



Full length article

Relational and cyber aggression among adolescents: Personality and emotion regulation as moderators

Constantinos M. Kokkinos^{*}, Ioanna Voulgaridou

Department of Primary Education, School of Education Sciences, Democritus University of Thrace, Greece

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 September 2016

Received in revised form

21 November 2016

Accepted 22 November 2016

Keywords:

Relational aggression

Cyberbullying

Callous-unemotional traits

Behavior activation

Emotion regulation

Adolescence

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to investigate the role of certain personality traits, such as callous-unemotional traits, behavioral activation system (BAS), and emotion regulation in the associations between proactive and reactive relational aggression (RA) and Cyberbullying (CB). Participants were 347 Greek adolescents who completed a self-report questionnaire. Based on prior evidence the present study examined personality characteristics both as predictors of relational and cyber aggression, as well as moderators in bidirectional models between these aggressive forms. Results showed that high callous and uncaring traits as well as low BAS moderated the pathway from CB to proactive and reactive RA. Further, proactive and reactive RA were positively associated with CB at high levels of callous and uncaring traits and low levels of BAS. Low cognitive reappraisal moderated the links between both RA functions (i.e. proactive and reactive) to CB. Finally, adolescents who engage in proactive and reactive RA and use high cognitive reappraisal to regulate their emotions are more likely to use CB. Overall, these results indicate that relational and cyber aggression share some common ground and aggressors do not significantly differ in terms of their personality traits.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Adolescence is an important developmental period marked by increases in both relational (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008; Murray-Close, Ostrov, & Crick, 2007) and cyber aggression (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Based on the developmental theory of aggression proposed by Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Kaukiainen (1992), adolescents may use indirect aggressive forms to a greater extent because their social skills are sufficiently developed to enable more subtle forms of aggression. Adolescents spend more time on the Internet, which may increase the risk of cyberbullying (CB), defined as an aggressive, intentional act carried out by electronic forms, repeatedly and over time, against a victim who cannot defend him/herself (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Though the cause-and-effect relationship between traditional cyber aggression is unclear, there are significant associations between these aggressive behaviors (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015).

Initial hypothesizing suggested that CB is often considered a specific form of social or relational aggression (RA) that involves the use of electronic devices (Beran & Li, 2008; Hemphill et al., 2012; Li, 2007). The nature of CB may be consistent with RA because both types often occur in the context of relationship difficulties, such as friendships breaking up or envying a peer's success and refer to the intentional harm of others by manipulating peer relationships through rumor spreading, damaging someone's social status, or social group exclusion (Law, Shapka, Domene, & Gagné, 2012). Although these forms of aggression have been found to correlate moderately, and have been theorized to be linked to similar social and cognitive variables (Burton, Florell, & Wygant, 2013; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015), there is research evidence suggesting that CB differs from traditional forms of aggression, including RA, in several ways (Smith, 2012), the most important of them being the degree of anonymity afforded by an online environment which provides CB with some unique characteristics compared to other aggressive forms (Antoniadou, Kokkinos, & Markos, 2016a; Peter, Valkenburg, & Schouten, 2005; Ward & Tracey, 2004). First, CB depends on technological expertise to a certain extent. Second, it potentially reaches a large audience rapidly. This feature may contribute to a greater negative impact on the victim who could feel more embarrassed and ashamed (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Third, CB has

^{*} Corresponding author. Department of Primary Education, School of Education Sciences, Democritus University of Thrace, N. Hili, GR 68100, Alexandroupolis, Greece.

E-mail addresses: kkokkino@eled.duth.gr (C.M. Kokkinos), joan.voul@hotmail.com (I. Voulgaridou).

been described as an indirect form of bullying where the perpetrator can remain anonymous. Conversely, RA can be indirect or direct (Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2015). Fourth, it is difficult to escape from CB because it can reach youths wherever they go online. Fifth, instigators of CB do not usually see victims' reactions. Without the direct feedback that traditional bullying may offer there may be fewer opportunities for empathy or remorse and therefore the incidents of CB may continue for longer periods than those of traditional bullying (Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2013). Finally, Law et al. (2012) claimed that online aggression is distinct from traditional in that it is more reciprocal, with the same individuals alternating between the roles of victim and aggressor, more often than it has been found in the traditional aggression literature.

Personality researchers explain aggression as a manifestation of individual/personality differences. Indeed, recent evidence suggests that personality traits do predict RA and CB (Goodboy & Martin, 2015). However, burgeoning literature argues that online and offline aggression are not predicted by the same individual characteristics and that more research is warranted to properly examine the underlying differences (Law et al., 2012; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015). Empirical evidence provides explanations for the individual factors (e.g., antisocial personality, deficiencies in emotion regulation) which are implicated in the manifestation of different forms of aggressive behavior (Baroncelli & Ciucci, 2014; Card et al., 2008; Kokkinos, Voulgaridou, & Markos, 2016b; Marsee & Frick, 2007). The current study was designed to determine if cyber and relational aggressors have similar or distinct individual traits.

Previous research has well supported the bidirectional links between different forms of traditional (i.e. physical, verbal, social) and cyber aggression (Law et al., 2012). Several findings suggest that cyber aggression may have additional appeal to those adolescents who are already aggressive and socially manipulative in face-to-face interactions (Sontag, Clemons, Graber, & Lyndon, 2011). According to Williams and Guerra's view (2007), cyberspace provides an additional medium through which existing aggressive youth can act. What is more, cyber aggression could also appeal to a wider range of individuals who may otherwise fear acting out in face-to-face interactions. There is plenty of empirical evidence providing support for the occurrence of both relational and cyber aggression during adolescence (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015). Indeed, adolescents reported engagement in both relational and cyber forms of aggressive behavior at least once in a period of two months (Wang, Iannotti, & Luk, 2012; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). Specifically, in an adolescents' sample, social exclusion and rumor spreading were statistically significantly correlated with CB (Wang et al., 2012). In the same vein, a study by Wang, Iannotti, Luk, and Nansel (2010) found increased co-occurrence of relational and cybervictimization among adolescents.

It has been stressed that understanding the motivation behind aggressive acts will help to ensure that appropriate intervention and prevention strategies are developed. Indeed, a growing body of research has examined the two different functions of RA, namely proactive and reactive (Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2015). The main difference between these two is the intrinsic motivation of the perpetrator. The aggressor responds to a perceived threat or provocation in reactive aggression, while in proactive, the aggressor carries out a deliberate behavior that is controlled by external reinforcers (Dodge & Coie, 1987). Bullying and by extension CB has been considered to be more closely aligned to proactive aggression. Although it should be stated that such an association between proactive aggression and CB is both logical and plausible, there are few empirical studies at present to substantiate a positive link between them (e.g., Calvete, Orue, Estevez, Villardon, & Padilla, 2010; Law et al., 2012). Other evidence suggests CB behaviors such

as posting mean messages or embarrassing photos are linked to reactive aggressive behavior (Burton, Florell, & Gore, 2013; Law et al., 2012). Thus, this study sought to examine the links between both RA functions and CB.

2. The role of personality traits

Sound evidence supports linkages of both aggressive forms (i.e. CB and RA) with pathological personality, such as callous-unemotional (CU) traits, and impulsivity (Kokkinos et al., 2016b; Marsee & Frick, 2007; Marsee, Silverthorn, & Frick, 2005). Marsee and Frick (2007) proposed that CU traits, defined as lack of empathy and remorse, are related to the emergence of proactive RA in adolescents. However, Barry et al. (2007) found that CU traits were not related to any type of aggressive behavior in their cross-sectional study, while Kimonis et al. (2008) found that CU traits were related to both proactive and reactive aggression. As far as CB is concerned, recent studies indicate that similarly with relational aggressors, cyberbullies tend to have personalities that are higher in CU and other psychopathic traits (Fanti, Demetriou, & Hawa, 2012; Goodboy & Martin, 2015; Kokkinos, Antoniadou, & Markos, 2014).

Adolescents' personality traits reflecting impulsivity, sensation seeking, neuroticism, low agreeableness, and low conscientiousness are positively associated with RA (Dane & Marini, 2014; Kokkinos & Voulgaridou, 2016; Kokkinos, Karagianni, & Voulgaridou, 2016a; Kokkinos et al., 2016b) and CB (Kokkinos et al., 2014). Such early findings emphasize the need for further research integrating broad dispositional trait frameworks such as Big Five and Reinforcement Sensitivity Theory (RST). Gray's (1987) RST assumes that behavior is navigated by two brain systems (Muris, Meesters, de Kanter, & Timmerman, 2005): the behavioral inhibition system (BIS), which regulates the experience of anxiety in response to threatening signals, and the behavioral activation system (BAS) which is sensitive to cues of reward, and is related to impulsivity and sensation seeking. In this study, the association between RA and BAS is further explored in the absence of BIS since there are empirical and theoretical reasons to suggest that the inhibition of a dominant impulse, related to BIS, is not assumed to be associated with relational forms of aggression (Card et al., 2008; Dane & Marini, 2014; Kokkinos & Voulgaridou, 2016). The association between CB involvement and behavioral temperamental traits such as BAS is not well described, although previous studies have observed the positive associations of Internet addiction with high BAS in adolescents and young adults (Yen, Kim, Tang, Wu, & Cheng, 2012). Therefore, hypothesizing that high BAS may increase the risk of CB involvement is reasonable. However, Yen et al. (2012) reported that male adolescents with lower BAS reward responsiveness are independent of punishment sensitivity. Thus, they may ignore the possible punishment resulting from their behaviors and are more likely to bully others online.

Other research supports that under-controlled temperament or poor effortful control (a quality indicative of poor emotional, behavioral, and attentional inhibition) is strongly associated with aggressive behavior and self-reported delinquency (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Eggum, 2010). Few studies have examined such personality factors as predictors of CB and traditional aggression. İçellioglu and Ozden (2014), for example, noted that cyberbullies tend to have personalities that may lack self-control and sensitivity compared to traditional aggressors. According to Sontag et al. (2011) cyberbullies who score high in impulsivity are more likely to engage in reactive face-to-face aggression, while, cyberspace may be more conducive to proactively relationally aggressive responses (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). In this regard, it appears theoretically relevant to explore the moderating role of personality

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4937711>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4937711>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)