

Cyberbullying: Differentiating Offenders Criminal Roles using a Narrative-Based Approach

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Abstract

The majority of research conducted into cyberbullying tends to focus on the victims, due to the serious consequences and effects that this crime has on them. However, there is a need to explore, categorise and identify cyberbullies and their characteristics so that inferences and crime links can be made to prevent the crime. The present study aimed at investigating whether the Narrative Action System Model (NASM) could be used to identify and examine the psychological underpinnings of different cyberbully offending styles. This model proposes four distinct narrative offender styles: the Professional, The Revenger, The Hero and the Victim. A total of 70 cases were analysed using a non-metric multidimensional scaling procedure (Smallest Space Analysis-I). Results produced four types of cyberbully styles, which can be related to the differentiation proposed by the NASM, demonstrating an effective application of the model. The thematic structure of each cyberbully style was discussed. Limitations and implications were provided.

Keywords: cyberbullying; investigative psychology; multidimensional structure

Introduction

Despite the lack of conceptual clarity around the definition of cyberbullying most researchers agree on one common factor: cyberbullying is a category of bullying that occurs in the digital realm of electronic text (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010; Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011). The most common form involves sending someone a message that could be interpreted as derogatory, inflammatory or threatening in nature. This form of electronic bullying includes different methods of harassment, such as the use of social media, emails, mobile texting, cameras, picture messages and blogs (Miller & Hufstedler, 2009; Beale & Hall, 2007). In a study conducted by Jackson (2011) it was found that emails, online chatrooms and social networking sites were the keys to cyberbullying. Another method of cyberbullying is hacking, which in this case refers to using the social media account of the victim and posting online material without his/her consent.

Based on a study conducted by Haber and Daley (2011), cyberbullying can have different forms: cyber harassment, impersonification (or masquerading), cyberstalking, online grooming, outing, denigration, exclusion/gossip groups, falsifying identity, flaming, trickery, and sexting. Most of these are behaviours that can be found in traditional bullying too; however, the latter has also spread to the digital world because it provides a great advantage for the persecutor. Specifically, the perceived online anonymity, through the safety and security of being behind a computer screen, allows individuals to feel less constrained from any social pressure, moral and ethical restraints (Notar, Padgett & Roden, 2013). This leads to disinhibition and heightened aggression (Postmes & Spears, 1998). The perpetrator can make anonymous and continuous attacks, inflicting serious psychological harm knowing that he/she will not be traced easily (Anderson & Strum, 2007). Due to the complexity of cyberbullying

The office of national statistics identified the cases of cyberbullying in England and Wales alone in the year ending March 2020, founding that a surprising one out of five children aged between 10-15 experienced at least one type of online bullying behaviour (Statista, 2020). This equates to around 764,000 children having been cyberbullied in one way or another in the England and Wales. Because of COVID-19, people around the world, including kids, have increased the time they spend on social media by 20% (Statista, 2020), which led to a clear growth of cyberbullying incidents (Karmakar & Das, 2020). According to a study conducted in 2018 by Plemmons et al. (2018), nearly 60% of teens have experienced some form of cyberbullying, causing an increase in suicide incidents, poor sleep, and depression (Kwon, et al., 2020), social difficulties (Forero, McLellan, Rissel & Bauman, 1999) and physical health problems (Kumpulainen, Raˆsaˆnen, & Henttonen, 1998).

Cyberbully Characteristics

Cyberbullying is often considered an extension of what happens at school (Smith et al., 2008), demonstrating that often perpetrators and victims are in close proximity, such as in the same class group. This is also confirmed by Mishna et al (2010) who found that 78% of victims attended the same school as their perpetrators.

Most studies investigating the nature of bullying and cyberbullying show a large proportion of cyberbullies being also traditional bullies (Gradinger, Strohmeier & Spiel, 2009), sharing similar patterns of psychological traits (Görzig, 2011). However, cyberbullies spend more time with technology and engage more in risky information communication technology (ICT) activities compared to traditional bullies (Erdur-Baker, 2010). In line with this, it appears that holding ICT skills as well as time spent online is associated with harassing others online (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004b).

The literature on the study of risk factors for perpetrators is not extensive. Some predictors and risk factors have been identified, such as the problematic use of social media (Craig et al., 2020), real-world antisocial behaviour (Sticca et al., 2012), previous history of cyberbully victimisation (Barlett, 2015), child sexual abuse (Hébert et al., 2016), anger and aggressive behaviour (Lonigro et al., 2015; Fletcher et al., 2014), lack of empathy, callous behaviour and covert narcissism (Machackova & Pfetsch, 2016), grandiose-manipulative traits (Fan, et al., 2019), moral disengagement (Lazuras et al., 2019), psychopathological symptomatology (Felipe-Castaño, 2019) and low parental competence (Garaigordobil & Machimbarrena, 2017).

Different studies tried to identify the main reasons associated with cyberbullying (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Calvete, et al., 2010; Jones, Manstead, & Livingstone, 2011), revealing that this behaviour was significantly associated with the use of proactive aggression, justification and exposure to violence and less perceived social support. Other additional reasons for cyberbullying included anonymity approval, boredom feeling better, jealousy, revenge, discrimination, protection of self and projection of feelings. Other reasons behind the involvement of forms of cyberbullying also include the expression of body shaming (Schlüter, Kraag & Schmidt, 2021), hate, racism, xenophobia and homophobia (Blaya, Audrin & Skrzypiec, 2020). In addition, a study conducted by Costello and Hawdon (2018) found that one-fifth of their sample of Americans aged between 15-35 were cyberbullied on the grounds of origins, religion, and colour of their skin.

There is a general lack of literature research on investigating models of differentiation of cyberbullying.

Nocentini et al. (2010) differentiated this criminal behaviour based on the type of criminal activity: written-verbal behaviour (based on phone calls, text messages, emails chats, websites, instant messages); visual behaviour (posting, sending or sharing non-consensual pictures and

videos using a phone or the internet); exclusion (intentional exclusion of someone from an online group); impersonification (stealing and revealing personal information using someone's identity). However, this categorization only reveals the nature of the crime but does not explain it. Kyriacou (2016), however, tried to differentiate school cyberbullies by taking into account the psychological attributes of the perpetrators, identifying five categories that underpin this behaviour: the *sociable cyberbully*, who offends for entertaining friends, with little consideration for the victim's feeling; the *lonely cyberbully*, an isolated individual who offends abusing victims with whom has little or no personal contact; the *narcissistic cyberbully*, his actions are driven by arrogance and self-importance, there is a need to demonstrate power by harming and harassing others; the *sadistic cyberbully*, who enjoys causing distress, harm and suffering; and the *morally driven cyberbully*, who offends following certain beliefs or moral codes, believing that victims are receiving justice for some transgressions they have committed. Although this differentiation considers both social and personal attributes, it is focused on school settings, limiting the applicability of these categories to other cyberbullies. Due to the lack of literature, there is a need to explore and understand the underlying behaviour of this category of perpetrators through the application of a formal psychological framework that can draw together emotional, cognitive and identity components of narrative roles. Thus, this approach will allow us to make inferences about offenders from their actions and starting to explore more in-depth their motivations to offend.

Narrative Action System Model Applied to Cyberbullying

Canter and Youngs's (2009) Narrative Action System Model (NASM) was developed following the need to understand the aspects of an offender's actions that can be identified as salient in his/her criminal behaviour (Canter & Youngs, 2012). The application of this method comes from the idea to draw offence roles which can offer a means of summarising complex

narrative processes. In fact, the identification of specific offence narrative roles is the distillation of an underlying storyline into a form that captures the offender's agency and intent in relation to the specific criminal behaviour. Therefore, the NASM can capture the quality of the agency and intention that is underpinning the criminal behaviour (Youngs & Canter, 2011).

The model identifies criminal narratives consisting of four major themes: the Professional's adaptive adventurer, the Revenger's conservative tragedy, the Hero's expressive quest and the Victim's integrative irony. In Canter and Youngs (2011), the narrative roles are described as:

- The Professional's adaptive refers to individuals who perceive themselves as professionals and adventurers. The offence is an opportunity to demonstrate their strength and expertise. They tend to be particularly confident, methodical and competent. They have control over the environment which leads to carefully-premediated offences.
- The Revenger's conservative tragedy refers to distressed and wronged individuals, who seek revenge. They are usually characterised by selfishness, their ambivalent nature is associated with violent outbursts.
- The Victim's integrative irony refers to individuals who feel powerless, incompetent, and confused about the world. The role of being a "victim" is associated with the experience of constant negative emotions.
- The Hero's expressive quest refers to individuals who act following a belief or a clear mission that needs to be accomplished. The offence is seen as inevitable, the victim irrelevant. They assign responsibility to others, minimizing their impact. They use victims as vehicles for their own emotional states of anger and frustration. While victims usually experience extreme violence and abuse, offenders experience arousal and positive emotions.

The use of narratives can help us to consider the roles that a certain offender adopts and enacts during an offence. The investigation of offence roles, thus, will provide in-depth information on the narrative processes, offering a direct exploration of the offender's narrative as an antecedent of criminal action (Canter & Young, 2012).

The NASM has been applied in many research focused on several offences (Greenwood, Synnott & Ioannou, 2023; Deblasio, Iannou & Synnott, 2022; Goodland et al., 2019; Ioannou, 2018; Goodlad, Ioannou & Hunter, 2019; Canter & Youngs, 2009, 2012; Canter, Kaori & Ioannou, 2003), demonstrating the successful appropriateness of this form of content analysis. For instance, Ioannou (2015) applied the model to property offences, drug offences, robbery, violence, sexual offences and murder. They found that the predominant role of property offenders and robbers was Hero and Professional, providing relevant understanding in offence narratives. A similar application has been conducted by Yaneva et al (2018) who used the narrative to differentiate contract killers. Results showed that both the Revenger and Hero roles could be seen as 'semi-professionals', presenting a mix of 'aggressive behaviour' and expertise. The Professional narratives reflected high levels of professionalism and skills. Furthermore, the Victim showed to be more amateurish, clumsy, and incompetent. In the following section the authors present the focus of the current study.

The present study

A multitude of research conducted into cyberbullying tends to focus more on the victims (e.g. Min Lee, et al., 2023; Sechi, Cabras & Sideli, 2023; McComas & Gil-Rivas, 2023; Campbell, et al., 2012) due to the serious consequences and effects that this crime has on them. However, the lack of research on the perpetrators does not help to categorise and identify cyberbullies and their characteristics. Being able to characterise the dominant offending style could help to draw inferences about offender characteristics and determine potential links to other crimes

(Canter & Youngs, 2003). Due to the lack of research on the exploration of cyberbullying and its role differentiation, the present study aims to explore more in depth the motivations underlying cyberbullying. This study will also determine whether the NASM can be applied to this offending style.

Research Methodology

Data Sample

Most of the data related to cyberbullying offences are scarce in terms of public access and often sensitive, as instances of cyberbullying mostly occur in private conversations. In addition, data access from social media is often protected by the user's privacy (Emmery et al., 2021). Due to these limitations, the present study adopted the approach used by Yaneva et al (2018): data was collected from a variety of online sources, mainly news websites. Case selection was based on the following criteria: (1) information about the case being confirmed by other two online sources (official news websites) (2) cases that involved any form of cyberbullying. The case selection was not limited to any particular country around the world. A total of 70 cases were selected and content analysed. Based on the literature, a total of 37 variables were created: 11 variables related to the offender characteristics; 10 related to the nature of the offence motivations; 12 related to the motive of the offence; 4 related to the method of the attack (Appendix 1). 7 variables were used for descriptive purposes (Table 1) while the remaining were subjected to multidimensional scaling.

The sample included offences from six different countries: the majority were from the United States (32) and Australia (24). A few cases were also from the United Kingdom (six), Canada (four), Malaysia (two) and Italy (two). The case selection was dependent on the availability of cases at the time of data collection.

Table 1. *Sample Description*

Offender Gender	Male	78.3%
	Female	21.7%
Victim Gender	Male	30.5%
	Female	69.5%
Offender Age	<10	2.2
	10-15	43.5%

	15-25	45.6%
	25-35	13%
	35>	8.7%
Victim Age	<10	2.2
	10-15	45.7%
	15-25	39.1%
	25-35	11.7%
	35>	1.3%
Offender-Victim Relationship	Schoolmates	43.3%
	Acquaintances	16.5%
	Strangers	24.8%
	Intimate Partners	15.3%
Duration of the Offence	Few days	2.2%
	Few weeks	50%
	Few months	26.1%
	Over 1 year	21.8%
Number of Victims	Single	65.2%
	Multiple	34.8%

37 variables were obtained from the selected cases. These were, then, coded dichotomously (“yes” or “no”) based on the presence or absence of the particular characteristic. A data matrix was created in SPSS where analysis was conducted.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed using the Smallest Space Analysis (SSA-I; Lingoes, 1973), a nonmetric multidimensional scaling procedure where the relationships between variables are represented as distances in Cartesian space. The closer any two points are to each other, the higher their association. The spatial configuration is examined in order to determine the patterns of relationships between variables and identify thematic structures (Canter, 1985). Narrative roles with similar underlying themes are hypothesised to be more likely to co-occur than those that imply different themes (Ioannou et al., 2015). One of the advantages of this method is the representation of the rank order of the co-occurrence as rank order of the geometric distance (Canter & Wentink, 2004). In other words, the SSA-I considers the relative locations of points

as opposed to absolute values. Therefore, it is easier to determine the regional structures, reducing sensitivity to biases in the sample that might have generated high or low absolute frequencies. Finally, the coefficient of alienation (Borg & Lingoes, 1987) indicates how well the spatial representation fits the co-occurrence represented in the SSA-I representation, thus, indicating the appropriateness of the output generated. A coefficient of 0.20 to 0.25 is considered a reasonably good degree of fit (Borg & Lingoes, 1987). To ensure inter-rater reliability, Cohen's Kappa was calculated and indicated a substantial agreement $k = 0.80$ (Marstone, 2010).

Several studies exploring criminal behaviours (Canter & Fritzon, 1998; Canter & Heritage, 1990; Salfati, 2000; Ioannou et al., 2015; Yaneva et al., 2018) found the application of this method to be informative and productive. The use of this approach as an appropriate analytical method has been supported by different academic research (Greenwood, Synnott & Ioannou, 2023; Goodland et al., 2019; Ioannou, 2018; Synnott et al 2018; Youngs, 2004) which used it for the content analysis of a variety of crimes types. In addition, its application extends also in other areas of psychology, such as organisational psychology (Lyons et al., 2010) and psychology of advertising (Hetsroni, 2000). The flexible applicability of this method, which goes beyond crime analysis, further demonstrates the rationale behind the choice of analysis.

Results

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the 30 categorical variables (the other 7 were used only for descriptive statistics). Each point represents an aspect of the crime derived from the content analysis (see appendix 1). The 3-dimensional SSA solution has a Guttman Lingoes coefficient of alienation 0.23452, indicating a very good fit between the Pearson's coefficients of the role variables and their corresponding geometric distances in the configuration. The labels in the plot are a brief summary of the variables (see Appendix 1). The closer the two points are, the

more likely the action/aspect of the crime they represent will co-occur. As discussed in the literature, certain behaviours are central to cyberbullying. The items placed at the centre of the plot reflect the common core, meaning they are central to the issue being examined (Yaneva et al., 2018). In this case, the central variable placed is “Social Media”, indicating that cyberbullying occurs via the use of social media, independently of the theme or narrative identified. The variables/behaviours at the periphery reflect different aspects of the same overall phenomena.

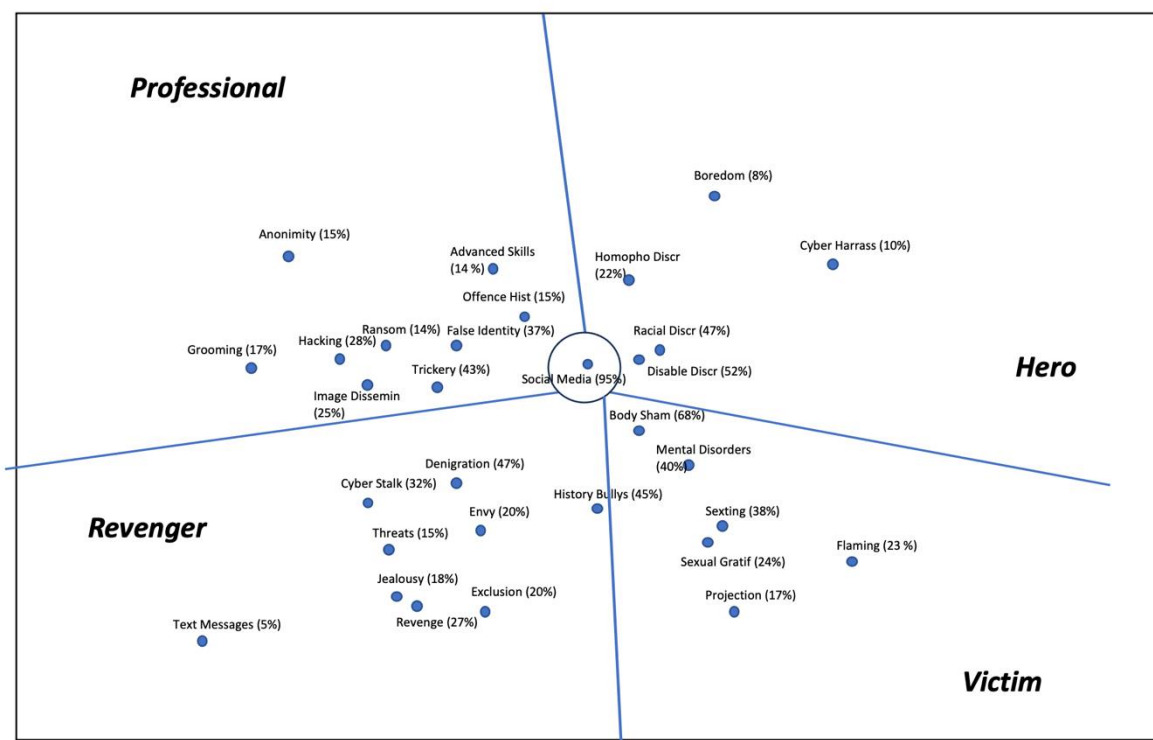


Figure 1. 1 by 2 projection of the Three-Dimensional Smallest Space Analysis (SSA) of Narrative Offence Roles with regional interpretation: NASM. CoA=0.23452

Themes of Narratives as Assessed by the NASM

By examining the SSA plot (Figure 1) four distinctive narrative roles could be differentiated into four dominant themes:

Professional’s adaptive adventure

This theme can be found on the top left side of the plot (Figure 1). Nine variables were identified in this region of the SSA plot. The combination of these variables suggests an experience-based type of offender. The presence of the variables “advanced skills”, “hacking” and “false identity” propose a skilled and competent offender able to take control of accounts and devices (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004b). In addition, the variable “history of offences” indicates potential criminal records (which might or might not be related to cyberbullying). This analysis suggests the presence of an offending experience, which makes the perpetrator confident about his criminal actions (Ioannou et al., 2015). Based on the narrative by Canter and Youngs (2009), this offender does not seek recognition or glory for his/her actions (confirmed by the variable “Anonymity”), on the contrary, he perceives his criminal activity as a job, part of his routine activity (Ioannou et al., 2015).

Previous literature (Kota et al., 2014; Paul, Smith & Blumberg, 2012) highlighted those common forms of cyberbullying are hacking social media profiles, taking control of someone’s social media profile and/or identity and posting inappropriate information. Sometimes this is related to sexual orientation, race or religion. Usually, these perpetrators have more advanced knowledge of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), including photoshopping, connecting between devices, adjusting the privacy settings, and guessing and changing passwords (Nilan, et al., 2015). The narrative from this plot, thus, is in line with the Professional profile from the NAS model, which suggests that this offender act professionally, perceives the crime as a job, and acts in a qualified and specialised manner (Canter & Young, 2012). Furthermore, the presence of variables “Trickery”, “Grooming”, and “False identity” in this part of the plot support the narrative as they propose the presence of intelligence and manipulation skills (Fan, et al., 2016).

Finally, the combination of the variables “Image dissemination” and “Ransom” might indicate the association of this narrative with behaviours that involve extortion and threats. In this

context, this cyberbully could pursue offences such as sextortion, which involves threats to expose the victim's intimate information or video, hack the victim, threat to distribute information about the victim's family, friends or acquaintances (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020b; Wolak et al., 2018) in order to extort sexual favours or money. The perpetrator usually lies about his/her own identity (in line with the variable "False identity) and uses many manipulations techniques (in line with the variable "Trickery") to convince the victim to produce images that will be then used for extortion. This type of cyberbully usually uses clear strategies to target, approach and seduce young teens or children (Hong, et al., 2020).

Revenger's conservative tragedy

This theme can be found on the bottom left side of the plot (Figure 1). Nine variables were identified in this region of the SSA plot. As Canter and Youngs (2009) suggested, the Revenger emerges when the individual suffered a form of unfair treatment, so his/her mission becomes revenge. This analysis is clearly supported by the presence of the variables "Jealousy", "Envy", and "Revenge", which indicate the engagement in cyberbullying due to vindictive and retaliatory purposes (Sabella, Patchin & Hinduja, 2013). As discussed in the introduction, the offender might act as a Revenger due to previous victimization (Barlett, 2015). For example, a study conducted by König, Gollwitzer and Steffgen (2012) found that traditionally bullied students tend to choose their former perpetrators as cyber victims. This has also been supported by Sabella et al. (2013) and Santre (2022) who found that cyberbullies were abused both offline and online, resorting to cyberbullying to revenge for their victimization.

The Revenger's behaviour might also be the consequence of a break up with an intimate partner. In fact, the variable "cyberstalking" suggests how this form of behaviour occurs in the context of ex-partners (Dreßing, et al., 2014; Duggan, 2014; Alexy et al., 2005). Furthermore, the presence of the variable "text messages" suggests a closer relationship with the victim of

an intimate partner. Interestingly, the proximity of the variable “Jealousy” with “Revenge” proposes a pattern that could be associated with revenge porn. This is also supported as the posting of revealing or sexually explicit images or videos of an individual without consent, in order to cause distress (Powell & Henry, 2016). Revenge porn typically occurs between a victim and his ex-partner and is motivated by vindictiveness and/or jealousy (e.g. after a break up) (Bloom, 2014). Therefore, even in this context, the cyberbully acts due to the perception of having received unfair treatment, and the need to revenge is uncontrollable (Canter & Young, 2009), reversing in forms of cyberstalking. Previous literature that has explored the motivations of cyberstalkers (McFarlane & Bocij, 2003; Ngoc, Nhung, Basuki, Mahfud & Saputro, 2020) provides the theoretical support for stating that the Revenger’s narrative seems to appropriately reflect the vindictive nature of this form of cyberbullying.

This narrative has also been associated with more violent actions compared to the others (Yaneva et al., 2018), reinforced by the presence of the variables "Threats", "Denigration" and "Exclusion", which are the most explicit and direct forms of cyberbullying identified in our cases. The strong belief in his/her mission leads the Revenger to see cyberbullying as a resourceful mean to punish victims after any experienced injustices (Canter & Young, 2009). Finally, the presence of the variable "history of bullying" also supports this motivation, suggesting the possibility that the Revenger has a history of traditional bullying, which is very common among cyberbullies (Gradinger, Strohmeier & Spiel, 2009). In addition, this indicates that the Revenger might have a history of repeated traditional bullying/cyberbullying.

Hero’s expressive quest

This theme can be found on the top right side of the plot (Figure 1). Six variables were identified in this region. The variable “boredom” suggests the nature of the perpetrator’s motivation, which seems to be supported by the original narrative. In fact, Canter and Young

(2009) suggested that the Hero tends to commit offences to satisfy himself, finding fun and interest in his life by offending. The crime, thus, becomes a pleasurable experience, an adventure. The variable “Cyber harassment” suggests the modality of this offender’s action, which focuses on repeated insulting messages to the same target (Finn, 2004).

The variables "Homophobic discrimination", "Racial discrimination" and "Disable discrimination" offer a general overview of the core motivations of the Hero’s criminal actions. This reflects the literature, which suggests a co-occurrence of these three motives (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Blaya, Audrin & Skrzypiec, 2020). The Hero attempts to justify his/her actions by claiming that these were the brave/right things to do. Research supports this narrative noting that homophobic bullying usually thinks that harassing someone for his/her sexual orientation or disability is appropriate and the victim deserves being offended and discriminated (Camodeca, Baiocco & Posa, 2018). Similarly, cyberbullies who act on racial principles are motivated by the desire to hurt the outgroup, validating racist views and increasing social desirability. In fact, racist cyberbullies often cyber harass to receive social validation from people who share similar views and ideas (Bliuc, Faulkner, Jakubowicz, & McGarty, 2018). This intrinsic aspect of the criminal behaviour perfectly matches the Hero's narrative as being in desperate need of recognition and respect (Canter & Young, 2012). Finally, the Hero’s narrative would also target victims with physical and cognitive disabilities for the same reasons previously presented.

Victim’s integrative irony

This theme can be found on the bottom right side of the plot (Figure 1). Six variables were identified in this region of the SSA plot. This perpetrator can be characterised by a generally negative mood and a pessimistic view of the world where social and moral codes do not apply (Canter & Young, 2009). He/she uses flaming as the main method to cyber harass his/her

victims (see variable “Flaming”). The variable “Projection’ reveals one of the motives for cyberbullying occurrence. The literature suggests that some cyberbullies often experience parental rejection and lack of communication and for these reasons, they tend to cyber harass others to gain the freedom, the power that they lack in their familial relationships (Makri-Botsari & Karagianni, 2014). Thus, cyberbullies project their inner need for power and domination combined with their feelings of anger and frustration as a reaction to the lack of love and acceptance (Dilmac & Aydoğan, 2010). Based on Canter and Youngs (2009)’s narrative, this seems coherent with the Victim profile, which is the manifestation of a generalised sense of impotence and powerlessness. These feelings can also cause low self-esteem, which has been found to be one of the causes of instances of cyberbullying (Fan, Chu, Zhang & Zhou, 2019). Lower levels of confidence and withdrawal from social situations can also cause the development of eating disorders and poor body image (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; O’Brien & Moules, 2013). These theoretical elements are supported by the presence of the variables “Body shaming” and “Mental disorders”. In fact, as previously discussed, most cyberbullies (including those who "switched" from being a victim to acting like a bully) are more prone to develop psychological disorders and mental issues, such as depression, substance abuse problems, and suicidal attempts/thoughts (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Sourander et al., 2010; Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; Campbell, et al., 2013).

In this SSA plot, we can also detect the close display of the variables “Sexting” and “Sexual Gratification”, as the second motives for the perpetrator’s harassment. In this context, sexting could be seen as a potential exploration of insecure sexuality (Morelli et al., 2020), which seems to be too difficult to be faced in the real world, or it could be associated with psychological distress (Choi et al., 2019; Del Rey et al., 2019). The Victim might use the online environment as a mean of obtaining non-reachable sexual opportunities, aiming at experiencing sexual pleasure. However, such activities can have aggressive or illegal components: they can involve

compulsive cruising of specialised online bulletins to arrange offline sexual encounters (Starcevic & Aboujaoude, 2015).

Discussion of Findings

The present study aimed to examine whether cyberbullying could be examined by the NASM (Canter & Young, 2009). Distinct patterns emerged from the SSA, suggesting that cyberbullying can fit the NASM proposed by Canter and Young (2009). Four narrative offence roles provided a generalised classification of cyberbullying supported by the previous literature. For the first time in the literature, this model provided a clear differentiation with a focus on the psychological interpretations of cyberbullying.

The Professional's adaptive adventure theme described a highly professional and skilled perpetrator. This narrative reflects highly criminal proficiency and competency. The perpetrator uses manipulation and ICT skills to access victims' private information and disseminate it online. This theme is associated with motivations like financial gain and/or sexual favours.

The Revenger is highly vindictive and seeks his revenge after having experienced unfair treatment, such as victimisation or a break-up with an intimate partner. Forms of cyberbullying like revenge porn, aggressive denigration and exclusion have been associated with this narrative. Compared to the other themes, the Revenger is fuelled by strong negative emotions such as jealousy, envy and revenge. Cyberbullying is used to alleviate these negative states and rebalance the perceived unjust world.

The Hero possesses strong homophobic and/or racial views, which fuel his/her cyber harassment towards his victims. Forms of discrimination toward those who have physical or cognitive disabilities have also been included in this narrative. While the Hero justifies his actions by perceiving his victims as blameful for his harassment, he uses cyberbullying as a way to obtain validation for his actions and respect from his in-group.

The Victim's theme reflects powerless behaviour, a pessimistic view of the world and a general sense of impotence. His harassment is the result of a process of constant projection of his

negative emotions, such as frustration, anger and rejection from the world. His state of "victimisation" is also affected by the presence of low self-esteem and psychological/mental disorders. Cyberbullying is used as a mean to escape vulnerabilities and insecurities, release negative emotions and find opportunities that are not available in real life. The only common variable among the four themes is the use of social media which reflects the core nature of cyberbullying (Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011).

Overall, the present study was able to identify four distinct behaviourally and psychologically types of cyberbullies who are fuelled by different motivations and use distinct methodologies and offending styles to achieve their aims.

Implications

The results from this study provide some strong preliminary theoretical elements for understanding cyberbullying and why people cyberbully. Although more research is required, the model proposed could help developing frameworks for conducting offender profiling around cyberbullying, or to adapt police interview techniques to the appropriate type of offender (Canter & Young, 2009). Furthermore, the narratives could be used for case linkage purposes, supporting the investigative process when trying to identify similarities among different cases.

This study also showed how narratives can provide evidence of different underlying criminal motivations, methodologies and potential mental issues, which can be used to develop appropriate treatment and rehabilitative programmes able to support the weakness and clinical issues of the offender.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

As stated, the findings are only preliminary. Further development of the study should take into consideration a wider range of cases with more accurate information. In fact, the sourcing method used for this study is less than ideal. The best method would be to gather information from the official documentation associated with the case, although this is often very difficult to access. When using open-source, like in this study, cases and offenders who received greater media attention could be detected easier and quicker, compared to those cases that remained hidden, with the results not being included in the database of this study. In addition, the results of this study could only be generalised in the context of the countries that produced the most cases of the sample.

Conclusion

The present study provides preliminary findings for the prevalence of offender themes within cyberbullying. Although further research will need to be conducted in this area, this study places the groundwork for future analysis around the exploration of this crime.

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Appendix 1: Content Dictionary of Variables

1. Offender Gender
2. Victim Gender
3. Offender Age
4. Victim Age
5. Number of Victims
6. Offender-Victim Relationship
7. Duration of the Offence

8. History Bullies: *Offender history of bullying victimisation*
9. Mental Disorders: *Offender history of mental disorders*
10. Offence History: *Offender history of committing other offences*
11. Advanced skills: *Offender advanced practical skills in computing*
12. Cyber Harass: *harassment online with the use of unsolicited messages*
13. Grooming: *online victim manipulation*
14. Cyber Stalk: *online stalking a combination of defamation, false accusations, teasing, and even extreme threats*
15. Denigration: *sharing information about another person that is fake, damaging and untrue*
16. Exclusion: *excluding the victim from online social groups*
17. Image Diss: *dissemination of the victim's personal images/videos*
18. False Identity: *creating false identity to manipulate the victim*
19. Flaming: *intense argument that normally takes place in chatrooms or via instant messages or email using personal insults*
20. Trickery: *the act by which the offender purposely deceives the victim tactfully*
21. Threats: *the use of threats and or/Blackmailing*
22. Sexting: *sending sexually explicit photographs, messages, and video in a text message or email*
23. Boredom
24. Envy
25. Jealousy
26. Revenge
27. Projection: *projection of negative feelings*
28. Sexual Gratif: *search for sexual gratification*

29. Anonymity: *search for social approval*
30. Racial Discr: *racial discrimination*
31. Disable Discr: *disability discrimination*
32. Body Sham: *body shaming*
33. Homopho Discr: *sexual orientation discrimination*
34. Hacking: *the gaining of unauthorized access to data in a system or computer*
35. Ransom: *extortion of money in exchange of personal information made inaccessible*
36. Social Media: *Offending via social networks*
37. Text messages: *Offending phone texting/calls*