

Hexaco, Attachment Styles and Empathy: The Factors Predicting the Perpetuation of Cyberbullying and Victimization Among University Students

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INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying, which refers to harassment facilitated through digital devices ranging from computers to cell phones, is one of the significant quandaries that has continued to confront the world in the 21st century. Bullying Statistics Org. (2018) reveals that cyberbullying often take numerous forms, for example, spreading rumor through texts or online, sending threatening messages to people's email addresses, posting harming content on web pages and social networking sites, confiscating people's sensitive information and using it maliciously via digital platforms, and sex-texting among others. While everyone is affected by the by the problem of cyberbullying, adolescents and young adults experience the dilemma more. Bullying Statistics Org. (2018) reveals that at least half of the teen and adolescent population in the U.S. and the world, in general, has experienced an incident(s) of bullying in which they are the victims. A similar proportion of teens/adolescents have engaged in bully activities using the same means targeting their peers and older people. Bullying Statistics Org. (2018) also reveals that one in every ten adolescents usually report an incidence of cyberbullying in which they are victimized. To worsen the matter, one or fewer teenagers in every five have their experiences with cyberbullying known to the law enforcement officers. The various dynamics of cyberbullying as they relate to teenagers are prominent across empirical research. While this is the case, pertinent gaps exist when it comes to knowledge concerning the predictors of cyberbullying as they apply to students in the higher education facilities. This research paper will attempt to fill these gaps by exploring how personality traits, attachment styles, and empathy predict cyberbullying among university students.

PERSONALITY TRAITS AS PREDICTORS OF CYBERBULLYING

Broadly, a personality trait represents the characteristic patterns of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors exhibited by different people. Given the diversity of students in a university setting, a set of personality traits are often in the plan, and such include honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. A student might exhibit only one or more of these traits. Regardless, as the discussion below will show, each of the personality traits will predict cyberbullying differently.

According to Johnson, Rowatt, and Petrini (2011), honesty-humility is the new dimension of personality and defines people's fairness, sincerity, modesty, and greed avoidance. Volk, Schiralli, Xia, and Zhao (2018) show that university students that exhibit honesty humility can either perpetrate cyberbullying or fall victims of the crime. Concerning the perpetuation of the offense, the scholars identify that a person with low honesty-humility will most likely engage in cyberbullying precisely because of the notion that they have a higher predisposition and willingness to exploit others (Volk, Schiralli, Xia, & Zhao, 2018). Khosa (2016) supports this finding by trying to show that persons with high scores on honesty-humility scale tend to disengage in behaviors that allow them to manipulate others. They also feel little to no temptation to break the rules and are not interested in lavish luxuries or wealth. At the same time, these individuals have no special entitlement to elevated social status. In stark contrast, Khosa (2016) shows that people that score lowly on honesty-humility will most likely flatter others to get what they want and that they are prepared to break the laws for gains. At the same time, these individuals have a strong sense of self-importance. In the light of this, it is appropriate to claim that university students who have a low honesty-humility score will be more likely to engage in cyberbullying, as they know that the cyber platform provides them with the best approach through which they can victimize other people in pursuance of something they feel is worth to them. Similarly, as the university students that material gains motivate those who score lowly on honesty-humility, it is likely that they will easily fall prey to cyber bullies especially where the culprit makes a false promise that he or she will provide something in return, for example, some sensitive information. Contrastingly, the university students that score high on honesty-humility are less likely to fall victims of cybercrime or even perpetrate the same.

Emotionality, according to O'Connor, Drouin, Davis, and Thompson (2018), refers to an observable behavioral and psychological element of emotion. The scholar adds that emotionality is primarily a measure of an individual's emotional reactivity to a specified stimulus. Khosa (2016) made a pertinent finding of emotionality, which one can use to link the personality trait to cyberbullying. The researcher established that people with high scores on emotionality scale tend to experience extreme fear of physical dangers. These people, as well, experiences anxiety as a response to stress in their lives.

What is more, people with high levels of emotionality will feel that they need emotional support from others and that they attach themselves sentimentally with others. In stark contrast, Khosa (2016) exhibits that physical harm, and even the possibility thereof, do not deter people with low scores of emotionality. Additionally, these individuals have little or no predisposition towards sharing their concerns with others and are detached emotionally from others. From this context, it is accurate to state that people with high emotionality are more likely to fall victims of cyberbullying while those that score highly on this personality trait will most probably pursue cyberbullying. Since the university, students with high emotionality levels have a greater need for emotional support; they will expectedly accept most requests and advances, if not all, from others perpetrated through digital technologies (O'Connor, Drouin, Davis, & Thompson, 2018). For instance, they will feel more satisfied when responding to sex-texts. They will also feel free to share sensitive information. The chief cause of this is the belief of these students that whoever they are interacting with is empathetic and that they mean best for them (O'Connor, Drouin, Davis, & Thompson, 2018). As for those students who score lowly on emotionality, their emotional detachment will most likely, drive them towards engaging in cyberbullying practices. As they do not care about the consequences of their actions to other people, these students might perpetrate cyberbullying merely to find fun.

Extraversion is the other personality trait often attributed with cybercrime. Extraversion refers to the degree to which a person is outgoing and social. In their research, Sam et al. (2018) revealed that people with high extraversion levels tend to have a positive feeling about themselves while feeling confident especially when addressing or leading groups of people. At the same time, these people have a high level of energy and enthusiasm and usually have an excellent appeal for social gatherings and interactions. What is more, as shown by Sam et al. (2018), highly extraverted individuals tend to crave for excitement. Contrastingly, people who have low levels of extraversion often consider themselves as overly unpopular and usually feel awkward whenever they are at the center of social attention. These individuals also exhibit low levels of optimism and liveliness. Thus, just as Webber (2013) demonstrated, the university students with high level of extraversion will be the most likely victims of cyberbullying relative their counterparts. The online platform, especially the social media, provides university students with an opportunity to extend their social network. Hence, they will reach out to numerous people, both known and unknown, thus adding them to their system. Besides, the online platform provides excitement given the range of content people share much to the happiness of the highly extraverted university students (Sam et al., 2018). The extensive online endeavors, therefore, predispose the extraverted university students to cyberbully. The lowly extraverted students, on their part, are not appealed by the Internet. Even if they might use social media, their activity is somewhat reserved, and this implies that the possibility of them being victimized is low.

Agreeableness refers to a personality type that tends to manifest itself through characteristics such as sympathy, kindness, warmth, cooperation, and consideration. Khosa (2016) demonstrated that people scoring high on agreeableness are often willing to compromise and cooperate with other individuals including strangers. Apart from this, Khosa (2016) expresses that such people will most likely forgive themselves for the wrongs they have suffered. Contrastingly, people that score low on agreeableness will hold grudges against those that seemingly harm them and are often not willing to collaborate and cooperate with others. What is more, these subjects according to Kokkinos and Saripanidis (2017) will expectedly put their interests as a priority and will stop at nothing even if it means to harm others. Hence, just as Kokkinos and Saripanidis (2017) revealed, the university students with a high level of agreeableness will be more likely to fall victims of cyberbullying. This is precisely so considering that these students will find no issue compromising their standards when online, for example, privacy, to support an ongoing virtual discourse. At the same time, such students will probably cooperate with others in the virtual space even where the context of the conversation is harmful. The students who have low levels of agreeableness are more likely to perpetuate cyberbullying because of their indifferent behaviors. These students, as revealed by Kokkinos and Saripanidis (2017), see the cyberspace as a good opportunity to target their peers, for example, those that they don't get along with well. Besides, in line with Kokkinos and Saripanidis' (2017) thought, as these students place their interests above everything else, they will most probably use the online platforms to engage others whether through friendly or unfriendly ways to get what they need.

Researchers have also found some correlations between conscientiousness and cyberbullying. Conscientiousness, according to Zhou, Zheng, and Gao (2018), refers to a personality trait of being vigilant or careful. The scholar adds that conscientiousness implies the desire or the motivation to perform a given task exemplary well while taking obligations to other essentially strictly. Khosa (2016) reveals that people who have high conscientiousness scores work in a disciplined way when attempting to secure the goals they have set. In addition to this, these people are inherently careful when making crucial decisions and strive for perfection and accuracy in their tasks. Contrastingly, Khosa (2016) claims that people with low scores of conscientiousness usually avoid challenging tasks and make decisions without engaging in the art of reflection.

Furthermore, these people are satisfied with the erroneous performance. Drawing from the thoughts presented above, it is accurate to claim that chances of the university students with high levels of conscientiousness perpetrating cyberbullying or falling a victim of the offense are low. This is just because these students, because of their standards, will desist from engaging in acts of indiscipline when interacting with others in the virtual space. Conversely, students whose scores in conscientiousness are low will seek to perpetrate cyberbullying. Stodt, Wegmann, and Brand (2016) support this assertion by explaining that such students often show low self-regulative skills and diminished ability to reflect on the Internet content

and these leads to extreme Internet Addiction, often abbreviated as IA. Stodt, Wegmann, and Brand (2016) add that with low conscientiousness, the university students will expectedly use the cyberspace in a dysfunctional manner. All these issues, in turn, predispose a low conscientiousness student towards the act of cyberbullying.

Openness to experience is also a fundamental predictor of cyberbullying. Khosa (2016) reveals that people with high transparency to experience scores tend to become overly absorbed in the beauty of art along with nature. In addition to this, these people often take an interest in quirky or unusual ideas as well as people. Moreover, these individuals are exceedingly inquisitive concerning diverse knowledge domains. However, Khosa (2016) claims that people low on openness to experience show little impression by most technological advent. They also avoid creating pursuits while feeling averse to radical or unconventional ideas. From this theory, it is well evident that the university students who score highly on openness to experience are more likely to fall victims of cyberbullying relative to their counterparts. Çelik, Atak, and Erguzen (2012) echo this claim, even though the researchers assert that the link is rather weak when compared to the case of other personalities. Cyberbullies usually attract their targets by posting unusual or surprising content on the Internet. For example, they might create a social media post that reveals a “one in a lifetime” offer. However, these unusual contents are often deceitful. With their affinity towards quirky issues on the net, the people with a high level of openness to experience will expectedly want to explore the deceitful offers, and in doing so, the cyber bullies effectively take advantage of the unknowing targets.

ATTACHMENT STYLES AS PREDICTORS OF CYBERBULLYING

The attachment according to McLeod (2017), attachment, as it relates to psychology, refers to a deep as well as an enduring emotional bond that usually connects one person to another across space and time. Different people often exhibit diverse attachment styles with avoidance and anxiety being the most prominent. On the one hand, avoidance attachment is primarily a form of attachment style in which people, mostly children, and young adults, learn to avoid feeling attachment towards other people. In addition to this, people who favor this kind of attachment are more likely to act in a manner that shows self-reliance and self-sufficiency, besides showing no predisposition towards having feelings with others. On the other hand, anxiety attachment represents a case where a person always feels that he or she wants to be close to other people intimately. For such people, maintaining a positive and close connection means giving up their needs to accommodate and please others.

Research shows that university students who depict avoidant attachment styles are less likely to become victims of cyber bullies relative to their counterparts who demonstrate anxious attachment. For instance, Alim (2016) noted that university students with avoidant attachment are often afraid to attach to

other people just because of the fear of being rejected. Thus, for such students, regardless of the advances made by the cyber bullies, these students will show an unwillingness to get intimate or even collaborate. This, in turn, allows the cyber bullies to perceive that the avoidant attachment-oriented student is a relatively difficult target. However, referring to the case of the university students who exercise anxiety attachment style, Varghese and Pistole (2017) revealed that these learners easily fall victims because of their willingness to befriend any person as well as their readiness to be submissive. Thus making them easy targets for cyberbullying, these university students will hinder to the demands of the cyber bullies whether knowingly or unknowingly merely because of their motivation to maintain the relationship. Worsley, McIntyre, and Corcoran (2018) also profile this particular concern by claiming that university students with anxiety attachment characteristics tend to be stressed and this is what pushes them into being submissive subjects, which is an effective avenue through which cyberbullying victimization occurs.

EMPATHY AS A PREDICTOR OF CYBERBULLYING

Empathy refers to the ability of a person to share and understand the feelings of another individual. Brewer and Kerslake (2015) relate that empathy often occurs in numerous forms and these include emotional and cognitive empathy. Brewer and Kerslake (2015) describe emotional empathy as the affective responsiveness in which a person automatically responds to other individuals' emotions, but unconsciously. Cognitive empathy, on its part, is often conscious and reflects the drive to recognize, in an accurate manner, and understand other people's emotional states. Each of these two types of empathy also plays a huge role in predicting cyberbullying among university students.

In their study, Ang and Goh (2010) found out that at low levels of cognitive or affective empathy, cyberbullying is prominent. Webber and Ovedovitz (2018) confirm this thought by revealing that low affective and cognitive empathy often predisposes the university students toward acts of cyberbullying. This is precisely so due to the notion that such learners, rather than responding with appropriate emotions to the peers' mental states, for example, distress, will attempt to inflict even further suffering by engaging in cyberbullying. These students, because of a lack of emotional and cognitive sympathy, will seek to take advantage of the peer's weaknesses in their mental states to advance their cyberbullying activities. However, those students that show high cognitive and emotional empathy will strive to avoid engaging in acts that will cause further instability in the emotions of their peers. Hence, for such students, cyberbullying is not an option when relating with their distressed peers through the virtual space.

While this is the case, people with high cognitive and emotional empathy may easily fall victim of cyberbullying. This is especially so where the cyberbully portrays false emotions. For example, the cyberbully might make himself or herself appear during online conversations that they are in genuine need for support, for instance regarding money. Since the students high on cognitive and emotional empathy will

seek to identify with the cyberbullies' emotions, they will likely give in to the interests of the malicious peer, thereby victimization.

While this is the case, as Brewer and Kerslake (2015) seem to show, the university students with high cognitive sympathy might escape victimization as, when compared to their counterparts that depict great emotional sympathy, they can detect the real emotions of the cyber bullies. This implies that such student has the capacity to know the pretentious and genuine emotions. In the case that they become aware that the prospective cyber bully is feigning emotions, the university students scoring highly on cognitive sympathy will not give in to the demands of the offender.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, this paper has shown that numerous factors often predict cyberbullying among university students. The discussion depicts that high levels of honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience usually increases the chances of cyberbullying and the maintenance of this malicious activity. In addition to this, the paper has portrayed that university students who have low levels of honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience might avoid victimization. However, low emotionality, extraversion, and agreeableness might drive some students into targeting others.

What is more, this paper shows that students that depict avoidant attachment are less likely to fall victim of cyberbullying relative to their counterparts who show anxiety attachment. A further interesting finding is that the university students who demonstrate cognitive and emotional sympathy cannot perpetrate cyberbullying but will effectively fall victims of the crime. Nevertheless, victimization on the part of the students that show cognitive sympathy can detect whether the cyber bully's emotions are genuine or not and this increases the chances that they will not be easy targets.

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