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Pathological narcissism, cyberbullying victimization and offending among homosexual and heterosexual participants in online dating websites



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ABSTRACT

Homosexual individuals are exposed to high levels of victimization. However, no studies have examined personality risk factors for cyberbullying victimization and offending among this population. This study investigated the relationships between pathological narcissism and cyberbullying victimization and offending among homosexual and heterosexual participants in online dating websites. Participants included 347 Israeli adults who completed a series of self-reported questionnaires. Our results show that homosexual men and women reported higher levels of cyberbullying victimization relative to heterosexual women. The groups did not differ in cyberbullying offending. Furthermore, homosexual men reported higher levels of pathological narcissism grandiosity relative to homosexual women. Pathological narcissism vulnerability and grandiosity were positively related to cyberbullying victimization, but not to offending, as well as to cyberbullying dating victimization and offending. Importantly, the group (homosexual male vs. other groups) moderated the association between pathological narcissism vulnerability and cyberbullying victimization. These findings highlight the differential associations between the two facets of pathological narcissism and cyberbullying victimization and offending among homosexual men and women, and lend empirical support to the high risk for cyberbullying victimization of homosexual men with pathological narcissistic vulnerability traits who are actively participating in the online dating sphere.

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1. Introduction

Cyberbullying is defined as any behavior performed through electronic or digital media (e.g., chat room, Facebook) by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicate hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others (Tokunaga, 2010). Cyberbullying can take the form of rumors, negative messages on social networking sites, blogs, or other websites, and harassing emails, text messages, photos or videos via mobile phones (e.g., “Someone threatened to hurt me online”; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Traditional bullying and cyberbullying share considerable overlap in their features; specifically, the intention to inflict harm and the repetition of aggressive behaviors (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Nevertheless, cyberbullying also has unique characteristics such as anonymity, 24/7 access, and potentially large social-network enabled audiences (Spears, Slee, Owens, & Johnson,

2009). Thus, cyberbullying victimization embodies a negative, overwhelming experience in which victims are potentially targets of harassment all the time, everywhere, and in front of everyone who want to see (Willard, 2007).

In recent years, substantial research has been devoted to cyberbullying and online aggression. Surprisingly, most studies focused on the youth population and within educational systems (e.g., Sourander et al., 2007). Cyber bullying victimization and offending are confirmed as widespread in high schools with approximately 20–40% of youths self-reporting as victims (e.g., Bhat, 2008). A number of studies have found girls to be at risk for cyber victimization and boys more likely to be cyber offenders (e.g., Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). Other studies did not find gender to be a predictor of cyberbullying (Tokunaga, 2010). The negative consequences of cyberbullying are varied and depend on the frequency, length, and severity of the acts. Victims are reported as being at risk for academic and family relationship problems (Beran & Li, 2007), depression (Didden et al., 2009), lowered self-esteem (Katzer, Fetchenhauer, & Belschak, 2009), and social anxiety

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(Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Considering the scope and consequences of cyberbullying among youth, examining these phenomena in the general adult population and specifically among vulnerable groups, such as homosexual men and women, is of dire need.

Unfortunately, lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals are exposed to varied and substantial amounts of victimization. Findings from a recent meta-analysis revealed that LGB individuals experienced greater rates of victimization than heterosexual individuals. Furthermore, gender differences in victimization between homosexual men and homosexual women were small (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012). However, only a few studies examined forms of cyberbullying among LGB individuals. For example, one study found that 10%–30% of LGB youth were occasionally cyberbullying victimized (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012).

LGB youth are also at risk for cyber dating abuse victimization and offending, as compared to heterosexual youth (Dank, Lachman, Zweig, & Yahner, 2014). Among young university students, homosexual participants reported the same levels of cyberbullying as compared to heterosexual participants. Interestingly, the rates of cyberbullying victimization, but not offending, were found to be more elevated in homosexual men than in heterosexual men, but not homosexual women (Wensley & Campbell, 2012). A question remains regarding personality traits, such as narcissism, that might interact with sexual orientation and put homosexual men and women at risk for cyberbullying.

Narcissism is a personality construct that is broadly characterized by a grandiose and inflated self-concept (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Over the years, most researchers treated narcissism as a general, homogeneous concept with both adaptive (Stoeber, Sherry, & Nealis, 2015) and maladaptive characteristics (e.g., Blinkhorn, Lyons, & Almond, 2015). However, its measurement exclusively captured grandiose narcissism. Whereas clinical psychologists and psychiatrists tend to focus on grandiosity as a core feature of narcissistic personality disorder as formulated in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013), social-personality psychologists view pathological narcissism as a continuum comprised of two facets: grandiosity and vulnerability.

The concept of pathological narcissism used in the present study captured both grandiosity and vulnerability as two separate, though associated, continuous dimensions. This concept is defined as an intense need for admiration and recognition, combined with difficulty in regulating these needs (Pincus & Roche, 2011). Narcissistic grandiosity, the most prototypical form of narcissism, is characterized by feelings of entitlement, interpersonal manipulativeness, and arrogance. Narcissistic vulnerability is characterized by social withdrawal and emotional dysregulation, following the painful disappointment of entitled expectations and self-enhancement failures (Miller et al., 2011). Though vulnerability shares some features with grandiosity (i.e., sense of entitlement, grandiose fantasies), the two were found to be distinct constructs (Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010), and have shown different, sometimes opposite, relationships with various normative behaviors and psychopathological outcomes (e.g., Miller, Gentile, Wilson, & Campbell, 2013).

While research suggests that individuals with narcissistic traits scored higher on aggression (Kim, Namkoong, Ku, & Kim, 2008) and narcissistic exploitativeness was positively related to traditional bullying (Ang, Ong, Lim, & Lim, 2010), only a handful of studies have examined the links between narcissism and cyberbullying. One study shows that among adolescent samples from Singapore and Malaysia, narcissistic exploitativeness was positively related to cyberbullying. Furthermore, normative beliefs about aggression partially mediated this relationship (Ang, Tan, & Mansor, 2010). Another study showed that among Turkish high-school students

narcissistic features of exploitation, entitlement, and superiority were positively related to dimensions of internet addiction that, in turn, were positively related to cyberbullying (Eksi, 2012). Yet another study demonstrated that among adolescents living in Cyprus narcissism was longitudinally related to both cyberbullying victimization and offending, but these correlations disappeared in a final model with multiple risk and protective factors (Fanti, Demetriou, & Hawa, 2012). However, none of these studies examined the link between narcissistic vulnerability and cyberbullying and between adult homosexual men and women.

The association between narcissism and sexual orientation has been studied mainly among homosexual men. One study among gym-active Australian men found no difference in narcissism between heterosexual and homosexual men (Brown & Doug Graham, 2008). Another study among Israeli undergraduates found that homosexual men score higher in pathological measures of narcissism, compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Rubinstein, 2010). The results of the latter study provoked significant criticism of the research design and of viewing homosexuals pathologically (e.g., Drescher, 2010). Interestingly, to date no other study has claimed to replicate these findings empirically. Furthermore, as there are individual differences in narcissism between genders (i.e., increased narcissism in men relative to women; Wright, O'Leary, & Balkin, 1989), the examination of within group differences among homosexual women is necessary.

With recent growth in the use of online dating sites and personal webpages on social networking sites, individuals are changing the way that they meet and form intimate relationships (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/mgs-ariel.macam.ac.il/science/article/pii/S0747563214000272>Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis, & Sprecher, 2012). The internet, and specifically mobile technology, is also an environment which individuals – not surprisingly, among them homosexuals – are using for sexual purposes (Groves, Breslow, Newcomb, Rosenberger, & Bauermeister, 2014). These innovative technologies, in turn, provide a highly relevant platform for reaching out to homosexual men and women who might not otherwise disclose their sexual orientation in face-to-face interviews, to participate in a study on general cyberbullying victimization and offending.

Online dating sites also represent an interesting arena to study associations between narcissism and cyberbullying as an enabling venue for anonymity, inflated self-promotion and regulation of self-esteem, and potential deception of others (Hall, Park, Song, & Cody, 2010). According to Twenge and Campbell (2010), social network sites are also one of the best reflections of narcissism due to opportunities for narcissistic self-imaging. As recent research indicates that narcissists often engage in ludic love, characterized by game-playing, fear of commitment, desire for alternatives, and deception (Le, 2005), it is useful to understand how individuals with high predisposition to pathological narcissism behave on online dating sites. Importantly, no study has yet explored pathological narcissism as a personality risk factor for cyberbullying among homosexual men and women who are actively participating in the online dating sphere.

Based on the literature review, it is hypothesized that: (1) homosexual men will report higher levels of cyberbullying victimization and offending than homosexual women and heterosexual men and women; (2) homosexual men and women will report higher levels of narcissism vulnerability and grandiosity than heterosexual men and women; (3) Narcissism vulnerability and grandiosity will be positively correlated with cyberbullying victimization and offending; and (4) Groups (homosexual men vs. comparison groups) will moderate relations between narcissism vulnerability and grandiosity and cyberbullying victimization and offending.

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