Cyberbullying in Relation to Empathy and Friendship Quality

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ABSTRACT

Personal characteristics, friendship, culture, and flexibility of the use of technology are specific factors that contribute to cyberbullying. This study aims to explore the characteristics of cyberbullying and examine whether empathy and friendship qualities contribute to the tendency of cyberbullying among adolescents in Indonesia. The method used were qualitative and quantitative phases with the indigenous approach. Subjects were adolescents within the age range of 14 to 18 years. Qualitative data was collected by interviews and FGD from the 18 subjects. The results showed that cyberbullying is an intimidating behavior. The lack of empathy and poor friendship quality characterize the qualitative findings. Next, the quantitative data was obtained from 553 subjects by filling cyberbullying tendencies, empathy, and friendship quality scales. The results showed that empathy and friendship quality have a negative contribution on cyberbullying tendencies. Thus, empathy and friendship quality are factors that prevent the development of cyberbullying behavior in adolescents.

KEYWORDS
Cyberbullying, Empathy, FDG, Friendship Quality

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of communications technology over the past decade has led to new possibilities for online interaction. The presence of the internet has become one of the needs of today’s adolescents (Quashie, 2009; Nixon, 2014). Connecting online in a community is essential for adolescents, and is a community reality that can not be underestimated (Notar, Padgett, & Roden, 2013). The evolution of information and communication technology, in addition to providing benefits to the social and emotional
development of adolescents (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014), also raises problematic patterns in the interpersonal communication of adolescents (Sticca, Perren, Ruggieri, & Alsaker, 2013). One of them is cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is done using computers and mobile phones via e-mail, text messages, instant messages, websites and chat rooms by slandering or making negative comments about the victim (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, & Tippett, 2008). Obermair, Nayla, and Koch (2014) defined cyberbullying, more specifically, as the use of internet and phone applications to destroy, disturb, or defame others deliberately.

This research begins with preliminary survey research and interviews with active teenage internet users from one of the State Senior High School in Yogyakarta. Most adolescents in the school access the internet for an average of five to eight hours a day. As many as 83% of the 180 respondents who filled the questionnaire stated that they had, at least once, sent messages and texts through social media to insult a classmate, senior, sibling, and students from other schools. Of the 83%, 62% said they often see their friends posting news with harmful content to classmates, spreading rumors, and sending videos in joking contexts. Seventeen percent of the remaining respondents claimed to have sent messages, comments and threats to other friends due to feeling hurt, fad, or hateful about another friends’ achievement. The results of interviews with guidance and counseling teachers explored the incidences associated with cyberbullying. One of the incidents experienced by student A in class X; he felt depressed and embarrassed due to the spreading negative rumors about him in social media. The student refused to come to school, and after much investigation, it was found that the perpetrator was a classmate with a close relationship with him/her. The offender did not believe that the rumor will interfere with the victim and still spread false rumors through edited pictures, despite knowing that it hurt the victim’s feelings. Early surveys in high school indicate the existence of cyberbullying practices in adolescents to be related to the sense of antipathy (lack of empathy) and harmful friendship.

**Empathy and Cyberbullying**

Ramdhani (2016) showed that there is an online disinhibition effect, a cause for adolescent cyberbullying, due to lack of empathy. Empathy acts as a social anchor that prevent adolescent from becoming antipathic during face-to-face interaction. Empathy consists of two different processes; firstly, cognitive process reflects someone’s ability to other people's feeling and emotion; secondly, affect process facilitates emotional understanding and ways to communicate those feelings, namely vicarious emotional sharing (Shamay, Aharon-Peretz, & Perry, 2009). Personal character such as empathy is deemed to be related to adolescents’ involvement as cyberbullying perpetrator (Ang & Goh, 2010; Sticca et al., 2013). More specifically, Ang and Goh (2010) found that male and female adolescent with lower empathy has high cyberbullying scores. Meanwhile, Krumholz and Scheithauer (2009) explained that cyberbullying perpetrators and victims have lower empathy level compared to individuals not involved in cyberbullying. Research by Steffgen et al. (2011) showed the same result, in which
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