



Full length article

Forgiveness and cyberbullying in adolescence: Does willingness to forgive help minimize the risk of becoming a cyberbully?

Cirenia Quintana-Orts, Lourdes Rey*

Department of Personality, Assessment and Psychological Treatment, Faculty of Psychology, University of Málaga, Spain

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Keywords:

Cyberbullying
Cybervictimization
Forgiveness
Aggression
Adolescents

ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying has received recent research attention due to the frequent use of social media and electronic devices among adolescents. This study examined forgiveness and cybervictimization as predictors of cyberbullying aggression in a sample of 1650 secondary school adolescents (50.5% females). Results of regression analyses indicated that cybervictimization was a significant predictor of indices of cyberbullying. The inclusion of forgiveness was found to significantly augment the prediction of cyberbullying aggression, even after accounting for sex and grade. Furthermore, the cybervictimization \times forgiveness interaction term was found to significantly augment the prediction of cyberbullying aggression. Specifically, cybervictimized adolescents with high forgiveness, compared to those with low forgiveness, reported significantly lower levels of cyberbullying behaviors. Implications of the present findings are discussed in terms of the protective role of forgiveness for preventing aggressive behavior and for preventing individuals from becoming a bully after suffering victimization. The results suggest that anti-cyberbullying interventions also need to focus on promoting forgiveness in adolescents.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Cyberbullying is defined as repeated acts of aggressive behavior over time through the use of electronic devices (e.g., social networking sites, e-mail, etc.). Cyberbullying is becoming a significant problem for adolescents (El Asam & Samara, 2016; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a) and victims find it difficult to defend themselves (Palermi, Servidio, Bartolo, & Costabile, 2017). Although cyberbullying is observed globally, studies that have addressed this phenomenon have shown differences in its prevalence, ranging from as high as 72% (Juvonen & Gross, 2008) to as low as 6.5% (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a). According to a recent systematic review, the vast majority of research has reported that between 10 and 40% of secondary school adolescents have experienced cyberbullying (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014).

Cyberbullying is not only frequent but is also related to negative outcomes. In particular, being a victim of cyberbullying has a number of consequences for mental health (Kim, Colwell, Kata, Boyle, & Georgiades, 2017). Specifically, cybervictimization has been linked with eating disorders, depressive and anxiety

symptomatology, poor self-esteem, suicidality, and substance abuse, among others (Bannink, Broeren, van de Looij–Jansen, De Waart, & Raat, 2014; Beckman, Hagquist, & Hellström, 2012; Olenik-Shemesh, Heiman, & Eden, 2012; Palermi et al., 2017). In addition, like other forms of interpersonal conflict, being a victim of cyberbullying negatively affects an adolescent's social and emotional adjustment (Elipe, Mora-Merchán, Ortega-Ruiz, 2015). Thus, adolescents who experience cybervictimization can feel a variety of negative emotions such as shame, anger, sadness, frustration, guilt, and helplessness (Elipe, Mora-Merchán, Ortega-Ruiz, & Casas, 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Ortega et al., 2012); the experience of negative emotions is associated with unforgiveness and difficulty in containing a desire for vengeance (Worthington, 2006). Those feelings might lead adolescents to bully back in order to exact revenge (König, Gollwitzer, & Steffgen, 2010) and to obtained equal power so as to defend oneself (Safaria, Tentama, & Suyono, 2016); these feelings and behaviors can have an effect on adolescent adjustment (Van Rensburg & Raubenheimer, 2015).

Consistent with this line of reasoning, recent studies (Kowalski et al., 2014; Kwan & Skoric, 2013) indicate that the strongest predictor of engaging in cyberbullying is being a previous victim of cyberbullying. As such, vengefulness and negative emotions have been found to significantly predict whether a victim of bullying and/or cyberbullying turns into a bully; these victims even tend to

* Corresponding author. Department of Personality, Assessment and Psychological Treatment, University of Málaga, Campus de Teatinos s/n., 29071, Málaga, Spain.
E-mail addresses: cquintana@uma.es (C. Quintana-Orts), lrey@uma.es (L. Rey).

choose a prior traditional perpetrator as the target for cyberbullying (König et al., 2010; Peets, Hodges, & Salmivalli, 2013; Safaria et al., 2016; Watson, Rapee, & Todorov, 2015). Further, those victims who also cyberbully appear to report even worse adverse consequences than those who are only cyberbullies or cybervictims (Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Thus, understanding protective factors for cyberbullying among adolescents is essential for the identification of factors that might help adolescents cope with the impact of cybervictimization, and promote healthy development.

Recently, research has suggested that forgiveness is a protective factor that can act to break the cycle of violence and improve general health (Akhtar & Barlow, 2016; Egan & Todorov, 2009; Hirsch, Webb, & Jeglic, 2012). Forgiveness is a strength established at the beginning of the 20th century by Peterson and Seligman (2004). It involves the reduction of negative emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, and an increase in more positive feelings, cognitions, and behaviors towards a perpetrator, event, and oneself, without there necessarily being restitution, retribution, or reconciliation (Webb, Toussaint, & Conway-Williams, 2012). Forgiveness is suggested to be an effective resource for ameliorating the aggressive states associated with being victimized, and reducing negative reactions to other people's behavior (Van Rensburg & Raubenheimer, 2015; Watson et al., 2015). In particular, some scholars have argued that promoting forgiveness would combat school bullying and other violent behaviors, by reducing feelings of hurt experienced when one is bullied, and decreasing instances of victims becoming perpetrators themselves (Egan & Todorov, 2009; Hui, Tsang, & Law, 2011).

Although the benefits of forgiveness have been well documented in different interpersonal transgressions (Akhtar & Barlow, 2016), very little research has been done in the context of bullying and, even less, in cyberbullying. Still, a handful of empirical research studies have reported that forgiveness is positively related to less emotional hurt in response to past bullying incidents (Egan & Todorov, 2009), and that forgiveness reduces aggressiveness and other conduct problems (Peets et al., 2013; Van Rensburg & Raubenheimer, 2015). Nevertheless, to date, none of the aforementioned studies focused on cyberbullying. Thus, this study examined the protective and buffering role of forgiveness, with regard to the effects of cybervictimization, on acts and behaviors of cyberaggression among adolescents.

The current study attempts to increase knowledge in the research field by examining the link between cyberbullying and forgiveness, which is considered as a protective factor, in a sample of Spanish secondary students. Taking into account that cyberbullying is an increasing problem in adolescents (Kowalski et al., 2014), and that there is a scarcity of research examining the relationships between cyberbullying and forgiveness, the objectives of the present study were twofold: 1) to examine forgiveness as a predictor of cyberbullying aggression, even after accounting for variance attributed to cybervictimization; and 2) to examine whether there is a significant cybervictimization \times forgiveness interaction effect that accounts for additional variance in cyberbullying aggression, beyond the main effects of both cybervictimization and forgiveness. All analyses will control for sex and grade.

Consistent with past findings (e.g., Ak, Özdemir, & Kuzucu, 2015; Patchin & Hinduja, 2011), we expect cybervictimization to account for a significant amount of the variance in cyberbullying aggression. Further, based on the contention that cyberbullying is an extension of face-to-face bullying (Kowalski et al., 2014), and given the strong evidence for a relationship between forgiveness and bullying (e.g., Van Rensburg & Raubenheimer, 2015), we expect forgiveness to account for a significant amount of additional variance in cyberbullying aggression, beyond cybervictimization. Finally, consistent with the notion that forgiveness might help mitigate or weaken the

association between cybervictimization and cyberbullying aggression, we expect to find evidence for a significant cybervictimization \times forgiveness interaction effect, that accounts for additional variance in predicting cyberbullying aggression, beyond cybervictimization and forgiveness. Specifically, we expect to find that the positive association between cybervictimization and cyberbullying aggression will be weaker for those high in forgiveness, compared to those low in forgiveness.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The sample comprised 1650 students (825 males and 840 females) from six public secondary schools in the city of Málaga, Spain. The age of the participants ranged from 11 to 20 years, and the mean age was 14.10 years ($SD = 3.22$). The students involved in the study were from the 1st year of E.S.O. (compulsory secondary education) to the 2nd year of Bachillerato (high school) (7th to 12th grades). The sample was predominantly Spanish (83.1%), but also included students from other European countries (9.3%), America (4.7%), Africa (2.3%), and Asia (0.6%). These figures are representative of the nationalities present in Andalusia (southern Spain).

2.2. Measures

The instruments used in this study are as follows:

- The Spanish version of the European Cyberbullying Intervention Project Questionnaire (ECIPQ; Del Rey et al., 2015; Ortega-Ruiz, Del Rey, & Casas, 2016) was utilized. This questionnaire is composed of 22 items assessing frequency of cyberbullying behavior. Each item is measured on a 5-point Likert ranging from 0 (no) to 4 (yes, more than once a week). The questionnaire evaluates two dimensions of cyberbullying; 11 items measure cybervictimization behaviors (e.g., 'Someone has posted online my embarrassing photos or videos') and 11 items measure cyberbullying aggression ('I threatened someone with messages on the Internet'). These subscales have demonstrated adequate internal consistency in Spanish samples (Ortega-Ruiz et al., 2016). In the current study, the internal consistency using the Cronbach's alpha was good for both subscales: cybervictimization behaviors (0.86) and cyberbullying aggression (0.82).

According to the cut-off criteria for the cybervictimization subscale used by Elipe, De la Oliva, and Del Rey (2017), participants who mark 'no' or 'once or twice' are considered non-victims, those who mark at least one of the responses as 'once or twice a month' are defined as occasional victims, and those who respond to at least one of the items with a frequency of 'once or twice a week' or more, are considered severe victims.

- The 10-item forgiveness subscale of the Values in Action-Inventory of Strengths (VIA-Y; Park & Peterson, 2006) was also utilized. The Spanish version, comprising 10 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely), can be found on the Authentic Happiness website (<https://www.authenticap-happiness.sas.upenn.edu/es/home>). The forgiveness subscales from the VIA-Y have been shown to provide valid assessment of the trait of forgiveness and have reported good psychometric properties in Spanish samples (Giménez, 2010). Cronbach's alpha in this study was 0.73.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6836232>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6836232>

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