

Differences in Social Skills among Cyberbullies, Cybervictims, Cyberbystanders, and Those Not Involved in Cyberbullying

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify differences in social skills (cooperation, assertion, empathy, self-control) between adolescents involved in cyberbullying (bystanders, bullies, victims) and those not, hypothesizing that adolescents involved in cyberbullying would score lower than those not on social skills ratings. Furthermore, the

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cyberspace [18]. It has been demonstrated that cyberbullies experience less remorse, concern, and empathy for their victims than do bullies in the physical (non-cyber) sphere [20]. Ability to visually recognize the victim's gender can curb the bully's continued harassment, whereas in the case of the cyberbully, who is not able to see the victim's gender the harassment lasts longer. A study involving 2186 participants found that harassing others caused cyberbullies to feel amused and socially powerful and accepted, although many did feel remorse [21]. In most cases, the bully senses that the harassing act has a social impact and thus uses it within his or her particular social context. Another study, which examined cyberbullying among adolescents, found that bullies reported that their main reason for harassing the victim was their dislike for that person. Other reasons reported in that study revealed the existence of a prior negative interaction – whether on- or off-line – between bully and victim [22]. It has been shown that the advantages of technology, its accessibility and its integration in everyday life, serve to increase the phenomenon of cyberbullying [23], since any personal communication, photo, or video clip can be made public by sharing it with groups of numerous participants on platforms similar to WhatsApp.

girls tended towards the role of victim more than did boys [26]. In

Bully-victim-bystander

It appears, thus, that cyberbullying exists alongside bullying in the physical world and that the two feed on each other: the adolescent who argued with a classmate on the way home from school writes an online comment on that classmate's Facebook, which receives positive and enthusiastic responses from others. This paves the way to ongoing bullying, and thus, the next day, the conflict that breaks out at school is directly related to the communication that took place in cyberspace. Indeed, a relationship has been shown between textual cyberbullying and face-to-face (FtF) bullying [24]. In addition, the roles that adolescents take on themselves in cases of FtF violence can be the same as the roles they adopt in an online environment [25]. Furthermore, adolescents who bully others online tend to spend more time online and feel more comfortable expressing themselves in an authentic manner in cyberspace [24].

Lindfors et al. [17] examined the prevalence of cyberbullying on adolescents aged 12 to 18, taking into account four groups of participants in cyberbullying: victim, aggressor, a combination of the two (i.e., alternately playing the role of bully and victim), and cyberbystander. According to these researchers, the phenomenon of cyberbullying cannot be fully understood without addressing all of these groups and their combinations. A novelty introduced by this study was the finding that 13% of the study population reported engaging in cyberbullying; however, only a few participants in the study considered this a worrisome or aggravating event. In other words, despite the fact that adolescents are frequently exposed to cyberbullying, only a very few consider it a serious phenomenon. In addition, the study examined the prevalence of age and gender on the roles of cyberbully and victim. A negative correlation was found between age and cyberbullying, such that the desire to engage in cyberbullying decreased as the age of the participants increased; hence, the older the age group, the fewer the number of victims of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying, age, and gender

Research literature is divided on the issue of the prevalence of gender on cyberbullying. Some studies have found that in cyberspace, boys tended to towards the role of bully more than did girls [7], whereas

outcome of this situation is c Yb social avoidance [37-40]. Y acquisition of social skills is not limited to early childhood, but continues on into adolescence. It has been shown that the acquisition of skills such as collaboration, self-expression, empathy, and self-control are essential for Y Vb social functioning in adolescence. Acquiring these skills enables adolescents to enter into interactions with peers and to avoid undesirable social reactions [41].

Furthermore, a XY Vb in social skills could lead to poor information processing, XY Vb social perceptions, egocentric communication patterns, and X W h Y g in problem solving [42]. Children with XY Vb social skills tend to have low self-esteem and are c Yb shy and passive [35]. Likewise, they have X W h m integrating socially among their peers and meeting acceptable social norms [36].

i g it appears that children who have X W h m acquiring social skills are vulnerable to being harassed and becoming victims, or conversely are likely to take on the role of bullies, since they have the characteristics of both victim and bully as described in the professional literature.

To summarize, b X b g from these studies indicate that social competence is inseparable from the skills that an individual needs to acquire in order to function Y Vb h m in society. In the course of our lives we acquire the tools that help us construct valid and Y Vb h

Measurement of social skills

The adolescents completed the Social Skills Rating System by Gresham and Elliott [2], translated into Hebrew and then back translated. It consists of 40 items relating to four sub-scales (10 items each): cooperation, assertion, empathy, self-control. Cooperation: works with others, helps others, good communication. Assertion: initiates communication, feels responsible, takes social responsibility. Empathy: understands others' feelings, listens, shares, gives compliments. Self-control: controls behavior and expression of feelings, reaches for a compromise. Each item is rated on a scale of 0 to 2, the higher the score the more frequent the behavior. Gresham and Elliott [2] demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.74$) in measuring social skills. Acceptable internal consistencies were found in this study: total score $\alpha = .86$, cooperation $\alpha = .75$, assertion $\alpha = .64$, empathy $\alpha = .72$, self-control $\alpha = .60$.

Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed via Facebook to individuals in the 13-18 years age group. Individuals who expressed their willingness to participate in the study received online questionnaires asking about their social experience in FtF interactions and on social media platforms. Participants were assured that the information they provided would remain anonymous and confidential.

Ethical considerations

The current study examined aggressive aspects of human behavior in FtF environments, therefore requiring a high degree of self-disclosure from the participants. In turn, it demanded the maintenance of complete anonymity and confidentiality of all data collected in the study. Presentation of data relates to subgroups within the population rather than to individual participants. All participants freely volunteered to participate in the study. Furthermore, they received the researchers' contact information in order to obtain additional information, a copy of the results, or additional details within the accepted standards.

Results

Most participating adolescents reported using the computer every day ($n = 428, 82.1\%$), for about four hours on average ($M = 3.95$ hours, $SD = 2.49$). They reported using it mainly for communication (email, chat, $n = 462, 88.7\%$), downloading (games, music, $n = 381, 73.1\%$), school purposes ($n = 318, 61.0\%$), information searching ($n = 300, 57.6\%$), and internet games ($n = 267, 51.2\%$). Most adolescents used a cell phone ($n = 498, 95.6\%$) and an internet camera ($n = 332, 63.7\%$) regularly.

Cyberbullying

Table 1 presents descriptive results for cyberbullying. Mean value for bystanders was the highest ($M = 1.73$, range 1-5), with 85% of the adolescents answering positively to at least one item. Mean value for victims was next ($M = 1.40$, range 1-5), with 63% of the adolescents answering positively to at least one item. Mean value for bullies was the lowest ($M = 1.21$, range 1-5), with 45% of the adolescents answering positively to at least one item. A significant difference between the three modes of cyberbullying was found ($F(2, 1040) = 223.96, p < .001, \eta^2 = .301$). An examination of the distributions revealed that 193 adolescents reported at least one item of both bullying and being a

Bystander	62 (28.1)	101 (33.7)	1.27	96 (29.7)	67 (33.8)	0.67
Victim	52 (23.5)	105 (35.0)	5.54*	105 (32.5)	52 (26.3)	1.59
Bully	64 (29.0)	73 (24.3)	1.05	86 (26.6)	51 (25.8)	0.04
Bystander and victim	32 (14.5)	73 (24.3)	6.11*	71 (22.0)	34 (17.2)	1.41
Bystander and bully	34 (15.4)	47 (15.7)	0.01	53 (16.4)	28 (14.1)	0.41
Victim and bully	30 (13.6)	51 (17.0)	0.95	54 (16.7)	27 (13.6)	0.75

*p < .05

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Empathy	1.44 (0.31)	1.43 (0.33)	0.89 (.002)	21.87* ** (.041)	0.95 (.001)	0.06 (.001)	0.05 (.001)	1.38 (.003)
Self-control	0.95 (0.32)	0.94 (0.33)	0.47 (.001)	2.11 (.004)	0.64 (.001)	0.08 (.001)	3.13 (.006)	0.33 (.001)
Bully								
Cooperation	1.11 (0.35)	1.32 (0.34)	34.47* ** (.063)	1.12 (.002)	1.61 (.003)	0.01 (.001)	0.52 (.001)	2.92 (.006)
Assertion	1.04 (0.34)	1.15 (0.33)	9.98** (.019)	5.55* (.011)	6.57* (.013)	0.28 (.001)	0.80 (.002)	0.40 (.001)
Empathy	1.36 (0.37)	1.46 (0.30)	10.17* * (.019)	20.48* ** (.038)	0.03 (.001)	0.18 (.001)	3.22 (.006)	0.10 (.001)
Self-control	0.87 (0.32)	0.97 (0.32)	11.50* ** (.022)	2.93 (.006)	0.37 (.001)	0.31 (.001)	1.66 (.003)	0.40 (.001)
Bystander and victim								
Cooperation	1.16 (0.37)	1.29 (0.35)	11.14* ** (.021)	1.99 (.004)	0.84 (.002)	0.01 (.001)	0.01 (.001)	0.02 (.001)
Assertion	1.08 (0.31)	1.13 (0.35)	2.63 (.005)	5.64* (.011)	3.78** (.013)	0.08 (.001)	0.01 (.001)	0.25 (.001)
Empathy	1.43 (0.33)	1.43 (0.32)	1.36 (.003)	14.49* ** (.027)	0.83 (.002)	0.03 (.001)	0.01 (.001)	4.08* (.008)
Self-control	0.91 (0.29)	0.95 (0.33)	2.58 (.005)	0.56 (.001)	0.81 (.002)	1.55 (.003)	1.52 (.003)	0.02 (.001)
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001								

Table 4 Means, standard deviations, and F values for subscales of social skills by types of cyberbullying gender, and grade level (N = 521)

Y analyses were found g[b] Wbh for all main Y Wg of cyberbullying [$F_{\text{bystander}}(4, 510) = 2.48, p = .043, \eta^2 = .019$; $F_{\text{victim}}(4, 510) = 3.11, p = .015, \eta^2 = .024$; $F_{\text{bully}}(4, 510) = 9.34, p < .001, \eta^2 = .068$; $F_{\text{bystander and victim}}(4, 510) = 3.05, p = .017, \eta^2 = .023$; $F_{\text{bystander and bully}}(4, 510) = 6.91, p < .001, \eta^2 = .051$; $F_{\text{victim and bully}}(4, 510) = 5.57, p < .001, \eta^2 = .042$].

Analyses were found g[b] Wbh for gender [$F_{\text{gender}}(4, 514) = 7.51, p < .001, \eta^2 = .055$] and grade [$F_{\text{grade}}(4, 514) = 4.90, p = .003, \eta^2 = .037$], but not g[b] Wbh for any interactions with cyberbullying. Results reveal that the top 30% of bystanders, the top 30% of victims, and the top 30% of adolescents who were both bystanders and victims were lower on cooperation than adolescents who were less involved with cyberbullying as

Cyberbullying and social skills

cyberbullying. Preventative measures can be applied by raising the awareness of adolescents, parents, and teachers to this issue, opening it up for discussion. In this way, rather than either ignoring cases of cyberbullying or carrying out crisis intervention when they occur, adolescents, parents, and teachers can learn how to avoid such situations.

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