An Examination of the Associations between Positive and Negative Friendship Qualities and Cyber-victimization from Friends during Early Adolescence

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Abstract:
During early adolescence, youth begin to rely more on their peers and friends for emotional support and acceptance. Youth are learning about positive (e.g., emotional support) and negative (e.g., criticism) aspects within the friendships they are developing. However, as youth are developing friendships, they also may be experiencing cyber-victimization from these friends. The current study explored how positive and negative aspects of friendships were associated with cyber-victimization from friends. Sixth grade students \( N = 281; 50.2\% \) male; \( 42\% \) African American) from a large urban middle school completed cyber-victimization and friendship quality questionnaires. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the associations between friendship qualities and cyber-victimization from friends. Results indicated that 38.8% of youth experienced cyber-victimization from a friend. First, positive friendship qualities (i.e., disclosure, satisfaction, emotional support, approval), were examined in relation to friend cyber-victimization. Analyses showed there was a significant relationship between cyber-victimization and friendship satisfaction \( B = -.40, p = < .05 \) and emotional support \( B = .81, p < .001 \). Second, negative friendship qualities (i.e., pressure, conflict, criticism, dominance, exclusion) were examined. There was a significant relationship between criticism \( B = .82, p = .02 \) and friend cyber-victimization. These results highlight specific friendship qualities may impact the cyber-victimization youth experience. More satisfaction within friendships was associated with less cyber-victimization, while emotional support and criticism placed youth at greater risk for cyber-victimization. By understanding how these relationship qualities impact friend cyber-victimization, we can begin to formulate ways to reduce cyber-victimization among friends in early adolescents.

Key Words: Cyber Victimization, Cyber Victimized by Friends, Friendship Qualities and Cyber Victimization
Introduction

• During early adolescence children begin to heavily rely on peers for emotional support and acceptance, learning about positive and negative friendship qualities, (Bond, Lusher, Williams, & Butler, 2014).

• However, during this time, adolescents also may be experiencing cyber-victimization, which is defined as victimizing others using electronic means, such as social media and communication technologies, from their friends.

• To date, researchers have focused on cyber-victimization more broadly, finding that 17% of youth have experienced cyber-victimization from peers at school (Felmlee & Faris, 2016).
Current Study

The current study is unique by helping understand the friendship contexts that place early adolescents at a greater risk for cyber-victimization from their friends. The current study examined positive (approval, emotional support, intimate disclosure, and satisfaction) and negative (conflict, criticism, dominance, exclusion, and
criticism, dominance, exclusion, and pressure) friendship qualities in relation to cyber-victimization from friends.