood of being involved in cyberbullying. Hinduja and Patchin (2013) found that if youth perceived that their friends were targeting others online, then they were more likely to report cyberbullying behaviors themselves. In a study examining the role of both online and in-person social support among adolescents, Ybarra et al. (2015) found that only in-person social support was related to a lower likelihood of being cyber victimized. To date, only one study has examined if the association between adolescents’ cyber victimization experiences and their adjustment problems is ameliorated by friendship factors. In a study among 867 ethnically diverse eighth grade students, Wright (2016) found that high levels of social support from friends moderated the association between cyber victimization and substance use. The author concludes that having friends who care for them allows adolescents to feel more capable of handling negative peer interactions such as cyber victimization without turning to substance use. Thus, there is emerging evidence to suggest that friendships have an influence on involvement in cyberbullying but the extent to which friendship factors ameliorate against the negative outcomes of being cyber victimized is less well understood and is the focus of the current study.

Current Study The current study not only addresses the novel question of whether time spent with friends and friendship quality moderates the association between daily cyber victimization and adjustment problems but it also uses a novel approach, daily diary methodology and focuses on an understudied population, Latino adolescents. To date, cyberbullying research has been limited in the types of methodology used with the majority of studies relying on traditional, one-time surveys (Espinoza and Juvonen 2012). The use of daily methodology (a type of intensive longitudinal design) in the current study will permit the examination of day-to-day fluctuations in cyber victimization. That is, this method can

address questions such as: On any given day that a Latino adolescent is victimized online, are they less likely to report feelings of distress if they spent time with their friend that same day (compared to teens who did not spend time with their friend)? And, if an adolescent is threatened online one day, but they also perceive their friendships to be high quality on the same day, will they be less likely to report school attendance problems (compared to victimized youth with low quality friendships)?

The focus on predominately Latino youth also extends the current research on cyber victimization by studying a marginalized ethnic minority group that remains understudied in the peer relations literature more broadly, and certainly in the cyber victimization research. There are several reasons why it is timely and important to examine the cyber victimization experiences of Latino youth. First, recent evidence indicates that the digital divide between Latino and White youth which was once prominent is now at its narrowest points (Brown et al. 2016) and overall among Latino youth their use of online tools is quickly growing (Madden et al., 2013). Thus, understanding the online experiences of Latino youth is timely. Furthermore, understanding how friends may protect Latinos from feelings of distress or perceptions of school safety is particularly important given that Latino adolescents are at high risk of mental health problems, such as depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation, as well as school problems (e.g., Gore and Aseltine 2003; Romero et al. 2013). In one of the few studies to examine cyber victimization among Latino adolescents, Espinoza (2015) found that daily victimization experiences were related to negative emotions, physical symptoms, as well as school outcomes. Thus, the results of that study highlight that online encounters of victimization compromises the well-being of Latino youth and an important next step is to identify factors that may weaken these victimization-adjustment links.

In sum, the main aim of the current study is to examine whether time spent with friends and friendship quality buffer the daily negative links between cyber victimization and adjustment problems (i.e., distress, anger, school attendance problems, perceived school safety) among a sample of predominately Latino high school students.

Method

Participants

Students spanning across ninth to twelfth grade were recruited from a high school comprised of predominately Latino (94%) students with 68% of students eligible for free or reduced lunch. Given the focus of the current study on the experiences of Latino students, the high school was selected given the student demographics and the principal and teachers willingness to participate.

Based on the students who were invited to participate in their homeroom class, returned a signed parent consent form and who signed an assent form themselves, there was a 67% participation rate for the current study. This percentage compares favorably with past studies utilizing a daily diary approach among adolescents (e.g., Ham and Larson 1990; Kiang et al. 2006). The analytic sample was limited to students who completed the background survey and at least one checklist, resulting in 136 participants (50% female). Students across ninth (26%), tenth (34%), eleventh (33%) and twelfth (7%) grade were included. With regards to ethnic background, the sample paralleled the school-level demographics such that a vast majority were Latino (88%) and also included students who self-identified as White (4%), African-American (3%) and Other (e.g., Asian, Middle Eastern) or Multiracial (6%). Within the Latino group, students were mostly Central American (57%) or Mexican American (39%). Seventy-four percent of students were second-generation (i.e., the adolescent was born in the United States and at least one parent was born outside of the U.S.). Eighteen percent of students were first-generation immigrants (i.e., adolescent and parent(s) born outside of U.S.) and 8% were third generation (i.e., adolescent and parent(s) born in the U.S.).

Procedures

Students in homeroom classrooms enrolled with mostly ninth, tenth and eleventh grade students were invited to participate in the study (homerooms with predominately twelfth grade students were excluded due to senior activities extending through some of the study period). Students received information about the study via classroom presentations led by the principal investigator and trained research assistants. During the brief presentations, students were broadly told about the goals of the study, what would be asked of them if they agreed to participate and the incentives for participating. Students were given a packet to take home to their parent or guardian that included an informational letter and the consent form, both documents were provided in English and Spanish. Students with parent permission and who also provided their assent completed a background questionnaire (e.g., demographic items such as ethnicity and country of birth) in a classroom setting. After the questionnaire, students received instructions for completing the daily checklists and a packet with a set of paper checklists and envelopes to complete each evening for five consecutive school days. After completing a checklist each evening, students wrote the time and date at the top of the completed checklist, sealed it in an envelope and placed it in the project box located in their homeroom on the following morning. To further ensure that the checklists were completed on time, they were gathered daily from each class. Each checklist took less than five minutes to complete. Students earned two dollars for each checklist, resulting in a ten-dollar payment if the five checklists were completed. On

average, across the five days, 97% of diaries were completed and 81% of diaries were completed on time (i.e., completed either on the same night or before 9:00 am on the following day). This rate compares favorably with past daily diary checklist studies with Latino adolescents (Espinoza et al. 2013). Analyses were run that included only those checklists completed on time and then again with all of the collected checklists. The main results did not differ across both approaches, thus, the findings reported in the results are drawn from all completed checklists.

Measures

Students completed a one-time background questionnaire and daily checklists. To address the main research aims of the current study, the measures are drawn exclusively from the daily checklists. The checklists assessed a variety of school and online events, emotions and activities.

Cyber Victimization Experiences In a section titled, *Online Events and Experiences*, students were asked, “Did any of the following things happen online or in a text message today?” followed by five items with the response options, *no* or *yes*. The items included: “someone called you names that insulted you”, “someone threatened you, physically or otherwise”, “someone spread rumors about you online or via text message”, “someone shared private pictures of you that embarrassed you”, and “someone shared private information, without your permission, that embarrassed you”. The items were adapted from a previous study of adolescent cyberbullying (Juvonen and Gross 2008). The five items were averaged each day to create the composite.

Adolescent Adjustment Two well-being (i.e., distress, anger) and school outcomes (i.e., attendance problems, perceived school safety) were utilized as adolescent adjustment indicators. To assess daily distress and anger, students were asked “The following is a list of feelings. Today, did you feel...”? Specifically, for the measure of *distress*, students completed six items that were drawn from the depression and anxiety subscales from the Profile of Mood States (Lorr and McNair 1971) as the two scales are highly correlated ($r = .55$, $p < .001$). Each evening, students rated the extent to which they felt depressive feelings (discouraged, hopeless and sad) and anxious feelings (worried, distracted and nervous). The items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from *not at all* (1) to *extremely* (5). The items were averaged to form a daily composite of distress and the items had strong internal reliability ($\alpha = .78$). *Anger* was measured with two items including “angry” and “mad” which were also rated on a 5-point

scale from *not at all* (1) to *extremely* (5). The two items were strongly correlated ($r = .82$, $p < .001$).

In the *School Events and Experiences* section, adolescents were asked to indicate whether certain events happened at school and also how they felt about school during the day. *Attendance problems* was assessed with two items. Each evening, students indicated whether they were “late for class” and if they “skipped or cut a class”. For each item, students responded either *no* or *yes*. The number of incidents reported were averaged each day. No alpha coefficients can be calculated for this measure given that it is a count of events. To measure *perceived school safety*, students responded to one item, “I was worried about my safety” with response options ranging from *not at all* (1) to *extremely* (5). This item was reverse coded so that higher scores indicate higher perceived feelings of school safety.

Friendship Factors In a section titled, *Friend Events and Experiences*, students responded to checklist items about whether they spent time with their friends during the day and also perceived closeness and support from friends. Two friendship indices were measured: time spent with friends and friendship quality. To assess *time spent with friends*, students responded to a single checklist item “spent time with your friends today” every evening. Given that this is a binary (0 = no, 1 = yes), single item an alpha coefficient cannot be calculated. Moreover, four items were used to measure *perceived friendship quality*. The items included: “got along with your friend(s)”, “felt really close to your friend(s)”, “your friend(s) were there when you needed them” and “felt like your friend(s) really understood you”. A daily mean of the four items was computed to create the composite. The items were modified from existing friendship scales that assess the affective quality of friendships (Greenberg et al. 1983) and a scale of social support (Zimet et al. 1988).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients for the mean-level variables (averages across all days) are presented in Table 1. The composite measure of daily cyber victimization experiences was averaged across the five school days to create a score that indicated the proportion of days that students were targeted online. On average, cyber victimization was an infrequent experience that occurred on only 2% of days ($M = .02$, $SD = .06$). Overall, 20% of predominately Latino high school students reported at least one victimization incident across the school days such that 10% reported one incident, 5% reported two incidents and 5% reported three or more incidents. No

Table 1 Descriptives and correlations among mean-level factors

	M	SD	Range	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Cyber Victimization	.02	.06	0–1	-						
2. Distress	1.54	.47	1–5	.18*	-					
3. Anger	1.70	.61	1–5	.18*	.66**	-				
4. Attendance Problems	.20	.23	0–1	.27**	.22**	.16	-			
5. School Safety	4.21	.96	1–5	-.01	.11	.10	.22**	-		
6. Time with Friends	.88	.23	0–1	-.09	.05	.04	.06	.14	-	
7. Friendship Quality	.83	.24	0–1	-.05	-.13	-.06	-.08	.10	.48**	-

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

differences in reports of victimization were found based on student's grade level, ethnicity or generational status (based on univariate linear models, all p 's $> .05$).

Testing the Buffering Role of Friendship Factors

The primary set of analyses tested whether time spent with friends and perceived friendship quality buffers adolescents from the negative impact of cyber victimization experiences. Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; Raudenbusch and Bryk

2002) was utilized as it accounts for the nested data that results from daily methodology (i.e., days nested within individuals). HLM models permit the testing of individual (between-subjects) and daily (within-subjects) associations between students' cyber victimization experiences and the adjustment indicators, with the friendship factors as moderators. Separate models were estimated for each well-being and school outcome. For example, the daily level equation that was estimated to predict daily distress and test for moderation was:

$$\text{Distress}_{ij} = b_{0j} + b_{1j}(\text{daily cyber victimization experiences}) + b_{2j}(\text{daily friendship factor}) + b_{3j}(\text{cyber victimization} \times \text{friendship factor interaction}) + e_{ij} \quad (1)$$

For the model shown in Eq. 1, feelings of distress on a particular day (i) for a particular student (j) is modeled as a function of the student's intercept, or the average feelings of distress across days (b_{0j}) as well as daily fluctuations in cyber victimization (group mean centered cyber victimization; b_{1j})

and in the daily friendship factor (not centered; b_{2j}). The error term (e_{ij}) accounts for variance in distress that is not explained by the cyber victimization and friendship predictors. In addition, the following corresponding individual-level equations were modeled:

$$b_{0j}(\text{average daily distress}) = c_{00} + c_{01}(\text{average cyber victimization}) + u_{0j} \quad (2)$$

$$b_{1j}(\text{daily association of cyber victimization with distress}) = c_{10} \quad (3)$$

$$b_{2j}(\text{daily association of cyber victimization with friendship factor}) = c_{20} \quad (4)$$

$$b_{3j}(\text{daily association of cyber victimization with interaction term}) = c_{30} \quad (5)$$

Average cyber victimization is modeled at the intercept to account for adolescent's chronic experiences with victimization.

The slopes for the main predictors were treated as fixed. Initial models that allowed all effects to vary randomly were run and

resulted in a general lack of significant variability in these variables and the models also had limited power, thus, the most parsimonious models with the fixed effects were retained.

Time Spent with Friends In the first set of models with time spent with friends, in predicting anger, distress and attendance problems, in addition to a significant interaction with cyber victimization, the daily- and mean-level cyber victimization variables were also significant (see Table 2). Thus, on any given day that an adolescent deviated from their average levels of daily victimization experiences (i.e., reported a higher level of cyber victimization) they reported greater feelings of anger, distress and also more attendance problems. Moreover, adolescents' who, on average, report higher levels of cyber victimization, also report feeling more anger, distress and report more attendance problems (mean-level).

In the model predicting anger, the interaction with time spent with friends emerged as statistically significant ($b = -3.37$, $SE = 1.03$, $p = .002$). The interaction was probed with the Preacher et al. (2006) HLM simple slope computational tools and is depicted in the upper panel of Fig. 1. On any given day that adolescents did not spend time with their friends, there was a significant association between cyber victimization and anger ($b = 3.81$, $SE = 1.01$, $p < .001$), such that those adolescents who were victimized reported higher feelings of anger. However, for adolescents who did spend time with their friends during the day, there was no association between cyber victimization and anger ($b = .45$, $SE = .32$, $p = .17$). The pattern of results can also be interpreted as, a lack of contact with friends on days when adolescents are victimized online, increases their levels of anger (compared to days when they do spend time with friends).

A similar buffering role of time spent with friends was found in the daily associations between distress and attendance problems with cyber victimization experiences. For distress, there was a positive association with cyber victimization for both adolescents who did not spend time with their friends during the day ($b = 3.47$, $SE = .33$, $p < .001$) and those who

did spend time with friends ($b = .76$, $SE = .27$, $p = .005$), but as shown in Fig. 1, the association was weaker for adolescents who did spend time with friends during the day. In predicting attendance problems, there was a positive association with cyber victimization for adolescents who did not spend time with their friends ($b = .42$, $SE = .12$, $p < .001$). Adolescents who did not spend time with friends were more likely to report attendance problems if they were victimized online during the day. Conversely, for adolescents who spent time with their friends during the day there was no association between cyber victimization and attendance problems ($b = .08$, $SE = .07$, $p = .26$; last panel of Fig. 1). Time spent with friends did not buffer the association between cyber victimization and perceptions of school safety.

Perceived Friendship Quality Following the same modeling procedures, additional analyses were conducted to examine whether the perceived quality of friendships buffers the associations between cyber victimization and the adjustment problems. Only one significant interaction with cyber victimization emerged in the model predicting distress ($b = -1.77$, $SE = .84$, $p = .04$). The simple slope analyses revealed a similar pattern of results as described in the previous moderation models. Specifically, for adolescents with lower levels of perceived friendship quality, there was a positive daily association between victimization and distress ($b = 2.64$, $SE = .68$, $p < .001$). Although there was also an association between cyber victimization and distress for adolescents with higher levels of perceived friendship quality ($b = .87$, $SE = .34$, $p = .01$), this link was weaker. No other significant moderations with perceived friendship quality were found.

Discussion

Through the focus on identifying protective factors, the utilization of daily methodology and studying a predominately Latino adolescent sample, three voids in cyber victimization research were addressed in the current study. For example, to

Table 2 Models testing time with friends as a moderator

	Anger		Distress		Attendance Problems	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Intercept	1.69***	.11	1.52***	.07	.17***	.03
L1 Daily Cyberbullying	3.81***	1.00	3.47***	.33	.42***	.12
L1 Time with Friends	-.06	.12	.08	.07	.04	.03
L1 Cyberbullying $\times$ Friend Interaction	-3.37**	1.03	-2.71***	.41	-.34*	.14
L2 Mean Cyberbullying	5.21***	1.19	4.26***	1.07	1.25**	.46
Standard deviation estimate	.24***	.48	.40***	.16	.20***	.04

Results are shown for 3 separate HLM models. The coefficients reported are unstandardized estimates.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Fig. 1 Cyber Victimization by Time Spent with Friends Interactions for Anger (a), Distress (b), and Attendance Problems (c)

date, a limitation of cyber victimization research is that studies have mostly focused on the factors that may place children at increased risk of being targeted online, such as the amount of hours spent connected online daily (Mishna et al. 2012), and disclosure of personal information (Mesch 2009), with few studies exploring the protective factors that may alleviate the distress, anger or negative school behaviors resulting from cyber victimization. Moreover, given that the role of peers and friendships is often ignored in research with Latino adolescents, only a few studies among Latinos have examined the potentially moderating role of friendships in relation to school bullying, and those findings have been mixed (Nakamoto and Schwartz 2011). Based on the broader peer relations literature,

there is support that friendship factors not only reduce the likelihood of being victimized but also that they may moderate the association between peer victimization and adjustment problems (Bukowski and Adams 2005). With the increasing rates of cyberbullying (Jones et al. 2012), it is important and timely to better understand how friendship factors may weaken the links we know to exist between cyber victimization and a host of adjustment problems across well-being and school domains among Latino adolescents (Espinoza 2015).

The results from the current study highlight that time spent with friends and friendship quality serves as a buffer in the daily negative link between cyber victimization and adolescent adjustment among a sample of predominately Latino high school students. The affective component of friendships, perceived friendship quality, was only found to protect adolescents from feelings of distress on days that they are victimized online. That is, on days that adolescents felt like they got along well with their friends and felt close to them, they reported less distress if they were cyber victimized, compared to adolescents who reported lower friendship quality. Although friendship quality plays an important role in protecting teens from feelings of distress, simply spending time with friends serves to not only protect them from feeling distress but also alleviates feelings of anger and prevents them from missing class or arriving to class late (i.e., lower attendance problems) on days when they are victimized online.

Thus, regardless of whether adolescents feel close to their friends or perceive that their friends really understand them, simply being around friends and spending time together may be sufficient to restore negative emotions and to motivate students to attend class. Indeed, companionship is one of the many benefits they may be gained from the additional hours adolescents spend with friends (Buhrmester 1996). Hodges et al. (1999) found that simply the presence of a mutual best friend influenced whether or not youth showed maladjustment following peer victimization at school. The students without a friend who were victimized showed more internalizing and externalizing behaviors across the school year, whereas, no link between victimization and adjustment was found for students with a friend. Results from an experimental study revealed that after being socially excluded in an online game (i.e., Cyberball), communicating online with a peer facilitated greater replenishment of adolescents' self-esteem and reduced their negative affect, compared to adolescents who engaged in solitary computer play after being excluded (Gross 2009). Furthermore, it has been speculated that youth who spend more time with friends may feel a sense of acceptance and belonging within their peer group and thus, are simply less concerned by negative interactions with other peers (Masten et al. 2012). It is important to highlight that the moderating effect of time spent with friends was found at the daily level, suggesting that spending time with friends has an immediate, same-day impact. Qualitative aspects of friendships such as

feeling understood by friends is said to enhance self-esteem and assist in developing coping strategies (Sandler et al. 1989); thus, it may be the case that these benefits from friendships may be more influential at chronic, rather than episodic levels.

As previously outlined, the current study extends cyber victimization research in multiple ways. However, there are also limitations to the current study that must be acknowledged and that future research can address. One limitation of the current study is that the small sample size coupled with the low frequency of cyber victimization incidents did not allow the testing of any spillover effects to examine if these are truly only same-day, immediate effects or whether there may be a lingering effect of spending time with friends or perceiving high friendship quality. Thus, future research would benefit from having a larger sample and utilizing daily methodology that extends across a longer span of days which may be particularly beneficial for studies focused on victimization incidents that may be infrequent. For example, a study on school victimization incidents spanned across ten school days (Espinoza et al. 2013) and a daily study on discrimination experiences was conducted across twenty days (Hoggard et al. 2015).

Another limitation is that because adolescents were asked to complete a checklist for five consecutive days, there was a need to keep the daily checklists brief in order to reduce the demands placed on the participants. As a result, there were some constructs that were measured with a single item, such as the item that asked adolescents if they spent time with their friends during the day. Based on this single item, it is unclear if the adolescents spent time with their friend in person or online. Estimates indicate that over half of teens report that they “spend time with friends” via text messaging every day and overall, text messaging and social networking sites are now venues by which teens regularly interact and communicate with their closest friends (Lenhart et al. 2015). Thus, the cyber context is serving as a normal extension of the face-to-face contexts and interactions that adolescents share.

However, when focusing on cyber victimization experiences it would be particularly interesting to examine whether spending time with friends is more effective (i.e., more protective) when it occurs in-person or online. A study conducted by Ybarra et al. (2015) begins to explore this distinction by asking the youth in their study to report on perceived social support from friends they met in-person and from friends they met online to compare the effect of both types of friend support. They found that friend support from friends they met in-person was related to lower odds of being victimized online but was unrelated to online social support. Future research that examines the protective role of friendships in relation to cyber victimization experiences should also consider behavioral attributes of the victim’s friends; that is, better understanding and accounting for friend’s characteristics is needed in the

literature (Kendrick et al. 2012). For example, low levels of aggression among friends (e.g., Schwartz et al. 2008) have been found to be important in the ameliorative role of friendships for school victimization. The extent to which friends in the victim’s peer network engage in cyberbullying behaviors may be important to consider when examining the extent to which friends buffer or exacerbate the effects of being cyber victimized.

In sum, this study contributes to the growing literature on cyber victimization experiences by showing that time spent with friends plays a protective role in the link between daily cyber victimization and adjustment problems such as feelings of distress and anger, among a sample of predominately Latino high school students. The findings of this study have important implications for intervention strategies targeting peer victimization. For example, past studies have provided support for interventions targeting relationships with friends rather than general skills related to broader peer relationships (Kendrick et al. 2012). As interventions focused on cyber victimization continue to develop and grow, the role of friends should be considered as a way to protect adolescents from the pain and negative behaviors that often result from victimization among adolescents.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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