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Setting a bad example : peer, parental, and celebrity norms predict celebrity bashing

Setting a Bad Example

Peer, Parental, and Celebrity Norms Predict Celebrity Bashing

Abstract

The present study investigated the effect of descriptive and injunctive norms of peers, parents, and favorite celebrities on adolescents' negative online behavior toward celebrities. The sample consisted of 1,255 adolescents (M_{age} = 14.17, SD = 0.47). Adolescents indicated what their peers, parents, and favorite celebrities think of celebrity bashing (injunctive norms) and whether they engage in it (descriptive norms). The adolescents also indicated how often they had participated in negative online behavior toward celebrities and peers. The results revealed that compared to injunctive norms, descriptive norms are better predictors of adolescents' negative online behavior toward celebrities. Focusing on the different role models, the impact of peers was the strongest for both mild and severe forms of celebrity aggression. Moreover, the results showed that adolescents who engage in negative online behavior directed at celebrities are likely to do the same regarding peers.

Keywords: celebrity bashing, cyberbullying, descriptive and injunctive norms, adolescents, role models

Setting a Bad Example: Peer, Parental, and Celebrity Norms Predict Celebrity Bashing

While numerous studies have investigated online aggression targeted at peers (e.g., Gini & Espelage, 2014; Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell & Tippett, 2008), only few have focused on other targets, such as celebrities (Pyżalski, 2012; Whittaker & Kowalski, 2014), the group of interest in the present study. Celebrities regularly become the subject of online bashing, a trend that started as a journalistic practice (Esser, 1999). However, in the context of Web 2.0. audience members are also increasingly activated to insult or ridicule celebrities (Claessens & Van den Bulck, 2014).

Celebrities who are victims of online bashing often struggle with negative consequences. One study on celebrity cyberbullying testimonials indicated that celebrities are often hurt by the comments they receive (Ouvrein, Vandebosch, & De Backer, 2018), which sometimes forms the basis for more serious issues, such as uncertainty, self-blame, depression, or alcohol or drug addiction (Ouvrein et al., 2018; Rojek, 2001). However, adolescents seem to highly underestimate the impact of celebrity bashing on celebrities, as researchers have shown that adolescents are convinced that celebrities are unable to read all comments written about them, and even if they do, they will not be hurt by them, because receiving hate is considered a normal part of a "famous" life (Ouvrein, Vandebosch, & De Backer, 2017).

Thus, studying celebrity bashing is relevant as these practices might cultivate acceptance of aggressive behavior. Following Gerbner's (1990) cultivation theory, individuals develop views about the world based on exposure to media. Therefore, regular exposure to celebrity bashing might distort individuals' views of the world. It is known that among adolescents, a correlation exists between bashing of celebrities and online aggression directed at peers, and that the combination of these actions is related to an overall increased risk behavior pattern, which might be explained by the similarities between the two types of

behavior (Pyżalski, 2012). However, in addition to the similarities between online aggression directed at celebrities and peers, there is an important difference that might be crucial when trying to explain celebrity bashing. The main distinguishing feature is the target of the behavior: a celebrity versus a non-celebrity person (a peer). For example, a recent study among adolescents showed that although adolescents disapprove of negative online behavior directed at individuals in general, adolescents are more tolerant when the victim is a celebrity (Ouvrein et al., 2017). This study also indicated that the threshold for bashing celebrities online is lower compared to the threshold for behaving aggressively regarding peers (Ouvrein et al., 2017). In sum, although bashing celebrities online might appear to be trivial, this practice may lead to online aggression directed at other targets, such as peers, and contribute to a culture of acceptance of aggressive online behavior. Therefore, studying the influence and potential protective factors that explain online aggressive behavior directed at celebrities is important.

The aim of this study is to analyze the potential influence and protective power of perceived descriptive and injunctive norms of parents, peers, and favorite celebrities on adolescents' aggressive online behavior directed at celebrities. This will be studied among adolescents, since this is the group that is often involved in cyberbullying, which is considered as a subform of online aggression (Tokunaga, 2010). The focus on perceived norms is supported by Akers' (Akers & Jennings, 2009) social learning theory, an application of Bandura's (1977) social learning theory adapted to a specific context of deviant behavior. Akers extended Bandura's theoretical mechanisms with the concepts of imitation and reinforcement, as these elements help to explain why someone becomes deviant and why individuals participate in these types of deviant behavior (Akers & Jennings, 2009; Sellers & Winfree, 1990). This theory has often been applied to forms of online aggression, such as sexting (Van Ouytsel, Ponnet, & Walrave, 2017) and cyberbullying (Lowry, Zhang, Wang, &

Siponen, 2016). According to this theory, individuals develop deviant behavioral intentions and attitudes via a combination of observing the behavior of others and interacting with important others, such as parents and peers, through which norms are then transferred (Akers & Jennings, 2009). The group of important others is often restricted to peers and parents. We want to add favorite celebrities to this group, as researchers have shown that during the transitional phase of adolescence, favorite celebrities take on the important role of influencers, reducing the role of parents (Giles & Maltby, 2004).

In what follows, the phenomenon of celebrity bashing, the role of Akers' social learning theory in this context (Akers & Jennings, 2009) and the existing research on perceived injunctive and descriptive norms is explained in more detail, followed by an overview of the literature on the influence of parents, peers, and favorite celebrities on adolescents' behavior. Combining these perspectives, we develop research questions and test them in a paper-and-pencil survey among adolescents. We then discuss the results and practical implications.

Celebrity bashing

The term "celebrity bashing" originally referred to a "trend of newspapers that are picking on celebrities or displaying them making a fool of themselves" (Johansson, 2008, p. 408). However, today the concept has surpassed the journalistic world with audiences increasingly participating in this behavior too (Claessens & Van den Bulck, 2014). Commenting on what journalists or others write, readers try out different variants of bashing, resulting in reader comments that are sometimes quite mean and far more judgmental than the journalistic article itself (Claessens & Van den Bulck, 2014; Van den Bulck & Claessens, 2014), leading us to define "celebrity bashing" as "the online attacking and abuse of celebrities by journalists and the audience." However, not all comments targeted at celebrities should be referred to as celebrity bashing. We distinguish celebrity bashing from (negative)

critiquing based on the underlying intentions of the behavior, which follows the work of Dalla Pozza, Di Pietro, Morel, and Psaila (2011). Whereas the motivation for critiquing is generally constructive, bashing describes behaviors with the intention to harm (Dalla Pozza et al., 2011). Intentional harm refers to "the intention to inflict harm on the victim by putting in place unpleasant and distressing behaviors against him/her" (Dalla Pozza et al., 2011, p. 23; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011).

Norms and Akers' Social Learning Theory

Behavioral intentions and the behavior itself are the result of different complex processes, including a range of determinants, such as attitudes, norms, behavioral control, and self-efficacy, making it very difficult to explain all the variance in the behavior (Fikkers, Piotrowski, Lugtig, & Valkenburg, 2016). This study focused on a subset of these determinants, perceived social norms. At the broadest level, social norms refer to shared standards, rules, and expectations for how individuals should behave in certain circumstances (Coleman, 1990). Although closely related, norms should be distinguished from values that refer to "enduring beliefs that a specific model of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable" (Rokeach, 1973, p. 5) and thus describe abstract and general guidelines for what is acceptable and what is important within one's culture (Hansson, 1991). People have different values and rank them based on the priority given to those values through cultural socialization (Schwartz, 1992). This ranking has been the subject of substantial changes during the past decades. Advanced economic and technical development and the entrance in a postmodernism area resulted in a shift of value priorities (Inglehart, 1971; Inglehart, 2000; Inglehart & Flanagan, 1987). The high priority for economic safety gradually became saturated and was being replaced by more "post-bourgeois" values such as need for belonging and aesthetic values (Inglehart, 1971). Apart from the industrial situation, these value priorities are also determined by one's personal

context and cultural socialization, including the social norms that are shared within this context (Schwartz, 1992), which indicates how these two concepts are closely related to each other.

The theoretical basis we rely upon to explain the influence of social norms in the context of online celebrity aggression is Akers' (Akers & Jennings, 2009) social learning theory. According to this theory, individuals develop attitudes toward and behavioral intentions to perform deviant behavior through both imitating role models and interacting with primary groups, such as peers and parents (Akers & Lee, 1996). In the first case, individuals learn vicariously, by observing others (models) who perform the behavior and who are rewarded or punished for it, whereas in the second case individuals develop their own attitudes based on norms and interactions with significant others.

Norms have often been dismissed as less important factors in explaining behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Armitage & Conner, 2001). This, however, has been due to restricted or poorly constructed definitions of this concept in the past (Armitage & Conner, 2001), and this problem can be solved by using clearer and more refined definitions of norms, such as the well-known distinction between injunctive norms and descriptive norms (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). Injunctive norms refer to what significant others think of the behavior and whether they typically approve or disapprove of it. In that way, injunctive norms give individuals information on how they should act (Cialdini et al., 1990; Rimal & Lapinski, 2015). Descriptive norms, in contrast, describe individuals' perceptions of what significant others do (Cialdini et al., 1990). The more individuals are willing to do the right thing, based on their belief that most others engage in that behavior, the more importance individuals attach to descriptive norms (Cialdini et al., 1990; Rimal & Lapinski, 2015). Although long neglected in research predicting behavioral intentions, descriptive norms can increase the explained variance of the behavior considerably, especially when predicting risky behavior

among young people (Rivis & Sheeran, 2003). A growing number of studies acknowledge the importance of including both types of norms when predicting different forms of risk behaviors, such as binge drinking, risky sexual behaviors, drug use, and risky online behaviors among adolescents (Baumgartner, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2011; Doane, Pearson, & Keller, 2014; Spijkerman, Van Den Eijnden, Overbeek, & Engels, 2007). Moreover, given the independent influence of both types of norms (Park & Smith, 2007), several studies have measured both concepts separately and compared their effects, and scholars concluded that both injunctive and descriptive norms are statistically significant predictors of the intention to engage in risky behaviors (e.g., Baumgarter et al., 2011; Spijkerman et al., 2007). However, consensus regarding which ones are most important is lacking. Whereas the former study (Baumgarter et al., 2011) indicated that the approval of significant others (i.e., injunctive norms) is more important when predicting adolescents' intentions to binge drink, the latter (Spijkerman et al., 2007) concluded that descriptive norms are more strongly related to risky sexual behavior than injunctive norms. In a meta-analysis of the effects of social norms, Manning (2009) tried to explain the contradictory findings by referring to the type of behavior, indicating that the extent of social disapproval is important to determine the influence of both types of norms, with descriptive norms being stronger predictors of behavior that receives high social disapproval. To the best of our knowledge, the potential, and perhaps different, influence of perceived descriptive and injunctive norms on adolescents' negative online behavior directed at celebrities has not been studied. Following existing research on cyberbullying that indicates a stronger influence of injunctive norms compared to descriptive norms and thus, points to the importance of distinguishing between these two types of norms in this context (Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014; Bastiaensens et al., 2016), the first research question of this study concerns the difference between the impact of

descriptive and injunctive norms of celebrity bashing in predicting adolescents' online

behavior directed at celebrities.

RQ1. Which perceived norms of celebrity bashing of peers/parents/favorite celebrities

are most influential in predicting adolescents' negative online behavior directed at

celebrities: descriptive or injunctive norms?

Most of the existing studies on significant others' norms recognize and compare the

influence of peers and parents as the most popular role models in adolescents' lives when it

comes to online aggression (Heirman & Walrave, 2012; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014),

neglecting the potential influence of another important reference group during adolescence:

favorite celebrities (Giles & Maltby, 2004).

Peers', Parents', and Celebrities' Norms Predict Online Aggression

Of the well-studied influence of parents and peers, the first, and most important,

group of role models for adolescents is their peers (Furman & Collins, 2008). Some studies

showed that peers' and friends' participation in cyberbullying (i.e., descriptive norms)

increases an adolescent's intention to engage in cyberbullying (Lazuras, Barkoukis, Ourda, &

Tsorbatzoudis, 2013). However, other studies showed that adolescents' perceptions of peers'

approval of online aggression (i.e., injunctive norms) is the strongest predictor of the

likelihood that adolescents participate in this type of behavior (Festl, Scharkow, & Quandt,

2015; Heirman & Walrave, 2012). Nevertheless, all studies agreed that the influence of peers

in increasing adolescents' intentions to participate in such behaviors can be quite strong

compared to other factors in the model. This peer influence can be due to the changing

socialization roles in adolescence, in which parents lose their exemplary function and the

presence of peers in each other's lives increases substantially (Furman & Collins, 2008).

Various studies that compared the impact of parents and peers on adolescents' behavioral

intentions showed that adolescents attach more importance to the opinions and reactions of

their friends and peers than to those of their parents and teachers (Heirman & Walrave, 2012; Mitchell, Petrovici, Schlegermilch, & Szöcs, 2015; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014).

Although parents progressively become less attractive as role models for their children, parents still have an impact on adolescents' development of attitudes toward cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014). Knowing that their parents disapprove of online aggression and fearing punishment or sanctions from them directly reduces adolescents' likelihood of involvement as perpetrators (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013) and as bystanders (Bastiaensens et al., 2016). Moreover, parents who are involved in their children's lives in general and in their online behavior in particular, and talk about acceptable online behavior, reduce adolescents' intentions to participate in online aggression (Cappadocia, Craig, & Pepler, 2013; Shapka & Law, 2013). Therefore, when studying online aggression directed at peers and other targets, additional measurement of parental influence seems important.

Third and last, as mentioned before, we also need to mention celebrities as role models (Giles & Maltby, 2004; Stever, 2011). Celebrities are defined here as people that stand out because they have either achieved something or because they have their status attributed to them by inheritance or by media and audiences (Rojek, 2001). Stever (2011) applied Levinson's (1986) lifespan development theory to the context of celebrity relationships to explain the establishment of strong relationships with celebrities during adolescence. According to Levinson (1986), individuals experience transitions from one life stage to another. During these transitional phases, parasocial attachments are more easily developed (Stever, 2011). As adolescence is one of these transition phases, during which teenagers are searching for new role models in addition to their parents, relationships with celebrities are very common during this period (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007; Stever, 2011). Relationships with celebrities can even be described as an intermediate phase between parent

relationships and peer relationships (Giles & Maltby, 2004). For some individuals, these celebrity relationships lead to parasocial relationships (Giles & Maltby, 2004; Horton & Wohl, 1956). A parasocial relationship can be defined as a celebrity-fanrelationship in which the "ordinary" person knows much about the celebrity, but the celebrity knows nothing about that person (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Although these relationships are always one-sided, individuals develop socioemotional bonds with celebrities and even experience them as real friends (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Through this pseudofriend status, in turn, celebrities exert influence on adolescents similarly to peers (De Backer, Nelissen, Vyncke, & Braekman, 2007; Giles & Maltby, 2004). In addition, an even stronger effect may be expected from celebrities compared to parents and peers. It is known that individuals, in general, have a profound tendency to mimic others who they consider as more prestigious (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). Prestigious others, such as celebrities, can then become the model for a broad range of copycat behavior, merely because they are considered prestigious (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). As celebrities are considered highly prestigious, especially among adolescents (De Backer et al., 2007; Giles & Maltby, 2004), they may become a kind of "super peer."

In sum, from different perspectives, the influence of peers, parents, and favorite celebrities on adolescents' aggressive online behavior can be assumed to be high. Because no study has investigated the differential impact of these three reference groups on adolescents' aggressive online behavior directed at celebrities, the second research question of this study is:

> **RQ2.** Whose perceived descriptive and injunctive norms of celebrity bashing are most influential in predicting adolescents' negative online behavior directed at celebrities: peer, parental, or the favorite celebrity?

Method

Sample

Data were gathered using a cross-sectional paper-and-pencil survey among adolescents in eighth grade, as cyberbullying is most common at this age (Tokunaga, 2010). A total of 1,255 adolescents (52.4% female) with a mean age of 14.17 years ($SD = .465$) participated in the study. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee for Social and Humanities research of the University [blinded for review] and is part of a larger research project on adolescents' online behavior directed at celebrities. In the first part of the questionnaire, the participants indicated what their peers, parents, and favorite celebrities think of (injunctive norm) and whether they engage in (descriptive norm) celebrity bashing. In the second part, we asked the participants how often they themselves had participated in mild and severe negative behaviors directed at celebrities and peers. A pilot study was conducted among a convenience sample of seven girls and two boys ($M = 14.2$, $SD = 2.44$) in order to test whether all questions and wording were clear. No issues appeared.

Measures

Negative online behavior directed at celebrities and peers was measured using a list of different forms of negative online behavior. These behaviors were selected using the European Cyberbullying Intervention Project Questionnaire (Del Rey et al., 2015) as the basis (11 items). The items were reformulated for the context of celebrity bashing, which, based on the elements of this scale, for this study was defined as "the intentionally insulting, ridiculing or trashing of celebrities about their personality, their performance or physical appearance, as well as the threatening or impersonation of celebrities through online channels." Although some of the items on this scale seem difficult to perform with celebrities (e.g., hacking accounts and stealing information), they were kept. In that way, we followed Pyżalski's work in which he used the Lodz Electronic Aggression Questionnaire (LEAPQ), a

scale that also contains these kinds of actions (Plitchta, 2015; Pyżalski, 2012, 2013). This scale has been used several times to measure electronic aggression directed at, among others, celebrities, indicating that these behaviors are rare but happen among adolescents (Plitchta, 2015; Pyżalski, 2012, 2013). Before answering the questions about their behaviors directed at celebrities, participants were provided a definition of celebrity bashing formulated as "the regularly offending and making a fool of celebrities online with the intention to hurt them." In that way, we stressed the importance of the underlying intentions as this was used as a benchmark to distinguish celebrity bashing from critiquing. The participants completed this scale twice. First, they were asked about their online behaviors directed at celebrities and then about their online behavior directed at peers. In both cases, participants indicated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*almost every day*) how often they had participated in these actions within the previous six months. Problematic outliers were deleted based on observations of boxplots. Exploratory factor analysis of negative online behavior directed at celebrities distinguished two factors: mild negative online behavior consisting of six items (*a* = .783) and severe negative behavior consisting of five items (*a* = .820). Mild negative behavior included, for instance, "criticizing a celebrity/peer on their physical appearance." An example of a severe negative online behavior was "hacking an online account of a celebrity/peer and pretending to be that person." The factor mild negative online behavior directed at peers consisted of the same six items in a peer context (*a* = .754), and severe negative behavior directed at peers was constructed using the same five items in a peer context (*a* = .783).

Injunctive norms of peers, parents, and favorite celebrities were captured using two items for each reference group ("My friends/parents/favorite celebrities wouldn't mind if I insult or ridicule celebrities online" and "My friends/parents/favorite celebrities would approve it if I insult or ridicule celebrities online"). These items were selected based on

previous studies on norms in a similar context (e.g., Pabian & Vandebosch, 2016).

Participants answered these questions on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*). The internal consistency for the three groups of injunctive norms was good: *a* was .740 for peer norms, .732 for parental norms, and .767 for celebrity norms. Descriptive norms of peers, parents, and favorite celebrities of celebrity bashing were captured using one item for each reference group ("My friends/parents/favorite celebrities insult or ridicule celebrities online") and was measured using the same 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*).

Data Analysis

For investigating the relationships between the norms of celebrity bashing and negative online behavior directed at celebrities and peers, path modeling was applied using Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2016) with weighted least squares means and variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimation method, as this this method is most suitable for non-normal categorical data (Barendse, Oort, & Timmerman, 2015). All the norms (observed variables) were regressed on mild negative online behavior directed at celebrities and severe negative online behavior directed at celebrities. Correlations were calculated between the norms and mild negative online behavior directed at peers and severe negative online behavior directed at peers. Gender and age were added as control variables. Multilevel analysis was not used, as the unconditional null model (Garson, 2013) showed the absence of a statistically significant school effect.

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Results

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Descriptive Results

In general, adolescents' participation in negative online behavior directed at celebrities was low, as almost three quarters of the participants (*n* = 886; 70.6%) did not report engaging in negative online behavior directed at celebrities within the previous six

months. Of the participants who reported negative online behavior directed at celebrities, more than nine out of 10 ($n = 317$; 94.1%) participated in mild forms of this behavior, and about one out of four ($n = 90$; 26.7%) stated they had engaged in severe forms. Sharing a negative post about a celebrity ($n = 165$, 13.3%) and commenting negatively on an acting or singing performance ($n = 154$, 12.3%) were the most frequently reported mild activities, whereas adapting videos of celebrities in an embarrassing way ($n = 52$, 5.2%) was the most frequently reported severe activity.

Almost half of the adolescents ($n = 572$, 45%) stated they had engaged in negative online behavior directed at peers at least once within the previous six months. Of the participants who reported negative online behavior directed at peers, almost all ($n = 556$, 96.2%) had participated in mild forms of this behavior, whereas one out of four ($n = 145$, 25.1%) stated they had engaged in severe forms. Using curse words directed at peers online was the most frequently reported mild activity ($n = 482$, 38.4%), whereas adapting videos of peers in an embarrassing way was the most frequently reported severe activity ($n = 89$, 7.1%).

Given the high rate of respondents reporting no participation in severe forms of negative online behavior toward celebrities and peers, we decided to dichotomize our dependent variables into a binary variables, 0 for no participation and 1 for any form of mild or severe participation.

The Wilcoxon t-test results indicated that respondents participated more often in mild ($z = 148050$, $p < .001$) and severe ($z = 16501.5$, $p < .001$) negative online behavior directed at peers ($M_{mild} = .66$, $SD = .47$; $M_{severe} = .20$, $SD = .40$) than directed at celebrities ($M_{mild} = .26$, $SD = .44$; $M_{severe} = .08$, $SD = .26$).

Regarding gender, mann-Whitney U t -tests showed that compared to girls, boys participated more often in mild and severe negative online behavior directed at celebrities ($U_{mild, celebrities} = 192878.5$, $p < .05$, $U_{severe, celebrities} = 196384$, $p < .001$ ($M_{boys, mild, celebrities} = .29$,

$SD = .45$; $M_{girls, mild, celebrities} = .23$, $SD = .42$; $M_{boys, severe, celebrities} = .11$, $SD = .31$; $M_{girls, severe, celebrities} = .04$, $SD = .20$) and directed at peers ($U_{mild, peers} = 195743$, $p < .05$, $U_{severe, peers} = 198951$, $p = .001$ ($M_{boys, mild, peers} = .69$, $SD = .46$; $M_{girls, mild, peers} = .63$, $SD = .48$; $M_{boys, severe, peers} = .23$, $SD = .42$; $M_{girls, severe, peers} = .16$, $SD = .37$)).

For age, older respondents participated more often in severe negative behavior directed at peers ($r = .08$, $p < .01$) and more often in severe negative behavior directed at celebrities ($r = .10$, $p = .001$). For mild behavior, no differences could be observed. An overview of the descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations is in Table 1.

(TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE)

Path Model

The standardized parameter estimates of the path model are presented in Figure 1. The model fit indices indicate a good fit for the data: The CFI was 0.992, the RMSEA was 0.044 (90% CI, 0.027–0.063), $\chi^2(8)$ was 27.38, and the p value was less than .001. The results reveal which norms of celebrity bashing predict mild and severe forms of negative online behavior directed at celebrities (Figure 1). The model also gives an indication of which norms of celebrity bashing correlate with mild and severe forms of negative online behavior directed at peers and the overlap between negative online behavior directed at celebrities and peers. The explained variances of the main variables of the present study, mild and severe negative online behavior directed at celebrities, are .09 and .12, respectively.

(FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE)

The results indicate that higher levels of descriptive peer ($\beta = .15$, $p < .001$) and celebrity ($\beta = .08$, $p < .05$) norms of celebrity bashing increase the probability of participation in mild negative online behavior directed at celebrities. Believing that one's peers and favorite celebrities themselves bash celebrities is a risk factor for performing mild forms of negative online behavior directed at celebrities. The probability for participation in mild online celebrity aggression was not associated with the perceived approval of celebrity bashing by peers, parents, and celebrities. The probability for participation in severe negative online behavior directed at celebrities was significantly associated with descriptive peer norms ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$). Parental norms were unrelated with the probability for participation in both mild and severe online celebrity aggression.

Furthermore, the results of the path model demonstrated moderate to strong positive statistically significant correlations between mild and severe forms of negative online behavior directed at celebrities and peers. The correlations between the four forms ranged between .38 and .70. Moreover, the model showed that injunctive and descriptive norms of celebrity bashing of peers, parents, and celebrities are also associated with negative online behavior directed at peers: A stronger belief that peers, parents, and celebrities approve of and perform celebrity bashing goes together with higher probabilities of performing mild and severe negative online behavior directed at peers. The associations between the descriptive norms and both forms of negative online behavior directed at peers (average $r = .16$) seem somewhat stronger compared to the correlations between the injunctive norms and both forms of negative online behavior (average $r = .14$).

Discussion

Research on celebrity bashing is still very limited. Only a few studies have described the phenomenon (e.g., Johansson, 2008), and to the best of our knowledge, no study has

investigated the predictors and potential protective factors of this type of behavior. Extending our knowledge on the potential explanations underlying celebrity bashing is important, given the trend of approval of aggression culture in which individuals easily accept online aggression directed at famous people, because they are confronted with it so often in the media. This trend becomes even more problematic when the effects are not restricted to the media but also involve the active participation of the public (Ouvrein et al., 2017). Although often dismissed, celebrities who are regularly confronted with such waves of negative comments experience negative feelings, and sometimes, even more serious issues (Ouvrein et al., 2018; Rojek, 2011). The aim of the present study, therefore, was to gain more insight into the role of the perceived norms of the three most important role models for adolescents (peers, parents, and favorite celebrities) as explanatory variables of adolescents' negative online behavior toward celebrities. Following Akers' social learning theory, we expected that norms can determine behavior when passed via social interactions with significant others, such as parents, peers, and favorite celebrities (Akers & Jennings, 2009; Akers & Lee, 1996). When adolescents observe that these significant others insult, humiliate, and threaten famous persons, the adolescents learn that this behavior is normal, and this attitude may lower the threshold for performing that behavior themselves.

The first research question referred to the difference between the impact of descriptive and injunctive norms of celebrity bashing in predicting adolescents' online behavior directed at celebrities. The path modeling results showed that the belief that peers, and favorite celebrities bash celebrities (i.e., descriptive norms) increased the likelihood that adolescents engage in mild forms of negative online behavior directed at celebrities. Only descriptive norms of peers was associated with the probability to participate in severe negative online behavior directed at celebrities. None of the variables on injunctive norms were associated to online celebrity aggression. For the first research question, thus, it can be concluded that

descriptive norms on celebrity bashing are more important for adolescents' own negative online behavior directed at celebrities than injunctive norms. Given the contradictory results in the literature on which norms are the most important element when explaining cyberbullying, these results agree with one part of the literature indicating that descriptive norms have the strongest relationship with behavior (e.g., Lazuras et al., 2013) and contradict the other part of the literature (Bastiaensens et al., 2016; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014). These results also confirm Akers' theory which states that individuals can develop deviant behavioral intentions on the basis of the exchange of norms through interacting with important others, such as peers (Akers & Jennings, 2009). However, in the context of online celebrity aggression, this could only be confirmed for descriptive norms. More research on both types of norms in the context of celebrity aggression is necessary to further explain the suggested relationships.

The second question focused on which of the three role models (peers, parents, or favorite celebrities) are most influential regarding adolescents' negative online behavior directed at celebrities. Existing research indicated that adolescents look for new role models other than their parents (Giles & Maltby, 2004). Celebrities and peers then often become role models who influence adolescents' behaviors (Giles & Maltby, 2004; Stever, 2011). However, although the parental influence has clearly diminished, parents still steer the online behavior of their children to a certain extent (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014). Therefore, it seemed interesting to compare the influence of the norms of these three groups of role models: peers, parents, and favorite celebrities. Results indicated that for both mild and severe online aggression directed at celebrities and at peers, peer norms were more important predictors, compared to parental norms. The third group of norms, celebrity norms were related with the probability to participate in mild online aggression, although this association was not quite strong. These results suggest that especially peers and

to a certain extent also favorite celebrities are important role models for adolescents' online behavior directed at celebrities. These results are consistent with findings of previous studies showing that adolescents attach more importance to the opinions and reactions of their friends and peers than to those of their parents and teachers (Heirman & Walrave, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2015; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014). Further research is necessary to investigate the prevalence of peers', parents' and celebrities' negative online behavior directed at celebrities and how often adolescents are exposed to this behavior.

Furthermore, the results showed that adolescents' negative online behavior directed at celebrities was positively correlated with adolescents' negative online behavior directed at peers and that injunctive and descriptive norms of celebrity bashing of peers, parents, and celebrities are also associated with the probability to participate online mild and severe negative behavior directed at peers, establishing a clear link between the two types of negative online behaviors. This finding is in line with both cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1990), which suggests that participation in one form of online aggression can cultivate general acceptance of online aggression, and symbolic modeling theory (Bandura & Menlove, 1986). According to the latter theory, modeling effects are not restricted to the concrete stimulus used but can be transferred to other individuals or other situations. Applying this idea to norms, it seems that believing that significant others approve of and/or participate in negative online behavior directed at celebrities also leads to an increasing likelihood of participating in negative online behaviors directed at peers. In that way, online aggression directed at celebrities, thus, might be considered a specific subset of online aggression, which might set the tone for online aggression directed at peers. Of course, with the obvious difference that whereas online aggression toward peers mostly includes people who know each other (Smith et al., 2008), online aggression directed at celebrities is aggression targeted at individuals to whom the aggressor is not related in real life and who

are generally considered high-status individuals (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). According to adolescents, this difference is important. In Ouvrein and colleagues' (2017) focus group study, adolescent girls said that celebrities who are attacked should be able to deal with it, as it is inherent to being famous (Ouvrein et al., 2017). Whittaker and Kowalski (2015) also found that aggressive comments directed at celebrities were considered more morally justified than comments directed at "ordinary people". This study corroborates these findings by showing how these processes of acceptance of online aggression directed at celebrities might be further facilitated by supporting peers' and favorite celebrities' norms.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study have to be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, in this cross-sectional model, we propose that norms affect behavior. However, whether norms are actually translated into behavior depends on one's other underlying motivations (i.e., the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations). When adolescents avoid participating in a behavior because they fear punishment from their parents, the adolescents' behavior is driven by extrinsic motivations (Ryan, & Deci, 2000; Roca & Gagné, 2008). However, when adolescents avoid participating in the behavior because they are convinced it is an unacceptable behavior, their behavior is the result of intrinsic motivations (Ryan, & Deci, 2000; Roca & Gagné, 2008). Several studies showed that intrinsic motivations generally lead to better performances compared to extrinsic motivations (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004; Roca & Gagné, 2008). Significant others' disapproving norms, thus, might not be enough to stop adolescents from participating in celebrity bashing. Moreover, the association between norms and behavior may also be the reverse: Individuals value particular norms and choose their friends and favorite celebrities based on these norms (Farell & Danish, 1993). It also seems possible that participating in a certain type of behavior can influence one's attitudes directed at that type of behavior. Following Bern's self-perception

theory, individuals adapt their own attitudes and behaviors after observing their own behavior, striving to harmonize their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Bern, 1972). To assess the direction of the effect of norms on adolescents' behavior directed at celebrities, future studies should use longitudinal or experimental study designs. Furthermore, future research should include potential moderators that can facilitate or inhibit the relationship between norms and behavior. Rimal and Laprinski (2015) suggested including moderators at the individual level (e.g., involvement, self-monitoring, and self-efficacy), as well as at the interpersonal and societal levels (e.g., group proximity and interdependence of the group).

Second, we distinguished between mild and severe forms of negative online behavior, but we did not use this distinction when we assessed the norms (we asked adolescents about their perceptions of the approval and behavior of relevant others regarding celebrity bashing in general). Future research could examine whether perceived norms also differ regarding mild and severe forms of negative online behavior and whether the differences have varied impacts on behavior. Moreover, future research on celebrity bashing can also benefit from distinguishing between mild and severe types of negative online behavior directed at celebrities and include them in the definition of celebrity bashing. As the majority of the items that we added to the European Cyberbullying Intervention Project Questionnaire (Del Rey et al., 2015) clustered in the subfactor mild negative behavior, previous studies may have measured only severe forms of negative online behavior. Furthermore, as mild and severe forms of negative online behavior directed at celebrities were predicted by different variables and mild negative behavior directed at celebrities appeared to be a stepping stone to more severe forms of bashing, future research should use scales that measure both types of online aggression.

Third, the study sample was drawn from a specific population in terms of age and geographic location. Although we do not have reason to expect different results for

adolescents from similar cultures, the associations between norms and behavior are likely to be different for other age groups. For example, as adolescents age, their psychological distance from their parents decreases while their reliance on their friends increases (Berk, 2014), which may be reflected in analogous changes in the importance of the norms of both groups for adolescents' behavior. Future studies may benefit from including a broader age group to test for age effects.

Last, further operationalization and validation of the scales to measure injunctive and descriptive norms of celebrities are necessary to further explore the potential impact of these concepts. To increase the validity and reliability of the constructs, multiple items should be added.

Implications

The findings from the present study can inspire prevention efforts against negative behavior directed at celebrities and peers. As the results show that perceived norms of celebrity bashing influence adolescents' negative online behavior, prevention efforts can target these norms to influence behavior. Specifically, descriptive norms may be influenced by putting role models (peers, parents, and celebrities) who demonstrate netiquette online in the spotlight. It may also be advisable not to focus only on individuals' negative online behavior, as this may create the impression that this behavior is common and everyone engages in it. Further, by encouraging peers, parents, and celebrities to take a firm stance against all forms of cyber aggression, injunctive norms may be influenced as well.

The findings suggest that peers have an especially strong influence on young adolescents' negative online behavior. Therefore, it is important that peers are aware of their modeling function and that they set a good example for each other. Cyber aggression prevention programs can be advised to include peers in their prevention efforts and to educate them about the effect of their own behavior and attitudes toward celebrity bashing.

Conclusion

The present study showed how peers' and celebrities' perceived norms of celebrity bashing are significant predictors of adolescents' negative online behavior directed at celebrities. The perception of how others behave online regarding celebrities seems to have a particularly strong influence, even more than the perception of others' attitudes toward celebrity bashing. These findings may be important for cyber aggression prevention and intervention efforts, which may benefit from targeting perceived norms of celebrity bashing and including peers in the programs, as these seem to play an important role in adolescents' negative online behavior.

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