

An exploration of the contextual predictors of cyber-bystanders'  
responses to cyberbullying on social media:  
A qualitative study on university students' perceptions

Zhi Zhang and Stephanie Pieschl

Institut für Psychologie

Technische Universität Darmstadt

# The concept of cyberbullying

Smith et al. (2008):

“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” (p. 376).

# The many different forms of cyberbullying

Li (2007) and Willard (2005):

- Flaming
- Online harassment
- Cyberstalking
- Denigration
- Masquerading
- Trickery and outing
- Exclusion

Langos (2012):

- Direct cyberbullying
- Indirect cyberbullying

# The role of cyber-bystander in cyberbullying incidents

Different forms of behavioural responses:

“Helping,” “Joining in,” and “Doing nothing” (Van Cleemput et al., 2014)

- “Helping” → strengthen the victim's mental resilience (Sainio et al., 2011)
- “Joining in” → encourage the bully to continue (Salmivalli, 2010)
- “Doing nothing” → encourage the bully as a silent form of approval (Kowalski et al., 2014)

# Factors relevant to bystanders' behavioral responses in cyberbullying incidents

Some contextual/environmental factors:

- The private nature of the act (Barlinska et al., 2013)
- Relationship - bully (DeSmet et al., 2012)
- Relationship - target (DeSmet et al., 2012)
- Relationship - other bystanders (Bastiaensens et al., 2015)
- Ambiguity (Patterson et al., 2017)
- Perceived severity (DeSmet et al., 2012)
- Number of bystanders (Macháčková et al., 2015)
- Behavior of bystanders (Bastiaensens et al., 2014)
- Sex (Patterson et al., 2017)
- Social pressure (Bastiaensens et al., 2016)
- Timing (Van Cleemput et al., 2014)

## Research Question

Which contextual factors are the most relevant to determine cyber-bystanders' behavioral responses after witnessing a cyberbullying incident?

# Method

Phase 1 (Pilot Study):

Semi-structured interview via Zoom Videoconferencing

Population: currently enrolled students at the TU Darmstadt

Sample size: 14 students

# Interview questions

1. Social media use
2. Understanding of cyberbullying
3. **How do you think people would most likely to react to a cyberbullying incident? Why do you think people most often react the way they do?**
  - **Which factors do you consider to be important to people's reaction to the incident?**
  - **Why do you think other people might join the cyber-bully? Why do you think other people might ignore the incident? Why do you think other people might help the cyber-victim?**
  - **Do you consider X also relevant? And what about Y? (Based on a prepared list.)**
4. How do you think about your friends' and your family members' opinions towards cyberbullying on social media in general?



# Method

Phase 2 (Main Study):

Semi-structured interview and Q Method via Zoom Videoconferencing

Population: currently enrolled students at the TU Darmstadt

Sample size: 40 ~ 60 students

# Q sort

DISAGREE					AGREE			
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	
		-2	-1	0	1	2		
			-1	0	1			

AGREE: \_\_\_\_\_

NEUTRAL: \_\_\_\_\_

DISAGREE: \_\_\_\_\_

Statements (examples):

- 1. Individuals’ behavioral response towards a cyberbullying incident will differ depend on the **gender of the victim**.
- 2. Individuals’ behavioral response towards a cyberbullying incident will differ depend on the **age of the victim**.

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Thank you very much for your attention!

Email: [zhang.zhi\\_2020@hotmail.com](mailto:zhang.zhi_2020@hotmail.com)