Appearance-related cyberbullying: A qualitative investigation of characteristics, content, reasons, and effects

# Details

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* Wellbeing
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* Other

## Sample

Twenty-seven adolescents in the ninth grade (15 years of age) from 2 different schools (1 public, 1 private) in 1 major city in Sweden.

## Implications For Parents About

Parenting guidance / support

## Implications For Educators About

Other

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Researchers

# Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore 15-year-old adolescents’ experiences of appearance-related cyberbullying. Twenty-seven adolescents participated in four focus groups. The adolescents in this study perceived that it is common to be targeted in appearance-related cyberbullying, especially for girls, and that appearance-related cyberbullying is considered to be a potent strategy when attempting to hurt girls. Girls often received comments about being fat, while among boys, it was common to receive comments about looking or seeming “gay.” According to the adolescents, an important reason for engaging in appearance-related cyberbullying was to attain higher social status in the peer group. The girls and boys reacted differently to appearance-related cyberbullying. Boys tended to act out or take no offence, while girls experienced lower self-esteem and feelings of depression. Findings in this study contribute to research on cyberbullying as well as to research on girls’ body esteem development.

# Outcome

Through a thematic analysis, we discovered that appearance-related cyberbullying might be gendered.... The adolescents in the focus groups perceived that it is common among adolescents to be targeted by appearance-related cyberbullying.... When it comes to cyberbullying aimed at one's style, the adolescents perceived that they can receive comments with sexual content; but the type of sexual content differed for girls and boys.... When it comes to cyberbullying directed at the body, the adolescents perceived that girls receive more comments about their bodies than boys do.... The adolescents perceived it to be more common for girls to be victims than for boys, they also suggested that girls who are victims of appearance-related cyberbullying are characterized by seeking attention online. More specifically, girls explained that they believe the purpose of social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram is to expose oneself to get attention, but that in doing so, one risks receiving negative attention and being cyberbullied.... The adolescents suggested that one reason for why cyberbullying is directed at appearance is that appearance-related cyberbullying is perceived to be a potent strategy to hurt girls.... The adolescents perceived that there were differences between boys and girls concerning the effects of appearance-related cyberbullying.... Overall, the boys and girls in this study seem to be influenced to some extent by gender stereotypes, in that they seem to conform to some of the “masculine” and “feminine” norms present in Western society." (Authors, 531-532)