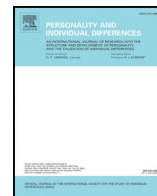




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Cyberbullying in Hong Kong Chinese students: Life satisfaction, and the moderating role of friendship qualities on cyberbullying victimization and perpetration[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying is a serious concern among Internet users worldwide. Few studies have examined the variables that may moderate cyberbullying behavior, especially among the Chinese population. This study examined cyberbullying with 312 Hong Kong Chinese college students ($M_{\text{age}} = 19.64$). The goal was to understand the relative impact of cyberbullying experiences as measured by life satisfaction and to examine how friendship quality may moderate this relation differentially for males and females.

The results showed that 58% of the participants reported cyberbullying others and of those 68% also reported being cyber-victimized. Cyberbullying victimization and cyberbullying perpetration were both negatively correlated with life satisfaction. Male students perpetrated more cyberbullying than female students. Cyberbullying victimization and perpetration were positively related for both males and females.

Friendship closeness and security only moderated the relation between cyberbullying victimization and perpetration for female students. Interestingly, the two components of friendship quality moderated the relation in opposite directions. Specifically, friendship closeness buffered the relation between cyberbullying victimization and perpetration while friendship security enhanced the relation. These findings indicate that gender and subscales of friendship quality should be included when investigating the effect of friendship on cyberbullying behavior, cyberbullying involvement and life satisfaction.

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Cyberbullying has generated considerable psychological research in Western settings. Despite the growing public concern, little is known about cyberbullying among Hong Kong students (e.g., Law & Fung, 2013; Leung & McBride-Chang, 2013; Wong, 2016; Wong, Chan, & Cheng, 2014; Wong & McBride, 2016). Therefore, the first goal of the present study was to examine the overall pattern of cyberbullying involvement and to explore the gender differences in a Hong Kong Chinese college student population. While this study was not designed to make cultural comparisons, the social interactive nature of cyberbullying suggests that it could be largely influenced by cultural values. Therefore the patterns among Hong Kong Chinese college

students may be different from those reported for Western adolescents and young adults. In addition, unlike other Western countries, there is no statute law against cyberbullying in Hong Kong and cyberbullying is not officially addressed in the curricula of most Hong Kong local schools or colleges. Therefore, the Hong Kong setting provides an interesting opportunity to examine differences in how Chinese students may notice or interpret cyberbullying, which may in turn, lead to different patterns of cyberbullying behavior and psychological outcomes. Gender differences in cyberbullying involvement seem to vary greatly across studies (e.g., Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014). Yet in most studies carried out in Asia report males are more involved in cyberbullying than are girls (e.g., Huang & Chou, 2010; Wong et al., 2014; Wong, 2016). Therefore, a second objective was to explore gender differences in cyberbullying behavior.

Both cyberbullying victimization (e.g., Leung & McBride-Chang, 2013) and cyberbullying perpetration (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2014) have a negative impact on individuals' quality of life or life satisfaction. However, few studies have investigated the relations among cyberbullying

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victimization, cyberbullying perpetration, and life satisfaction. Therefore, a third objective was to investigate how cyberbullying victimization and perpetration might predict life satisfaction among Hong Kong Chinese students.

1. Cyberbullying victimization as a predictor of cyberbullying perpetration

Current research has shown (Riebel, Jäger, & Fischer, 2009; Kowalski et al., 2014) that one of the strongest predictors of cyberbullying perpetration is cyberbullying victimization. Multiple studies from Western settings and Hong Kong, reported strong correlations ($r = 0.50$ to 0.60) between cyberbullying victimization and perpetration (e.g., Bauman, Toomey, & Walker, 2013; Wong et al., 2014). Furthermore, a recent attempt to divide a sample of 2186 adolescents into different cyberbullying involvement groups revealed a strong co-occurrence between bullying victimization and perpetration in cyberspace (Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla, & Daciuk, 2012), which may imply that retaliation or reactive bullying explains some variance in cyberbullying.

2. Friendship quality and cyberbullying involvement

In studies of face-to-face bullying, perpetration/victimization and friendship are sometimes examined simultaneously to understand how different forms of social relationships interact and contribute to individuals' psychological outcomes (e.g., Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997). There is some consensus that friendship serves as a protective function in cyberbullying victimization (e.g., Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999). Past studies suggested that individuals benefit from friendships because they can practice their social skills (e.g., Hodges et al., 1999) and may gain emotional support to develop their self-concept and self-esteem (e.g., Hodges et al., 1999). While having one or more friends may buffer the negative effect of traditional bullying victimization (e.g., Bukowski, Sippola, & Boivin, 1995), peer rejection and lack of friends were also related to reactive aggression (e.g., Raine et al., 2006). Peer rejection may also contribute to hostile attributions of intent, especially among individuals who are susceptible to forming such attitudes, and subsequently behave in a reactive aggressive manner (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1994). A meta-analysis of hostile attribution biases supports this effect and noted these biases were stronger among children who were rejected by their peers (De Castro, Veerman, Koops, Bosch, & Monshouwer, 2002). Nevertheless, when the context of interaction changes from face-to-face to online settings, the relations between cyberbullying involvement and friendship qualities become less clear. Some past studies suggested that friendship quality buffered the negative relations between cyberbullying victimization and life satisfaction, which is a common and extensively validated indicator of subjective well-being in a number of bullying and aggression studies (e.g., Flaspohler, Elfstrom, Vanderzee, Sink, & Birchmeier, 2009; Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; You et al., 2008), in young Hong Kong Chinese children (e.g. Leung & McBride-Chang, 2013). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that friendship would buffer the relation between bullying victimization and perpetration in cyberspace among college students as well.

To summarize, goals of the current study were to examine: 1. the pattern of cyberbullying involvement among Hong Kong Chinese college students and test for gender differences; 2. the impact of cyberbullying on Chinese college students as measured by their life satisfaction; and 3. whether friendship qualities may explain the association between cyberbullying victimization and perpetration.

Hypothesis 1. We expected that cyberbullying involvement would be negatively related to life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2a. We expected that friendship quality would moderate the relation between cyberbullying victimization and perpetration.

Hypothesis 2b. We expected that there would be gender differences in how friendship qualities moderated this relation.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

After obtaining their consent, questionnaires were distributed to 312 college students (174 females, 94 males and 44 unreported) aged 18 to 25 years old ($M_{\text{age}} = 19.64$, $SD = 1.17$). Participants anonymously completed questionnaires on a voluntary basis at the end of lectures in one of their social science courses. Because there are more females than males studying at Hong Kong universities (Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2016, e.g., of the 82,658 undergraduates in 2015/2016, 55% ($N = 45,473$) were female students), the current sample is unbalanced but reflects the gender ratio among college students in Hong Kong.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Friendship quality

The 17-item Friendship Quality Scale (Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1994) consists of four subscales, *companionship*, *help*, *security*, and *closeness*. Participants were asked to think of one friend and to answer questions about their relationship quality with that particular friend. This friend could be online from online games, from the Social Networking Sites (SNS) or from college. Using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) participants rated how much they agreed with each item (e.g., "My friend thinks of fun things for us to do together." (companionship); "My friend helps me when I am in need (help)"; "I can reconcile with my friend after a fight (security)" and "I often think about my friend (closeness)"). The reliability for the Friendship Quality Scale was 0.93, and companionship, help, security and closeness subscales were 0.77, 0.78, 0.72 and 0.86, respectively. This scale was tested with Hong Kong sample (i.e., Leung & McBride-Chang, 2013). We conducted an ANOVA to examine the level of friendship quality from three sources. The results revealed that level of friendship quality was equivalent across groups ($p > 0.05$), hence data from different friendship sources were collapsed in the subsequent analysis.

3.2.2. Cyberbullying perpetration

Participants completed an 8-item cyberbullying perpetration scale (Leung & McBride-Chang, 2013). Using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never*; to 5 = *every day*), students rated the frequency of their cyberbullying behaviors (e.g., "I gossip or say mean things about others in online games/on the internet"; "I steal others' belongings e.g., money, weapons in online games/on the internet"). Reliability for the eight-item scale was 0.85.

3.2.3. Cyberbullying victimization

This 8-item scale taps individuals' level of cyberbullying victimization online. This scale was validated in a study conducted in Hong Kong (Leung & McBride-Chang, 2013). Participants rated the frequency of their experiences on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = *never*; 5 = *every day*). Sample items included: "Others gossip or say mean things about me in online games/on the internet." and "Others steal my account or my belongings (e.g., money, weapons) in online games/on the internet." Cronbach's alpha was 0.87.

3.2.4. Life satisfaction

Participants completed Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin's (1985) 5-item Life Satisfaction Scale. The scale was used with Hong Kong Chinese populations in several studies (e.g., Sun & Shek, 2010; Wang, Yuen, & Slaney, 2009). Participants rated their life satisfaction on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Total

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