The Effects of Empathy on Cyberbullying Mediated by Moral Disengagement

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Article Info	Abstract
	This study was intended to analyze the effect of empathy on cyberbullying mediated by moral disengagement. It involved 310 university students as the sample selected using proportionate stratified random sampling. Their data were collected using Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) scale, Mechanism of Moral Disengagement Scale, and Cyberbullying scale. The results of bootstrapping bias-corrected analysis showed that empathy was negatively predicted by cyberbullying and moral disengagement. Meanwhile, the results of mediation analysis indicated that there was a relationship between empathy and cyberbullying mediated by moral disengagement. Regarding these findings, this study suggests that guidance and counseling service should be aimed at minimizing cyberbullying.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of technology significantly contributes to both positive and negative impacts on life. Rahayu (2012) states that one of the negative impacts of the development of information technology is cyberbullying behavior. It is known that cyberbullying can improve anxiety, stress, sadness, disappointment, loneliness, lower self-esteem, and cause suicide in several cases (Handono et al, 2019). Given the serious impacts, the study on cyberbullying needs to be conducted.

Cyberbullying is in form of intentionally aggressive acts that are repeatedly done by groups or individuals using electronic devices from time to time to make the victims helpless. Most of the suspects of such are anonymous. (Kowalski, et al, 2012).

Chadwick (2014) mentions that cyberbullying is usually done by adolescences. This behavior is inevitably experienced by adolescences in various stages of personal development, especially university students. Bauman (2011) argues that this kind of bullying possibly happens because today's technology has covered various circles, especially students.

According to databooks (2019) half of Indonesia people use social media. In details, Wangid (2017) says that Indonesian students are online around 2-8 hours per day everywhere. This high frequency of social media use will cause a person having greater possibility to be a victim of cyberbullying. (Kowalski, et. al. 2014).

The theoretical view of aggression has linked morality and aggressive behaviors on the distorted moral to minimize guilt. (Gini, et. al, 2014). In addition, Pornari, et al (2010) and Smith, et al (2008) reveal that the higher moral disengagement owned by a person, the greater chances of cyberbullying he will do.

Moral disengagement is a cognitive mechanism that enables someone to avoid the internalized moral standards, and behave amorally without feeling depressed. (Bandura, et. al, 1996). This statement is in line with Ang, et al (2011) that social media has an anonymity feature. As a result, this anonymity can lead to greater chance of deregulation, and less possibility to give empathy for what others think. Again, the anonymity makes the social media users free from feeling guilty on what they do, so they keep doing what they want.

Various social media are used by digital society to interact. However, they need empathy in their digital interaction because empathy is a major aspect of human behavior that facilitates social interaction by identifying emotions with one another (Cohen and Wheelwright 2004). Empathy is needed in daily life to understand what others feel, and create a harmonious social relationship.

Ang and Goh's study (2010) concludes that affective empathy is related to cyberbullying behavior. On the other hand, Lee and Shin (2017) found that it is only cognitive that is related to cyberbullying. Surprisingly, Andayani (2012) found that empathy is significantly less influential on indirect aggression where cyberbullying is a form of such. Calvete, et. al (2010) states that the features of anonymity, distance, and technology consequences lower one's possibility to have empathy, in other words these features cause moral disengagement on individuals.

Saric and Hoffman (2006) explain that the basic principles of a person are caring and justice. Empathy is a motive for everyone to be fair and care for others. For more, Deter, et. al's study (2008) found that empathy significantly affects one's morale. Therefore, moral disengagement is very possible to become a mediator variable.

By referring to the above explanation, this study was focused on the contribution of moral disengagement as a mediator of empathy and cyberbullying in students. Even though cyberbullying studies in early adulthood development are rarely done because the person who acts aggressively is considered childish, but it is still carried out by several people, such as Navarro, et al, (2016). Thus, this phenomenon needs more attention to investigate so that

individuals' development will be in line with their developmental tasks.

METHODS

This descriptive correlation study had a sample of 310 respondents selected using the stratified random sampling method. In details, the samples are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Number of Respondent

Study Majors	Gender	
	Male	Female
BK	15 (4.9 %)	15 (4.9 %)
PG-PAUD	7 (2.2%)	29 (9.3%)
PGSD	68 (22%)	68 (22%)
PLS	15 (4.9 %)	15 (4.9 %)
PSI	24 (7.8%)	24 (7.8%)
TP	15 (4.9 %)	15 (4.9 %)
Total	144	166

Back-translated instruments were used in this study. The instruments were cyberbullying scale by Patchin and Hinduja, Moral Disengagement by Bandura, Interpersonal Reactivity Index scale by Davis.

The cyberbullying scale consists of two aspects designed to measure direct and indirect cyberbullying behaviors (being a victim first) and uses likert scale covering answer from 1= never to 5= many times. This scale measures some indicators, namely cybervictimization, ("I have been cyberbullied"), and cyberoffending, ("I cyberbullied others"). Based on reliability test, it gained the value of α coefficient of .858.

The moral disengagement scale consists of eight aspects measured using likert scale covering answer from 1= strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. The measured indicators are moral justification ("It is alright to fight to protect your friends"), euphemistic language, ("sharing exams questions is a way to help your friends"), advantageous comparison, ("damaging some property is no big deal when you consider that others are beating up people"),

displacement of responsibility, ("someone cannot be blamed for misbehaving if he is pressured to do it"), diffusion of responsibility, ("you cannot blame someone who had only a small part in the harm caused by a group"), distorting consequences, ("teasing someone does not really hurt them"), attribution of blame, ("people who get mistreated usually do things that deserve it"), and dehumanization ("Someone who is obnoxious does not deserve to be treated like a human being"). Based on reliability test, this instrument obtained the value of α coefficient of .916.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) scale has four aspects designed to measure empathy globally. It uses likert scale with answers ranging from 1= clearly does not describe me well to 5= clearly describe me well. The indicators of this scale are fantasy, ("I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel"), perspective taking, ("Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place"), empathy concern, ("I am often quite touched by things that I see happen"), and personal distress, ("When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces"). Based on reliability test, this instrument obtained the value of α coefficient of .809.

Furthermore, the data analysis in this study was carried out using regression analysis, while the effects of mediator was examined using bootstrap bias-corrected using N = 5000, and confidence interval of 95% (CI).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study had three variables, namely dependent variable (cyberbullying), independent variable (empathy), and mediating variable (moral disengagement). Based on the results of descriptive statistics, the means and standard deviations of each variable were (M = 101.9; SD = 8.21) for cyberbullying, (M = 24.35; SD = 5.18) for empathy, and (M = 97.48; SD = 19.77) for moral disengagement. The results of the mean and standard deviation analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Results of Mean and Standard Deviation

Variables	N	M	SD
Cyberbullying	310	101.9	8.21
Empati	310	24.35	5.18
Moral Disengagement	310	97.48	19.77

Table 3 shows that empathy variable had a significant and negative relationship with MD by gaining (β = -. 56; p <0.01). Meanwhile, in the analysis of MD and CB, it was also known that the variables obtained significant relationships by having the value of (β = .06; p <0.01). Based on these results, it was concluded that MD had a significant and positive relationship with CB.

Table 3 also shows that directly empathy had a significant relationship with CB by gaining (β = - .07; p <0.01), meaning that empathy had a significant and negative relationship with CB. Other results indicated that there was a mediating effect of MD on the relationship between empathy and CB (β = -.10, SE = .028; LLCI (95%) = -0601, ULCI (95%) = -.0196).

Table 3. Effect of Moral Disengagement as Mediator

	Bootstrapped BC (CI = 95%)									
	β	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	R	R2	F	p
Criteria Moral Disengagement							.26	.06	21.47	<0.05
Empathy	-.56	.12	-4.63	<0.01	-.807	-.326				
Criteria Cyberbullying							.36	.12	22.61	<0.05
Empathy	-.07	.028	-2.55	<0.01	-.127	-.016				
Moral Disengagement	.06	.012	5.36	<0.01	.042	.093				
Total effect	-.10	.028	-3.88	<0.01	-.166	-.054				
Indirect effect	-.03	.010			-.060	-.020				

This is in line with the study by Wang, et al. (2017) that moral disengagement mediates empathy and aggressive behaviors. Both moral disengagement and empathy have significant contributions to aggressive behaviors. Even though the study did not investigate the aggressive behaviors indirectly, cyberbullying is one of this indirect aggressive behavior (Betts, 2016; Calvete et al, 2010). It is because there are aspects that mediate the behavior.

Empathy is also a foundation of abstract moral behavior. Espinosa and Clemente in Betts (2016) argue that since adolescences spend their time in cyberspace, their direct social interaction is limited. As a result, their opportunities to develop social and cognitive skills through social interaction significantly decrease. Further, the adolescence's empathy and moral development might be less developed, and trigger them to practice aggressive behaviors (cyberbullying).

Furthermore, the anonymity feature on the internet was one of the cause of aggressive behaviors on cyberspace. Pornari & Wood (2010) states that the CB bullies cannot evaluate their actions, so they experience internal conflicts, psychological pressure, and self-esteem lost. In other words, this is what so called as distorted consequences.

The impacts of inaccurate self-evaluation led someone judge based on audiences' judgements on the internet. Whereas, the cyberspace audiences are many, and from all over the world. A study by Weber, et al (2013) found that the characteristics of bullying victims can lower or improve the possibility and intensity of being blamed in cyberbullying. In

addition, the victims who expose excessive presentation of self-information to the public tend to get their attribution blamed.

As technology develops, there is a culture of "sharing" practice by social media users. Mulawarman and Nurfitri (2017). In sharing harmful content, individuals can individuals can assign responsibility for immoral acts to anyone, even if the original source of the content is unknown. Thus, the share function seems to produce, transfer and spread responsibility simultaneously. (Runions and Baks, 2015).

The development of empathy and morals in current technological advancements makes developmental counseling guidance play an important role in maximizing the development of quality young people at this time Myrick (2011). As stated earlier, the empathy that develops in cyberspace interaction may be different or biased insignificantly. Besides, empathy development is along with a significant moral development. Therefore, there is a need for empathy training for adolescences so that they can reduce moral disengagement and practice moral engagement more.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study prove that moral disengagement has a mediating role between empathy and cyberbullying. Thus, counselors are suggested to conduct guidance and counseling services emphasizing that there is no need to perform aggressive behaviors, such as attribution of blame, displacement and diffusion of responsibility, distorting consequences, and so on. It is because essentially aggressive behaviors will lead to negative psychological impacts for the actors and the victims. Besides, the counselors can also conduct empathy training for students, especially in the cognitive aspects. This needs to be done due to the cyberspace anonymous nature and minimum face to face interaction, high perspective-taking is required to make someone be in others' shoes prior to performing aggressive behaviors. By doing so, it is expected

that someone can minimize his aggressive behaviors.

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