The effects of group centrality and accountability on conformity to cyber aggressive norms: Two messaging app experiments

# Details

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## Sample

Experiment 1: The final sample consisted of 233 participants (53.6% female, 45.1% male, 1.3% did not specify) with an age range from 11 to 15 years old (M = 13.19, SD = 0.91), of which 180 were in the experimental conditions, and 53 were in the baseline group. The majority of participants (95.7%) were born in The Netherlands and all participants were fluent in Dutch.

Experiment 2: The final sample consisted of 296 participants (52.4% female, 47.3% male, 0.3% did not specify) with an age range from 10 to 16 years old (M = 12.67, SD = 0.92), of which 243 were the experimental conditions, and 53 were in the baseline group. The majority of participants (97.3%) were born in The Netherlands and all participants were fluent in Dutch.

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Other

## Other PolicyMaker Implication

Prevention and intervention programs

# Abstract

Cyber aggression in messaging apps often involves a group-based process of conformity to aggressive norms. To date, no empirical research has investigated this psychological process and its determinants. Therefore, this study reports two experiments that examined the effects of group centrality (the subjective importance of a social group) and accountability (being accountable for one's actions) on conformity to cyber aggressive norms. Additionally, the moderating role of susceptibility to peer pressure was examined. The experiments included a scripted WhatsApp conversation in which participants judged the appropriateness of cyber aggressive behaviors after viewing ostensible peers' responses. The results of Experiment 1 (N = 233, Mage = 13.19) were replicated in Experiment 2 (N = 296, Mage = 12.67), which had an improved method addressing the limitations of Experiment 1. Accountability affected conformity to cyber aggressive norms (Experiment 1: f = .18, p = .016; Experiment 2: f = .13, p = .041): Adolescents who did not think they had to discuss their responses in class conformed more than those who did. However, no effect of group centrality or moderating effects of susceptibility to peer pressure were found. This study extends conformity research to messaging apps. The findings suggest that increasing accountability in messaging apps may be a viable strategy for intervention efforts to reduce conformity to cyber aggression.

# Outcome

A messaging app paradigm was used to examine conformity to cyber aggressive norms among adolescents.

Not being accountable for one's actions increased conformity to cyber aggressive group norms.

Contrary to previous findings, group centrality did not affect conformity.

The findings suggest that conformity to cyber aggressive norms in messaging apps is a relatively automatic social process.

Applied interventions to reduce conformity to cyber aggression should focus on increasing accountability on WhatsApp.