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Aggression Through Mobile Communication: Unraveling Its Motives and Consequences.

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Abstract

Both adolescents and adults use mobile applications to engage in conversations, expand their social networks, and, for some, to engage in romantic relationships. While mobile applications offer a range of opportunities for maintaining and expanding one's social circle, some users are confronted with forms of aggression. This chapter reviews the scientific knowledge on two forms of aggressive behavior through mobile technology within interpersonal relationships: cyberbullying and cyber dating abuse. First, the chapter focuses on cyberbullying defined as intentional acts to hurt through digital media, socially isolate, or cause distress to a victim, which may occur repeatedly or result in repeated harm by continued exposure. The different types, the prevalence, as well as predictors and consequences of cyberbullying are analyzed. Second, the authors review research on what stimulates bystanders to help a victim or, on the contrary, join in cyberbullying. Forms of aggression through digital media may occur not only among friends or peers, but also within romantic relationships. The third part of the chapter is therefore devoted to the types, motives, and consequences of cyber dating abuse: digital behaviors that occur to control, stalk, harass, or abuse one's dating partner. Next to emotional forms of abuse (such as threatening or insulting one's partner), some forms of cyber abuse are sexual (such as pressuring a partner to engage in sexting). To offer a deeper understanding of these digital forms of dating abuse, the contextual and relational factors of the behavior are discussed.

Keywords: mobile communication, mobile applications, cyberbullying, cyber dating abuse, disinhibition, health risks

Aggression Through Mobile Communication: Unraveling Its Motives and Consequences

Mobile telephony has permeated most individuals' lives. Not only do these devices provide opportunities to stay in touch with existing personal and professional contacts, but mobile applications also offer individuals new opportunities to expand their social circle (Lenhart, 2015). Despite these new opportunities for social contact, the same applications can also be used to exert different forms of aggression. This chapter will focus on cyberaggression, which can be defined as acts of a person who intentionally wants to harm someone by using electronic media. These aggressive acts can be delivered to a single person or a group of individuals, "who perceive(s) such acts as offensive, derogatory, harmful or unwanted" (Grigg, 2010, p. 152). In this conceptualization of digitally mediated aggression, a number of acts can be understood as such, ranging from racist, sexist and homophobic comments, stalking, (sexual) harassment and cyberbullying, to trolling and flaming.

Although this diverse list of aggressive acts all have the use of digital media in common, they sometimes differ in whom is targeted and, more particularly, the relationship between the perpetrator and victim. Pyżalski (2012) summarized these relationships in his typology of cyber-aggression that is based on the identity of the targeted victim. The typology includes both aggression directed to peers, but also aggressive acts targeting groups in society, celebrities, vulnerable individuals, school staff and random victims (Pyżalski, 2012). Whereas trolls can act anonymously in online discussion groups to harass or mislead random individuals they are not acquainted with, other online aggressors can target specific individuals or groups (e.g., racial, sexual minorities, celebrities). By contrast, other forms of aggression frequently occur within interpersonal relationships, such as (cyber)bullying which often occurs between peers and cyber dating abuse, which takes place between romantic partners.

The research discussed in this chapter will focus on the two last mentioned forms of aggression, where there is often a relationship between victim and perpetrator, as being part of the same peer group, or when victim and perpetrator are romantically involved. A lot of studies concerning these forms of online aggression focus on young people as a vulnerable group. As adolescents develop their identity and social network also through social media, being confronted with aggression from peers or romantic partners can have an important and long-lasting impact on their health and future relationships (Ackard et al., 2007; Wolke and Lereya, 2015). Therefore, this chapter will review the current knowledge on both forms of online aggression, with a focus on young people and, where possible, results concerning other demographics will be discussed.

It is important to note that these forms of online aggression are also linked to offline forms of abuse. Cyberbullying can be an extension of bullying occurring at school (Kwan and Skoric, 2013). Cyber dating abuse can, for instance, be a continuation of offline dating violence by engaging in online psychological forms of control when romantic partners are physically separated. It can also be a digital extension of the offline sexual pressure that takes place within a romantic relationship (Van Ouytsel, Walrave, Ponnet, & Temple, 2016). Offline aggressions can also be filmed and shown on social media with the purpose of creating further harm. This is for instance the case in happy slapping, a physical aggression conducted by one or several perpetrators on a victim and that is filmed and put online for others to watch and to comment (Lohbeck and Petermann, 2017; Palasinski, 2013).

While cyberbullying and cyber dating abuse differ in terms of interpersonal context, the purpose of the aggressor, and the potential consequences, they also share characteristics that may differentiate these digital forms of aggression from face-to-face aggression. These differences make electronic forms of aggression a qualitatively different phenomenon in comparison with offline forms of aggression (Pyzalski, 2011). Therefore, we first highlight

characteristics of digital communication in general, and mobile communication in particular, that may facilitate forms of aggression. The second part of this chapter focuses on digital forms of bullying. We will review the literature on the motives and consequences of cyberbullying, as well as its associations with offline forms of bullying in schools, or during spare time activities. The third part of the chapter will focus on the several forms of cyber dating abuse that can occur through mobile communication within romantic relationships.

Aggression Through Mobile Media: Contexts and Consequences

Digital forms of aggression through mobile phones have some characteristics that make them distinct from offline forms of aggression. First, individuals can be reached almost 24/7 through their mobile phones. This may impact the way aggressors target and contact their potential victims, especially because research has found that two thirds of adults and eight out of ten cell-owning youth sleep with their mobile phone at hand's reach (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010). Therefore, perpetrators can still torment their victims, even in their bedrooms. This contrasts with offline aggressions that may be limited to certain times of the day (e.g., school/office hours) and where victims can return home as their safe haven. Electronic forms of aggression can reach individuals as long as victims are connected with their devices (Heirman & Walrave, 2008). Simply turning off one's mobile phone to escape the online aggression is not an option because mobile communication is an essential part of adolescents' and adults' daily lives. Although perpetrators can be blocked, new e-mail or social media accounts can be created, or prepaid phone cards can be used to continue to harass the victim.

A second characteristic of mobile communication is the persistence of its content. In the networked context of mobile and other digital applications, a message can easily be copied, stored, and spread, which may increase the impact of digital aggressions. Once a

picture or message is copied and distributed, it becomes difficult to stop further distribution (Song & Oh, 2018). For instance, a perpetrator may disclose a victim's romantic or sexually intimate message (e.g., sexting messages). This may lead to comments or the further forwarding of a message that was once sent in confidence (Van Ouytsel, Walrave, & Van Gool, 2014). When a victim succeeds in taking down a message, there is still a possibility that the picture might resurface. Also bullying messages can rapidly spread and reach unintended recipients. For adolescents, highly influenced by peers, loss of face among the peer group due to public online bullying may have important consequences, such as their reputation in the peer group (Sticca & Perren, 2013), but also their self-esteem (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014).

Next to the fact that digital forms of aggression are persistent and hard to escape, the relative anonymity of digital communication constitutes a third characteristic that differentiates online aggression from offline types of aggression. Perpetrators may easily hide their identity by using screen names or temporary accounts (Langos, 2012). Indeed, research has found that half of the cyberbullying victims did not know the identity of their aggressor, which adds to the victim's distress (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Some web sites and applications where users are not identifiable by others may give perpetrators a feeling of safety through the anonymity they offer. Although anonymous online communication has been possible for decades (e.g., on chat and dating sites), specific applications (e.g., Q&A app ASKfm, Snapchat, or dating applications such as Tinder and Grindr) offer the possibility to communicate anonymously with a specific recipient. Also, other applications and websites (such as ASKfm, Curious Cat) that were developed around the claimed key feature of anonymity have been criticized for this reason. This feeling of anonymity could lower some individuals' inhibitions to engage in cyberbullying. A study among 18- to 21-year-old users of the web and mobile-based social network ASKfm found that almost half had received

negative comments about their appearance, and one fifth had been confronted with threatening comments. Although these applications enable individuals to engage in anonymous communication, it must be noted that the anonymity of communication is relative for providers and law enforcement experts who can identify the perpetrators (Vandebosch, Beirens, D'Haese, Wegge, & Pabian, 2012).

The (pseudo-)anonymity perpetrators may experience when using specific web sites or applications may induce another characteristic that differentiates online from offline aggressions. Because perpetrators are not eye-to-eye with their victims, they may not be fully aware of the damage caused (Suler, 2004). Aggressors can easily hit and run. For instance, they can send an aggressive text message, post an embarrassing picture online, and ignore their real-life impact because the aggressors are not (immediately) confronted with the consequences of their acts. How the victims are affected by the aggressions becomes difficult to assess because other cues, more particularly nonverbal responses, such as tears or a frown, are lacking. Therefore, perpetrators may not be immediately aware of the emotional impact of their acts (Heirman & Walrave, 2008; Van Ouytsel, Walrave, & Vandebosch, 2015). The hiding of online aggressors behind their online persona and being physically separated from their victims is also called *dissociated anonymity*, dissociating their “virtual” acts from their own selves (Suler, 2004). Perpetrators may feel less accountable for their acts and perceive less risk of being caught (Brandtzæg, Staksrud, Hagen, & Wold, 2009).

For some individuals, online forms of aggression, such as cyberbullying or cyber dating abuse, may therefore be seen as easier to perform than traditional offline aggressions (Bryce & Fraser, 2013). Early studies stressed the difference in technology-related competences between perpetrators and victims, stating that online perpetrators possess technical skills that empower them to engage in their hurtful acts (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a). However, more recent research has challenged this by the observation that a majority of the

aggressions require only basic technical skills, such as texting, posting a message or picture on a social network site, or starting a (fake) profile page (Slonje, Smith, & Frisé, 2013). Nevertheless, a power imbalance that is seen in (offline) bullying or other relational violence, as an important aspect differentiating victims from perpetrators (such as physical power, or rhetoric), may translate to the online context by the fact that the perpetrator may (temporarily) remain anonymous (for instance in instant messaging, dating and hook-up applications). This creates an advantageous position for the perpetrator, whose messages can be seen, liked, or transferred to others while the perpetrator hides behind his or her nickname. Perpetrators can therefore be energized by their audience, which can be larger online compared to bystanders of offline aggressions. Moreover, it is easier for online bystanders to comment, like, or transfer the message in comparison with reinforcing aggressive acts offline. Perpetrators who feel supported may be stimulated to continue and even engage in more aggressive acts (Salmivalli, Sainio, & Hodges, 2013). In the case of cyberbullying, perpetrators may therefore continue to engage in this form of aggression publicly to hold or strengthen their position in the peer group (Sijtsema, Veenstra, Lindenberg, & Salmivalli, 2009). In the case of cyber dating abuse, a rejected partner may engage in revenge porn, making an intimate picture or video of the victim public, as an ultimate means to take revenge by causing embarrassment or distress (Englander, 2015). However, not all forms of aggression through mobile or other digital media are public. In the context of abusive mobile communication among romantic partners or peers, the communication may remain between them. Within souring romantic relationships, stalking and other forms of aggressive and repetitive calling and texting may remain under the radar of relatives and friends and have an important emotional impact on the targeted victim.

Cyberbullying

Since the advent of digital media, bullying behavior has had its virtual extension. Cyberbullying is defined as “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (Smith et al., 2008, p. 376). In general, two broad categories of cyberbullying can be discerned, based on Stassen Berger’s (2007) classification of offline bullying modes of attack: *direct* forms of cyberbullying through which a victim is directly attacked by one or several perpetrators, for instance, threatening text messages or social network site posts, and *indirect* forms that occur behind the back of the victim, such as rumors or gossip that is spread through digital media, or sharing entrusted personal information with others (e.g., posting intimate text messages or pictures in a public online area) (Langos, 2012; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009).

Several aspects of the abovementioned definition refer to criteria included in Olweus’ (1997) classic definition of (offline) bullying, namely the fact that it is (1) intentional, that it (2) consists of a series of acts, and that (3) there is a power imbalance between perpetrators and victims. First, (cyber)bullying is differentiated from teasing because it is the intention of the perpetrator, the individual carrying out the (cyber)bullying, to hurt his or her target. Second, the bullying consists of a series of aggressive acts calculated to cause distress for the victim, the individual who receives the (cyber)bullying (Tokunaga, 2010). However, some have argued that repetition can also be caused by the repeated confrontation of the victim with the online harmful content, confronting the victim now or at a later stage several times with the result of one single bullying act (Slonje et al., 2013). Third, the power imbalance can be interpreted in the offline world as differences in physical power between perpetrator and victim, as well as differences in psychological strength (Olweus, 1997). In online contexts, the

power imbalance can be interpreted as the fact that the perpetrator can be anonymous or team up to attack a single victim (Slonje et al., 2013; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008).

Despite the widespread use of digital technologies and the perceived ease with which cyberbullying can be perpetrated, cyberbullying is not necessarily more prevalent than offline forms of bullying. Meta-analyses have found that prevalence rates of cyberbullying perpetration and victimization are lower than those of traditional bullying. For instance, a meta-analysis of 80 studies found 16% to be the mean cyberbullying perpetration rate, in comparison with 35% for offline bullying. Similar differences were found for victimization (36% for bullying, 15% for cyberbullying). Cyberbullying is thus less prevalent than traditional bullying (Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014). Research investigating online aggressive behavior found that the prevalence was the highest among the youngest age group (10.3% of 12-to 15-year-olds), diminishing throughout adulthood (e.g., 4.6% of 20- to 26-year-olds, and 2.1% of adults older than 50) (Ševčíková & Šmahel, 2009).

No predominant gender differences can be discerned in the prevalence rates with regard to both cyberbullying perpetration and victimization (Barlett & Coyne, 2014; Brochado et al., 2017; Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014). While some studies found higher victimization rates among girls (e.g., Buelga, Cava, & Musitu, 2010) and higher perpetration rates among boys (e.g., Jang, Song, & Kim, 2014), other studies found higher perpetration rates among girls (Kowalski & Limber, 2007) or no gender differences at all (e.g., Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Slonje & Smith, 2008). The way in which types of cyberbullying are measured is one explanation for these inconsistencies (Kowalski et al., 2014). Also, differences in age range of surveyed samples could explain differences because a meta-analysis found that males were more likely to cyberbully in later adolescence, while females were more likely to engage in cyberbullying during early adolescence (Barlett & Coyne, 2014).

Research found differences in victimization and perpetration, based on other individual characteristics. For instance, LGBTQ youth were found to be more victimized (Llorent, Ortega-Ruiz, & Zych, 2016; Priebe & Svedin, 2012; Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012). As far as ethnic group differences are concerned, a meta-analysis found no overall associations between ethnicity and peer cyberbullying victimization. However, when focusing on specific countries, ethnic majority youth suffered more victimization in the US, while minority youth were more targeted in the UK (Vitoroulis & Vaillancourt, 2015).

Cyberbullying Victimization

In terms of media through which individuals are confronted with cyberbullying, a study among Belgian adolescents (aged 9-16) found that social network sites (44% of the victims) and mobile text messages (37%) were cited as the most frequent contexts, while cyberbullying occurred less through e-mail (15%), online gaming (10%), phone calls (6%), and YouTube (2%; Van Cleemput et al., 2013). Research among a representative adult sample (US, aged 18 and older) also found that the most common venues for online harassment experiences were social media (58%), the comment section of a website (23%), texting (15%), e-mail (10%), and gaming (10%) (Duggan, 2017).

Although these prevalence rates may depend on communication technologies and specific applications that are popular at a certain period and among a certain age group, the impact of cyberbullying on victims may differ between media that are used by bullies. More particularly, the same study found that victims perceived the more severe online harassment to take place on social media, through texting or e-mail, and on messaging applications or dating sites (Duggan, 2017).

Because mobile apps often include networked publics, this could play a role in the impact of cyberbullying because aggressive messages can be viewed and shared among online

social network members. Therefore, acts of cyberbullying that are public, for instance on social media, are perceived as worse because they attack individuals' social status within their personal network (Sticca & Perren, 2013). One of the public forms of bullying through mobile phones is "happy slapping" (Lohbeck & Petermann, 2017). The combination of being victimized by physical violence and a second phase of victimization through the public humiliation following the online sharing of the video, blurs the line between physical and virtual world aggression. This multiplies the victims' harm because they are repeatedly confronted with the aggression and hurtful comments after the physical assault has occurred (Chan et al., 2012).

Next to the use of mobile phones and other digital media for cyberbullying, individuals' digital media use has been linked with cyberbullying victimization. For instance, risky digital media use, such as sharing personal information online or adding strangers to one's social network site friend list, was found to increase the odds of cyberbullying victimization (Kwan & Skoric, 2013; Walrave & Heirman, 2011). Although digital media usage frequency was found to be associated with cyberbullying victimization, as well as perpetration, risky digital media use was found to have a larger impact than mere digital media use frequency (Chen, Ho, & Lwin, 2017). Nevertheless, research also observed protective factors for cyberbullying victimization. A positive school climate and school safety measures, as well as support from others, were found to prevent cyberbullying victimization (for a review, see Kowalski et al., 2014).

Several studies have demonstrated that victimization impacts victims' psychological health. More particularly, victims are found to experience, amongst others, anxiety, helplessness, lower self-esteem, depressive feelings, and suicidal ideation and attempts (for a review, see Garaigordobil, 2011; Hamm, Newton, Chisholm, & et al., 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; Van Geel, Vedder, & Tanilon, 2014; Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, & Del Rey, 2015). Also,

poorer school commitment and lower performance at school have been associated with cyberbullying (Beran & Li, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2018).

Research on parents' role in preventing cyberbullying victimization is limited. Parents discussing rules for online activities with their children and setting rules for disclosure of personal information online, as well as concerning the sites the child is allowed to visit and parental monitoring of the websites visited, lowered the likelihood of victimization (Mesch, 2009; Navarro et al., 2013). Furthermore, parents are not always aware of their child's victimization (Byrne, Katz, Lee, Linz, & McIlrath, 2014; Dehue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008). A majority of (adolescent) victims were found to keep cyberbullying victimization to themselves. One of the reasons might be that adolescents are afraid to talk about their victimization because they fear that their parents might limit their Internet use. Instead, adolescent victims engage mostly in passive coping strategies, such as blocking or ignoring the aggressor or avoiding reading the messages. A minority of youth tells an adult (parent, teacher) about the aggression. If victims already decide to tell anyone, they will tell it most likely to a friend. A minority of victims engages in active coping strategies such as revenge bullying (Hamm et al., 2015).

Several studies among adolescents found that cyberbullying perpetration and victimization are related (Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Walrave & Heirman, 2011). Also, relationships between (offline) bullying and cyberbullying were observed. More particularly, role continuity was observed, where offline victims have to face supplementary online aggressions, often by the same perpetrators (Baldry, Farrington, & Sorrentino, 2017; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). This was corroborated by a social network analysis investigating interactions between pupils of the same grade that found that victims are offended by the same perpetrators both online and offline (Wegge, Vandebosch, Eggermont, & Walrave, 2014).

Cyberbullying Perpetration

Several personal characteristics such as narcissism (Ang, Tan, & Mansor, 2011), psychopathy (Goodboy & Martin, 2015; Pabian, De Backer, & Vandebosch, 2015), and low empathy (Ang et al., 2011; Brewer & Kerslake, 2015) are positively associated with cyberbullying perpetration. Moreover, perpetrators have been found to have a nonconforming reputation (i.e., they have a transgressive, rebellious reputation) and to engage in other antisocial behaviors (such as vandalism or offline aggression). Therefore, online bullying may, for some individuals, be part of a larger range of (online/offline) aggressive behaviors. Furthermore, cyber aggressors seem to be less satisfied with their lives than non-aggressors (Buelga, Iranzo, Cava, & Torralba, 2015). Aggressors (and victims) were also found to more frequently engage in substance use, which could lower inhibitions to engage in aggressive behaviors and shows that it may be part of a pattern of problem behaviors in adolescence (Gámez-Guadix, Orue, Smith, & Calvete, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

In addition, the social context of (potential) bullies is of importance. Individuals raised in families in which they have experienced (verbal/physical) aggression may respond to situations among peers in an aggressive way. However, sufficient support from friends and high emotional regulation skills have been found to mitigate the impact of experiencing aggressions among family members on the subsequent perpetration of electronic aggressions. In other words, a study among college students found that a supportive peer environment and individuals' capacity to regulate their emotions temper the impact of family aggression experiences on individuals' own performance of online aggressions (Kellerman, Margolin, Borofsky, Baucom, & Iturralde, 2013). Parents can also play a role in diminishing adolescents' engagement in online harassment. Adolescents who have strong emotional bonds with parents (i.e., trust, getting along, being able to discuss problems) and receive higher parental monitoring are less likely to engage in online harassment (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel,

2009; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004b). Additionally, open parent–child communication was related with less cyberbullying perpetration (Symons, Ponnet, Walrave, & Heirman, 2017).

Furthermore, research has demonstrated that perpetrators' norms and values are related with their engagement in online aggression. Teenage cyberbullies have been found to minimize the impact of their acts (Walrave & Heirman, 2011). More particularly, moral disengagement and positive normative beliefs about aggression (Bussey, Fitzpatrick, & Raman, 2015; Chen et al., 2017; Kowalski et al., 2014) were found to be positively linked with perpetration. If adolescents perceive that the norms concerning cyberbullying within their peer group are favorable, they are more inclined to engage in cyberbullying (Heirman & Walrave, 2012). Therefore, the perceived social norms that could be visible in comments shared on social network sites and other communication apps during a cyberbullying episode could influence individuals to join in the bullying. The perception of peers concerning the acceptability of cyberbullying is also related to the way in which they react as bystanders during online aggressions.

Bystander Behaviors in Cyberbullying

Bystanders, those who witness the (cyber)bullying, have a crucial role in (cyber)bullying situations because they can choose between three types of reactions: (1) keep out of the situation (outsider), (2) assist or even reinforce the cyberbully (assistant or reinforcer), or (3) defend and support the victim (defender; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996). A majority of youth (61%) involved in a cyberbullying situation were found to stay out of the situation, while almost a third (31%) took up the role of defender, and a minority admitted to have chosen the side of the bully to reinforce (5%) or to assist (3%; Song & Oh, 2018). Another study among adolescents found that half of the witnesses did not react and remained passive bystanders, while almost half supported the victim. Almost four out of ten also asked their friends not to join in. Less youth (a fourth) told the bully to stop, and fewer teenagers (a fifth) reported the incident to siblings or parents. Some young people engaged in non-supportive reactions (reinforcing, forwarding the message to others). Older adolescents, former cyberbullying victims, and individuals who are convinced of their self-efficacy and the potential impact of their intervention are more inclined to intervene in favor of the victim. Moreover, at the school and class level, it was observed that when victim blaming was low, positive bystander behavior was more likely to occur (DeSmet et al., 2016). Conversely, negative bystander behavior was predicted by moral disengagement and inappropriate social skills. Bystanders also expected higher personal gains from participating in the bullying behavior, and exhibited lower empathy and problem-solving skills (DeSmet et al., 2016).

Whether bystanders stand up for the victim or join in the bullying was investigated in an experimental study. It was found that bystanders' reactions depended on, amongst others, the type of relationship: Victims that were close friends were more likely to be helped than acquaintances, while bystanders were more inclined to join in if the other bystanders were

good friends (Bastiaensens et al., 2014). When bystanders are hopeful for a positive outcome of their intervention for the victim, they will more easily intervene in favor of the victim (DeSmet et al., 2016). Also, the perceived seriousness of the attack influences their decision to intervene or not (Bastiaensens et al., 2014, 2015; Obermaier, Fawzi, & Koch, 2016). Moreover, bystanders are more inclined to support the victim of bullying on social network sites through a private message than in public. They may fear becoming the next target if they publically speak out against the abuse (Bastiaensens et al., 2015).

Bystanders are also influenced by the presence or absence of other witnesses. The *bystander effect* states that witnesses are more likely to intervene if they are experiencing the aggression alone. As the number of bystanders increases, the likelihood of intervening decreases because the responsibility for intervening is diffused among the bystanders (Darley & Latane, 1968). Because there are multiple witnesses, individual witnesses feel less responsible to intervene. At the same time, when others are also watching without intervening, individual bystanders may think that the aggression is not serious enough to require intervention (Obermaier et al., 2016).

Cyber Dating Abuse

Online forms of aggression in interpersonal relationships are not limited to cyberbullying. They also occur within romantic relationships. Digital technologies enable perpetrators to commit psychological or sexual forms of dating violence electronically. This behavior is called cyber dating abuse. Cyber dating abuse can be defined as the “control, harassment, stalking, and abuse of one’s dating partner via technology and social media” (Zweig, Lachman, Yahner, & Dank, 2014, p. 1306).

Researchers distinguish between sexual forms and psychological forms of cyber dating abuse. Sexual forms of cyber dating abuse include putting pressure on or coercing the romantic partner to send self-made sexually explicit photographs, or pressuring the romantic partner to engage in sexual acts through digital media against his or her will. Psychological forms of cyber dating abuse include demanding to know the PIN codes to the mobile phone and social media of the romantic partner, reading text messages on the romantic partner’s mobile phone without permission, excessive texts and phone calls to learn where the partner is, or sending threatening text messages to the romantic partner (Borrajo, Gámez-Guadix, Pereda, & Calvete, 2015; Van Ouytsel, Walrave, Ponnet, & Temple, 2016).

Similar to cyberbullying, cyber dating abuse differs from offline forms of aggression in several ways, making it a distinct behavior with a unique impact on the victim. Firstly, just as with cyberbullying, perpetrators of cyber dating abuse can target their romantic partner without any geographical or temporal limitations, which makes it more difficult for the victims to escape the abuse, even after the relationship ends (Borrajo et al., 2015; Peskin et al., 2017; Zweig et al., 2014). Moreover, digital forms of dating violence might cause more harm than offline forms because the abusive messages are more permanent, can have a more public nature, and can be easily retrieved and shared (Dick et al., 2014; Peskin et al., 2017).

These unique characteristics might cause cyber dating abuse to have a different impact than offline forms of dating violence (Peskin et al., 2017).

Most research on cyber dating abuse has focused on adolescents' experiences, as it is relatively prevalent among this age group. The prevalence rates differ, depending on how cyber dating abuse is measured and conceptualized and the age of the participants. Using a broad measure of cyber dating abuse, Peskin et al. (2017) found that almost 15% of the surveyed middle school students had perpetrated a digital form of dating violence. Using specific measures about monitoring, a study in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium found that up to 65% of the high school students had experienced at least one form of monitoring behaviors within their romantic relationships, which are one of the psychological forms of cyber dating abuse (Van Ouytsel, Ponnet, Walrave, & Temple, 2016).

Cyber dating abuse can be situated in other forms of relationship, school, and community violence. Firstly, cyber dating abuse victimization has been associated with experiencing victimization through offline forms of dating violence (Dick et al., 2014; Epstein-Ngo et al., 2014; Temple et al., 2016; Zweig et al., 2013). In a sample recruited through school-based help centers, Dick et al. (2014) found that victims of cyber dating abuse were also more likely to have been victimized by physical or sexual dating violence. Victims of cyber dating abuse were also more likely to report that they had experienced sexual violence by someone that was not their romantic partner (Dick et al. 2014), and they also had a higher chance to have been exposed to violence within their community (Epstein-Ngo et al., 2014). Cyber dating abuse perpetration and victimization have further been linked to cyberbullying and offline bullying victimization and perpetration (Borrajo et al., 2015; Peskin et al., 2017; Yahner, Dank, Zweig, & Lachman, 2015).

Sexual Forms of Cyber Dating Abuse

With regard to sexual forms of cyber dating abuse, girls often experience pressure within their romantic relationships to engage in the sending of sexually explicit photographs through the Internet and the mobile phone. Sexting behavior usually takes place through smartphone applications, such as WhatsApp and Snapchat (Van Ouytsel, Van Gool, Walrave, Ponnet, & Peeters, 2017). Girls who do not report *explicit* pressure by their romantic partners often describe that they experience *implicit* forms of pressure, such as the fear that they will lose their romantic partner if they do not send sexually explicit pictures, and repeated pressure after they refuse to (Van Ouytsel, Van Gool, et al., 2017). Sexting was linked to experiences of offline sexual coercion among girls and young women (Choi, Van Ouytsel, & Temple, 2016; Ross, Drouin, & Coupe, 2016). Among college students, Drouin, Ross, and Tobin (2015) found that about 20% of their sample had experienced that their romantic partner had tried to coerce them to engage in sexting. The participants perceived the trauma associated with experiencing sexting coercion as larger than experiencing physical forms of sexual coercion, and victims also experienced more depression and anxiety (Drouin et al., 2015).

Cyber Dating Abuse Perpetration

Research on the nature of cyber dating abuse has mainly focused on the context in which perpetration takes place. Qualitative research found that monitoring behaviors, a psychological form of cyber dating abuse, are often triggered by romantic jealousy, which leads to surveillance and monitoring behaviors of the romantic partner (Baker & Carreño, 2016; Van Ouytsel, Van Gool, Walrave, Ponnet, & Peeters, 2016). This might especially be the case among adolescents who are still learning to cope with these emotions within romantic relationships that are often their first (Stonard, Bowen, Walker, & Price, 2017). Romantic jealousy can be caused by social media, for instance, when the romantic partner sends

messages to others or if the partner likes pictures of potential romantic rivals on social media (Baker & Carreño, 2016; Van Ouytsel, Ellen Van Gool, et al., 2016).

Research on the characteristics of cyber dating abuse perpetration found that some perpetrators of dating violence seem to experience emotional problems, such as destructive conflict resolution skills among middle school students (e.g., hanging up the phone during an argument) (Peskin et al., 2017) and higher levels of hostility among college students (Deans and Bhogal, 2017). Cyber dating abuse perpetrators are also more likely to be approving of gendered attitudes, such as endorsement of norms for violence by boys against girls (e.g., believing that it is okay to hit girlfriends to get them under control) (Peskin et al., 2017), and the endorsement of gender stereotypical attitudes (e.g., believing that boys should be smarter than girls or that on a date, boys should pay for all the expenses) (Van Ouytsel, Ponnet, & Walrave, 2017).

Just as with cyberbullying perpetration, perceived social norms also have an influence on perpetration of the behavior. Adolescents who perceive that their peers would approve of monitoring behaviors, were more likely to engage in them (Van Ouytsel, Ponnet, et al., 2017). Youth whose peers are involved in dating violence perpetration are also more likely to be perpetrators of cyber dating abuse (Peskin et al., 2017).

The family context also seems to play a role within cyber dating abuse perpetration. High school students witnessing monitoring behaviors by the father (such as regularly calling to ask where his partner was or checking the cell phone) were more likely to engage in controlling behaviors themselves. There was no relationship with witnessing monitoring behaviors by the mother (Van Ouytsel, Ponnet, et al., 2017). Wright (2015) found that alienation from the mother, but not from the father, was significantly related to committing cyber dating abuse, through a mediating relationship of anxious partner attachment. This is in line with previous research that found that anxiously attached individuals are more likely to

engage in abusive behaviors within their romantic relationships when experiencing conflicts, whereas those with an avoidant attachment style would withhold affection (Wright, 2015).

Risk Factors for Victimization

Only very limited research has focused on the risk factors for cyber dating abuse victimization. Youth who are more frequently using computers and cell phones (Zweig et al., 2014) or more frequent social network site use (Van Ouytsel, Ponnet, and Walrave, 2016) are more likely to report cyber dating abuse victimization. Furthermore, cyber dating abuse victimization was linked with engagement in online risk behaviors (Van Ouytsel, Koen Ponnet, et al., 2016), which the authors explained by the fact that victims might not be aware of how to properly protect themselves against online victimization. Additionally, victims might often find themselves in online situations in which guardianship is lacking (such as parental supervision of their internet use), which might heighten their risk for victimization (Van Ouytsel, Koen Ponnet, et al., 2016). Another risk factor for victimization might be that adolescents are oftentimes not able to identify abusive behaviors, such as excessive messaging, because they might interpret them as expressions of love and care as opposed to abusive behaviors (Baker & Carreño, 2016; Stonard et al., 2017).

Health Outcomes of Cyber Dating Abuse

Offline forms of dating violence have been found to be associated with negative health outcomes and risk behaviors for the victims. Consequently, dating violence is considered to be a public health concern (Niolon et al., 2017). The relationship with negative health outcomes may be particularly relevant to counselors and clinicians that are confronted with victims because these health risks might play a role in how victims experience cyber dating abuse (Dick et al., 2014). Studies that investigated the associations of cyber dating abuse

perpetration and victimization among adolescents with other types of risk behaviors and health outcomes found that these problem behaviors are often interrelated and share similar predictors (Jessor, 2014).

Research on the associations of cyber dating abuse with other health risk behaviors has shown that perpetrators of cyber dating abuse were more likely to have used alcohol or drugs before having sexual contact (Van Ouytsel, Torres, et al., 2017). Moreover, cyber dating abuse perpetrators were also more likely to report substance use and poor physical health (Van Ouytsel, Torres, et al., 2017). Among victims similar associations with substance use and sexual risk behavior were found. Victimization was associated with heavy episodic drinking among both boys and girls. Furthermore, victimization was linked to more frequent alcohol use among males and having had unprotected sex among girls (Van Ouytsel et al., 2016) and higher levels of sexual activity in the lifetime (Zweig et al., 2014). Only one study has focused on the emotional outcomes of cyber dating abuse, which found that cyber dating abuse victimization is associated with experiencing depressive symptoms (Zweig et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Mobile technologies offer users new and exciting opportunities to build and maintain friendships and romantic relationships. However, just as in the offline world, some users might be victimized by abuse. This chapter highlighted two forms of abuse: cyberbullying and cyber dating abuse. The review of the literature showed that a significant amount of users are confronted with these forms of abuse and control within their friendships and romantic relationships, which poses a significant challenge to the well-being of mobile phone users. The permanent nature of digital communication and the fact that mobile phones have become an essential part of modern day life make it difficult to escape the abuse and make digital forms of harassment qualitatively different from offline forms of abuse. With evolving

technologies and the emergence of new applications, continued research on these forms of digital aggression remains warranted to gain an in-depth understanding of the context in which it takes place.

The review of the literature showed that cyberbullying and cyber dating abuse are interrelated, share similar risk factors, and are often associated with similar problem behaviors. A potential prevention strategy could therefore consist of a broad prevention effort that addresses multiple risk factors simultaneously. An example of such a prevention tool is the Canadian prevention tool *Fourth R*, which focuses on teaching healthy relationship techniques within friendships and romantic relationships and which teaches young people conflict-resolution skills. The program name refers to the three basic skills, “reading, writing, and arithmetic” and adds a fourth component, “relationships”. The prevention program touches on the domains of interpersonal safety, sexuality, and substance use and abuse simultaneously, with the aim of strengthening young people’s interpersonal skills. The program teaches young people, for instance, how to refuse certain behaviors (such as unsafe sexual behaviors or smoking or drinking) and uses role play techniques to improve their interpersonal and conflict resolution skills. It has been proven to be effective in reducing relational violence and sexual risk behaviors among youth (Wolfe et al., 2009). It also increased adolescents’ skills to cope with peer pressure and reduced their involvement in abusive behaviors (Wolfe, Crooks, Chiodo, Hughes, & Ellis, 2011). Other specific evidence-based prevention and intervention programs have been developed to address bullying in general (such as KiVa; Herkama, Saarento, Salmivalli, and Sturmeijer (2017)) and cyberbullying in particular (for a review, see Tanrikulu (2017)). Initiatives to prevent online forms of aggression and support victims need further research, along with strategies to promote and implement these programs.

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