Chapter 11

Emerging Adults' Coping Strategies:
Longitudinal Linkages to Their Involvement in Cyber Aggression and Cyber Victimization

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined coping strategies for cyber victimization among 270 (130 women) emerging adults, and how these strategies related to cyber aggression one year later (Time 2). The most frequently utilized coping strategies among emerging adults were telling one's friends and ignoring the aggressor. The coping strategies of telling no one, getting revenge against the aggressor, pretending it didn't happen, waiting for the aggressor to stop, and crying were related to cyber victimization one year later. Blocking the aggressor and getting revenge against the aggressor were associated with Time 2 cyber aggression perpetration. Tell my friends related negatively to their involvement in cyber aggression. This research has implications for interventions aimed at reducing these behaviors among emerging adults.

INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood, a unique developmental period between the ages of 18 and 25, is characteristic of pursuing individualistic goals, developing more intimate relationships, and engaging in risky behaviors (Arnett, Ramos, & Jensen, 2001). About 95% of emerging adults go online at least once a day, enjoying the benefits of this digital age, including the decreasing costs of computers, and having immediate access to information (Jones & Fox, 2009). The conveniences brought by the digital age also have a darker side including internet addiction (e.g., Wiegman & van Schie, 1998), identity theft (e.g., Copes, Kerby, Huff, & Kane, 2000), and cyber victimization (e.g., Finn, 2004).

Less attention has been given to cyber aggression and cyber victimization (CAV) among emerging adults, with the bulk of this research focused on the experiences of children and adolescents (e.g., Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Pornari & Wood, 2010; Wright & Li, 2013a). However, recent research indicates that emerging adults do engage in and experience cyber aggression (e.g., Dilmac, 2009; Walker, Sockman, & Koehn, 2011; Wright & Li, 2012). It is currently unknown which coping strategies emerging adults utilize to deal with cyber victimization, and how such coping strategies relate to later involvement in CAV. Such investigations are important as coping strategies have a role in the subsequent perpetration and experience of face-to-face aggression as well as psychological adjustment (Chen, Wang, Chen, & Liu, 2002). Therefore, research on emerging adults' coping strategies for cyber victimization may help to address a gap in the literature on the risk factors associated with CAV. To this end, the present study included two major aims. For the first, emerging adults' coping strategies were examined in an effort to understand which ones they utilized, and whether there were any gender differences in these strategies. The second aim investigated emerging adults' coping strategies in relation to CAV, assessed one year later.

Cyber Victimization and Coping Strategies

In one of the earliest studies to examine CAV among emerging adults, findings revealed that 10-15% experienced email and/or instant messenger victimization (Finn, 2004). Examining additional technologies, Walker and colleagues (2011) reported that 56% of emerging adults were victimized through Facebook. In addition, they found that 45% were also victimized via text messages. Emerging adults also perpetrate cyber aggression. In particular, 22.5% of Turkish emerging adults perpetrated such behaviors at least once (Dilmac, 2009). Utilizing a sample of emerging adults from the United States, Wright and Li (2013b) found that most of their participants reported engaging in cyber aggression every two to four months. Taken together, each of these studies indicates the importance of further understanding emerging adults' involvement in CAV.

Given the high rates of cyber victimization among emerging adults, it is important to understand the types of coping strategies they utilize to deal with these behaviors as well as which strategies help to reduce later involvement in CAV. Little attention has been given to emerging adults' coping strategies used to deal with cyber victimization. However, researchers (e.g., Aricak et al., 2008; Riebel, Jager, & Fischer, 2009; Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, & Tippett, 2008) have investigated adolescents' coping strategies for cyber victimization. Turkish adolescents, who encountered an aggressor online, reported more active coping strategies, such as blocking the aggressor, telling the aggressor to stop, changing their username, and talking to their friends, when compared to passive coping strategies (e.g., waiting for the aggressor to stop; Aricak et al., 2008). Similar coping strategies were utilized among adolescents in England (Smith et al., 2008) and Germany (Riebel et al., 2009). Similar to Aricak and colleagues' study, German and English adolescents' blocked messages, avoided messages, and talked to a parent or friend about their experience, with the majority preferring to talk to a friend first.

Researchers (e.g., Aricak et al., 2008; Riebel et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2008) examining adolescents' coping strategies used to deal with cyber victimization provide a foundation for understanding the coping strategies used by emerging adults. No age differences have been found in the coping strategies used to deal with real life stressors among adolescents and emerging adults, with both groups employing social supporting seeking and aggressive coping strategies (e.g., revenge; Diehl, Coyle, & Labouvie-Vief, 1996). Despite no age differences in these coping strategies, it is important to examine the coping strategies

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