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Communication Skills, Moral Disengagement, and the Bully Role in Cyberbullying[1]

Sami KIRTEKE[2], Bahtiyar ERASLAN ÇAPAN[3]

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Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the mediating role of moral disengagement strategies in the relationship between communication skills and the bully role in the cyberbullying process. This study used a mixed design. In the quantitative section of the study, data were collected from 551 adolescents using the bully form of the Cyberbullying Test, the Collective Moral Disengagement Scale, and the Real and Electronic Communication Skills Questionnaire, while 11 individuals were interviewed in the qualitative section. The findings obtained from the structural analysis in the study's quantitative section showed that the moral disengagement levels of bully adolescents mediated the relationship between electronic communication skills and cyberbullying levels (β=.14, p<.05), and moral disengagement levels mediated the relationship between real communication skills and cyberbullying levels in the bully role (β=-.34, p<.05). The qualitative findings obtained by conducting content analysis within the scope of the study determined that individuals in the bully role were involved in the cyberbullying process using moral disengagement strategies under the influence of their electronic communication skills. The results were discussed with the relevant research findings.

Keywords: cyberbullying, moral disengagement, communication skills, bully role

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[2] Dr., Ministry of National Education, Turkey, samikirteke44@gmail.com, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5980-2185
[3] Prof. Dr., Anadolu University, Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Sciences, Guidance and Psychological Counseling, Turkey, beraslan@anadolu.edu.tr, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5000-7321

Introduction

Nowadays, the use of technological tools in daily life is one of the indispensable things for adolescents. The use of technological tools brings about numerous advantages and disadvantages depending on the purpose of use. Cyberbullying is one of the behaviors, which impact individuals in adolescence psychologically, sociologically, and academically and whose prevalence increases with the use of technological tools. Studies conducted to understand the causes of cyberbullying and prevent it have been the focus of psychology for the last two decades.

Aggressive behaviors executed through electronic media can be defined as cyberbullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015; Yosep, Hikmat & Mardhiyah, 2023). The increased prevalence of cyberbullying is parallel to the increased rate of bullies (Antonio, Guerra & Moleiro, 2023; Farooq, Abdullatif & Altheeb, 2023). When the literature is reviewed, it is seen that the rate of individuals engaged in cyberbullying in the bully role is approximately 40.8% (Antonio et al., 2023; Al-Shatnawi, Ababneh, Elemary, Rayan & Baqeas, 2024). The behaviors addressed within the scope of cyberbullying have three components: repetition, intent to harm, and power imbalance (Menesini et al., 2012; Vandebosch & vanCleemput, 2008). Hinduja & Patchin (2009) divided cyberbullying behaviors into three categories according to the extent of harm. The first category includes behaviors with less effect, such as ignoring the victim, mocking, name-calling, and arguing. The second category includes gossiping, impersonating the victim, and sharing pictures and videos without permission, which cause moderate anxiety. The last category includes threats of death and physical harm to the victim, which cause higher anxiety. Cyberbullying can impact the social and emotional development of victims, leading to decreased academic achievement, depression, and damage to their self-esteem (Larranaga, Navarro & Yubero, 2018). Considering that cyberbullying adversely impacts adolescents socially, emotionally, and cognitively, it is essential to conduct preventive studies (Antonio et al., 2023; Zych, Ortega-Ruiz & Marin-Lopez, 2017). In explaining the causes of cyberbullying behavior, the moral disengagement mechanisms that guide adolescents' social skills and behaviors in daily life and electronic environments are addressed as psychosocial factors.

One of the effective factors in individuals' tendency to cyberbullying during adolescence is social skills contributing to their socialization (Llorent, Farrington & Zych, 2021). Social skills are discussed as real and electronic skills (Mantzouranis, Baudat & Zimmermann, 2019). The contextual features of both the electronic environment and daily life may allow the need for different social skills (Brown, 2013; Reich, 2017). Opportunities such as communicating with larger communities independently of the distance concept, transferring their posts to other individuals without any obstacles, no time limitation (Gomez & Marta-Lazo, 2015), fast and easy access, and anonymity (Nesi, Choukas-Bradley & Prinstein, 2018) that the electronic environment offers to individuals may also cause social skills to differ (Johnson, Haigh, Becker, Craig & Wigley, 2008). Social skills in the electronic environment are defined as an individual's ability to establish social relationships with other individuals using technological devices (Wang & Haggerty, 2011). Adolescents who are involved in cyberbullying as bullies are skilled in using technological devices and spend a lot of time in electronic environments (Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla & Daciuk 2012; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004), have difficulty communicating in daily life, and are excluded from the social environment and turn to the electronic environment since they have inadequate social skills (Lapidot-Lefter & DolevCohen, 2014; Postigo, Gonzalez, Mateu & Montoya, 2012; Romera, Cano, García-Fernández & Ortega-Ruiz, 2016). Cyberbullying can lead to more serious consequences than traditional bullying due to the

contextual factors of the electronic environment (anonymity, the absence of time and place limitations, and rapid spread) (Nocentini, Calmaestra, Schultze-Krumbholz, Scheithauer, Ortega & Menesini, 2010). Since socialization is an essential need during adolescence (Choi, Tran & Park, 2015), adolescents meet their needs such as gaining popularity and belonging to a group through cyberbullying behaviors (Hamm et al., 2015; Zych, Baldry, Farrington & Llorent, 2019).

Adolescents' levels of moral disengagement are among the variables that predict their cyberbullying behaviors. An increase in adolescents' levels of moral disengagement also causes an increase in cyberbullying behaviors (Gini, Pozzoli & Bussey, 2014; Orue & Calvete, 2019). Moral disengagement strategies employed by adolescents, such as distorting the behavior's consequences, underestimating the consequences, using euphemistic language, making advantageous comparisons, displacement of responsibility, and dehumanizing the victim, serve as mediators to justify cyberbullying behaviors (Bjahered, Thornberg, Wanström & Gini, 2020; Teng, Nie, Pan, Liu & Guo, 2017). Whereas the process of moral disengagement offers adolescents the opportunity to reconstruct their bullying behaviors, it can cause morally unacceptable behaviors to be perceived as acceptable by presenting them as serving moral and well-intentioned purposes (Kuasandra, Sunawan & Japar, 2020; Riaz & Bano, 2018). Through moral disengagement mechanisms, adolescents can protect their selves against bullying behaviors and ease their conscience by getting rid of the feelings of guilt and shame (Doramajian & Bukowski, 2015; Perren & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012; Runions, Shaw, Bussey, Thornberg, Salmivalli & Cross, 2019; Renati, Berrone & Zanetti, 2012; Wang, Lei, Liu & Hu, 2016).

Cyberbullying is becoming increasingly common among adolescents, and its adverse impacts on individuals are increasing (Chan, Cheung & Lee, 2021; Machimbarrena & Garaigordobil, 2018). In the literature, bullying behavior has been tried to be explained with many theoretical views. In this study, cyberbullying behavior is discussed in terms of Social Cognitive Theory. Social Cognitive Theory argues that the environment and individual characteristics are effective in determining the behavior of the individual, and that both individual characteristics and environmental characteristics determine participation in behavior and being affected by behavior (Bandura, 2001). According to the Social Cognitive Theory, the social skill levels and moral regulation mechanisms of adolescents were investigated as individual characteristics, and the contribution of the electronic environment to the cyberbullying process as an environmental feature was investigated. According to the Social Cognitive Theory, the characteristics of the environment are effective in the realization of behavior. Cyberbullying behavior is affected by some features of the electronic environment. The features of the electronic environment such as anonymity, openness, and sending posts to more people and for a long time make important contributions to the realization of the cyberbullying process (Dooley, Pyzalski & Cross, 2009; Kowalski, Limber & Agaston, 2008). According to the Social Cognitive Theory, individual characteristics play an important role in the formation of behavior by interacting with environmental characteristics. Social skills can play a critical role in adolescents' responsibilities to protect themselves against the risks of the electronic environment and not to harm others. Social skills can play a main role in the training to be given to adolescents on the use of electronic media (Kowalski et al., 2008). Social skills can prevent individuals from being excluded from peer groups, victimization in the face of antisocial behaviors, and can provide effective results in coping with the problems they experience mentally (Miers, Blööte, Tooij, Bokhorst & Westenberg, 2013; Papatraianou, Levine & West, 2014; You, Kim & No, 2015). Real life and electronic media communication

skills directly or indirectly affect the individual's decision to commit cyberbullying behavior. Individual characteristics can affect the individual at the point of realizing bullying behavior. However, the individual's real life and electronic media communication skills can affect their participation in the cyberbullying process in different roles. Moral dissociation processes also serve as mediators to justify cyberbullying behavior (Bjarehed, Thornberg, Wanström & Gini, 2020). Studies have shown that moral disengagement processes mediate the relationship between personal factors and the cyberbullying process (Zhou, Zheng & Gao, 2019).

The researches carried out on the variable of cyberbullying in Turkey are generally not based on a theoretical basis, and the research studies have generally been carried out using quantitative research methods. Our research was carried out using quantitative and qualitative research methods within the framework of social cognitive theory in order to reveal the general principles and integrative processes for cyberbullying behavior. It is thought that determining psychosocial factors is essential in studies to be conducted in terms of preventing and intervening in the cyberbullying process. Our study investigates the role of communication skills, which are considered protective factors in the cyberbullying process (Papatraianou, Levine & West, 2014; Zych, Farrington & Ttofi, 2019), and moral disengagement, which is thought to facilitate the execution of a behavior (Allison and Bussey, 2017; Lo Cricchio, García-Poole, te Brinke, Bianchi & Menesini, 2021; Perren & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012; Wang, Yang, Wang & Lei, 2019; Zhou, Zheng & Gao, 2019). The purpose of the study is to reveal the relationship between the real and electronic communication skills and moral disengagement levels of individuals in the bully role and cyberbullying. In this respect, it is aimed to achieve the purpose with quantitative and qualitative research findings.

Method

Research Design

In the quantitative section of our study, in which the mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was employed, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to determine the relationship between adolescents' real and electronic communication skills and moral disengagement levels and cyberbullying in the bully role. In the qualitative section, a case study was used to examine the data collected in the quantitative section in depth and to determine the reasons for the behaviors of individuals involved in the cyberbullying process as bullies. In this study, it is thought that an in-depth examination of the feelings, thoughts and behaviors of individuals in the roles of victim, bully and observer will contribute to the literature by using qualitative and quantitative research methods together to explain the cyberbullying process. On the other hand, it is thought that in-depth examination of the lives of individuals in different roles in the process of cyberbullying may be important in determining their needs and working towards their needs. In line with the identified needs, it is thought that organizing trainings for teachers, families, friends and professionals who have a direct relationship with individuals who participate in cyberbullying as victims, bullies and observers may be effective in combating cyberbullying behavior. In addition, qualitative research method was used in order to determine the opinions of adolescents in the roles of victims, bullies and observers regarding the concept of cyberbullying, and also to examine the quantitative research results in depth.

Study Group

The participants from whom quantitative data were collected within the study's scope were identified using the simple random sampling method. The study's sample comprised a total of 551 students, 294 females and 257 males, studying in various secondary education institutions in Konya province in the 2020-2021 academic year. In the study's qualitative section, data were collected from a total of 11 participants, 3 males and 8 females, who were identified using the criterion sampling method based on volunteering from among the participants from whom quantitative data were collected, by employing the interview method.

In addition, at least 156 in the analysis carried out by taking into account the error level 0.05, effect size 0.5 at the 90% power level. It was calculated that it was necessary to work with the individual. While determining the sample size, Manikumar, Monisha, Pahinian, Jeganathan and Aparna (2018) were taken into consideration.

Criteria taken into account when using the criterion sampling method:

• To be a high school level 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th grade student.

• To have a high score in the bully role form when the scores of the individuals who voluntarily participated in the research from the cyberbullying scale were ranked from high to low.

• To have experienced the cyberbullying process in the role of a bully.

• To be able to spare time to make interviews during their education life.

While determining the participants for the qualitative part of the research, the people who were involved in the cyberbullying process in the last year were determined in the interviews with school counselors. As a result of the study, the students were reached and informed about the study and asked if they wanted to be a participant. A cyberbullying scale was applied to determine the role in which students were involved in the cyberbullying process. In addition, interviews were conducted using the pseudonyms (nicknames) determined by the participants.

Data Collection Tools

Personal information form: The personal information form, prepared by the researcher within the study's scope, was developed to determine the participants' demographic variables. The personal information form used in the study includes questions about gender, the number of siblings, grade level, school type, age, and parental togetherness.

Real and Electronic Communication Skills Questionnaire: The Real and Electronic Communication Skills Questionnaire was developed by Mantzouranis et al., (2019). The scale was designed as two separate forms (Real and Electronic Communication Skills) with 18 items and 4 subscales (sociability, self-disclosure, emotion decoding, and assertiveness). The scale, which was prepared as a 5-point Likert scale, can be scored as a total score and separately for the two forms. Kırteke, Eraslan-Çapan & Bakioğlu (2020) adapted the scale to Turkish culture. The item factor loadings of the scale varied between .62 and .89 for the real communication skills form and between .55 and .89 for the electronic communication skills form. The reliability value was .75 for the real communication skills form and .78 for the electronic communication skills form.

Collective Moral Disengagement Scale: Gini, Pozzoli & Bussey (2014) developed the Collective Moral Disengagement Scale. It is a 5-point Likert scale, consisting of a single dimension and 17 items. Eraslan-Çapan & Bakioğlu (2016) adapted the scale to Turkish culture. A 15-item structure was revealed as a result of the scale's adaptation to Turkish culture. The item factor loadings of the scale were determined to vary between .41 and .76. Furthermore, upon examining the reliability analyses, it was found that the reliability values were .86.

Cyberbullying Test: Garaigordobil (2015) developed the Cyberbullying Test. The test, which was prepared in three separate forms (cyberaggressor, cybervictim, and cyberobserver), consists of a total of 45 items, 15 items in each form, and was designed as a 4-point Likert scale. Eraslan-Çapan, Bakioğlu & Kırteke (2020) adapted the test to Turkish culture. The number of items was revised to 14 as a result of the adaptation studies. In the reliability analyses conducted during the scale adaptation studies, the reliability value was found to be .88 for the cybervictim form, .90 for the cyberaggressor form, and .93 for the cyberobserver form.

Semi-structured interview form: A semi-structured interview form was developed to deeply examine the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of bullies in order to collect qualitative data within the study's scope. While preparing the semi-structured interview, the researcher first shaped the interview form with the support of the literature. The form prepared in the second stage was sent to 2 academicians who are experts in the field of qualitative research and arrangements were made by taking into account the feedback. Before deciding on the final version of the interview form, a pilot application was carried out. Considering the latest regulations decided after the pilot application, an interview form consisting of 17 questions was created for the roles of introduction, bully, victim and observer regarding cyberbullying behavior.

Data Collection Process

In the study, data were collected from secondary education institutions in Konya province in the 2020-2021 academic year. First, ethics committee permission was obtained from Anadolu University within the scope of the study. At the second stage of the research, permits for the study were obtained from the Konya Provincial Directorate of National Education, and the researcher herself collected the data by contacting the institution administrators and the school counseling service in the high schools. After interviewing the institution administrators and school counselors, the research data were collected from 15 secondary education institutions. The research data were carried out via Zoom after the consent of the participants. Since the researcher worked at the secondary school level, data were not collected from his own school from his own school. Within the study's scope, the researcher informed the participants, and it was emphasized that participation was based on the principle of voluntariness through the prepared consent form.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected in the study's first section were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). The qualitative data constituting the second stage of the research

were analyzed through content analysis. The quantitative data of the study were analyzed using SPSS 21 and AMOS 21 programs.

In the content analysis carried out in the study, the stages of coding the data prepared by Creswell (2013), determining the themes based on the codes, organizing the code and themes, preparing and interpreting the findings were used as the road map.

First, the data was transferred to the computer environment and read three times over and over again. At the same time, the audio recordings were listened to to audio recordings. In addition, the context in which the data was collected while reading the recordings was ensured by listening to both the reading and audio recordings.

The researcher continued the study by taking short notes of his own interpretations while listening to the audio recordings and reading them for himself. In the next stage, the researcher tried to reveal the codes one by one for the research question in the transcripts he printed. Various classifications were made for the codes by the researcher Creswell (2017) classified the codes based on personal experiences and social science labels. As a result of the interviews, classifications were carried out using the codes obtained directly from the participant and the codes formed depending on the social science label literature. Finally, the codes obtained from the transcripts, which have been worked on three times, have been finalized.

Categories were obtained based on the codes put forward and the concepts obtained from the categories were evaluated in the light of the literature and themes were obtained. While analyzing the qualitative data by the researcher, similar codes obtained from the data were presented within the determined sub-themes. While determining the themes, the cyberbullying scale was determined by taking into account the role of the bully. The sub-themes determined from the qualitative data are categorized under the themes revealed. In the emergence of the codes and sub-themes that emerged during the content analysis process, direct quotations were made from the answers of the interviewed adolescents and presented to the readers step by step. Then, the codes and themes created by the researcher were tabulated and interviewed by the participants to be submitted for approval, and the findings were finalized with the approval and corrections of the participants. After the data analysis was done by the researcher, he sent the codes, themes and interview forms to an expert faculty member from the qualitative research field, received feedback and made the necessary arrangements. Codes, sub-themes and themes are given in the findings section with direct quotations from the interview with the participants. The data collected with the content analysis was interpreted, and it was aimed to determine the feelings, thoughts and behaviors of the participant, to reveal the relationships of the data with each other and to convey them to the readers in an orderly manner.

From the research proposal, which is accepted as the first stage of the study, a Validity and Reliability Committee, which includes two field experts and qualitative research methods experts, has been established in order to determine the appropriate method in line with the determined purpose and to carry out the research in accordance with the method, to ensure the auditability of the researcher and the research, to discuss the difficulties encountered during the study within a scientific framework, and to provide guidance on solution proposals.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity in the study, the researcher informed the participants that their identity information and the data obtained within the scope of the study would only be used for research and would not be shared with anyone, thus ensuring that the participants relaxed. Support and feedback were received from experts in the field of qualitative research, from the research design of the study process to the discussion and conclusion sections. Within the scope of the reliability measures taken in the study, the data collected from the participants were delivered to the readers without any comments by the researcher. When analyzing the qualitative data, the codes, subthemes, and themes revealed were examined by the study's authors and experts in qualitative research, and arrangements were made in line with the feedback provided.

Regardless of quantitative methods, validity and reliability processes in qualitative research are examined by taking into account the existence and meaning of the facts. In the research, the result of the study, which was carried out by creating a chain of evidence to ensure the validity of the structure, was read to a person selected from the participating individuals and the accuracy feedback was obtained. In order to contribute to internal validity within the scope of the research, the researcher informed the participants that their identity information and their data will only be used for research and will remain confidential before starting the interview process, and the participants were relieved and in this way, it was aimed to collect real, in-depth data. In order to increase the credibility of the research in the qualitative section, the researcher first conducted interviews between 22.10.2020 and 23.12.2020 in order to collect in-depth data. The fact that the person conducting the research worked as a Psychological Counselor in the Ministry of National Education, knew the student profile closely and carried out studies on the research subject facilitated the researcher in the process of collecting the data. Feedback was received from experts in the field of qualitative research at every stage of the study, from the design part of the research to the result discussion part, and the study continued with the necessary arrangements. Within the scope of the study, it was tried to reach as many participants as possible in order to increase the credibility of the data. As a result of the interviews, the interviews were were conducted in detail in order to obtain in-depth information. In addition, feedback was received on the qualitative research method from the presentation of the qualitative research problem to the discussion interpretation section with the faculty member who is an expert in the field, and necessary arrangements were made. It was aimed to determine whether the answers given by the participant individuals during the interview were understood correctly by obtaining participant confirmation. Within the scope of the research, in order to increase external validity, all sections from determining the problem of the research to the discussion and conclusion part have been was presented in a detailed, clear and understandable way.

By choosing the purposive sampling method, it is aimed to collect in-depth and rich data for the research problem. On the other hand, direct quotations were made in the findings section of the interviews, and the participants were given the opportunity to read and comment on their own data, contributing to transferability. Purposive sampling was carried out in order to reveal the contrasts and similarities and to examine the research problem in depth, and purposive sampling was done to increase the degree of transferability, and 11 adolescents were interviewed using the criterion sampling method, which is one of the sampling methods. In addition, the data obtained from the participants were presented on a scientific basis and by making direct quotations without disturbing its natural structure. Internal reliability can be

expressed as the degree to which similar results can be reached by other researchers by handling the same data. The questions prepared by the researcher were asked to the participants in similar ways to contribute to the internal reliability of the research. In addition, in order to increase internal reliability, the data collected from the participants were tried to be given to the readers without comment. Within the scope of the study, the code, sub-themes and themes put forward by the researcher were re-evaluated with the faculty member who is an expert in the field of qualitative research methods, and arrangements were made by receiving feedback. External reliability is related to whether the results obtained will be presented in a similar way in similar environments. Within the scope of the research, the data collected in order to increase external reliability, the codes and themes determined by the researcher, the notes taken, and the summaries made were shared with an expert in the field of qualitative research and the accuracy of the stages carried out was confirmed.

Role of the Researcher

The corresponding author of the study works as a psychological counselor in a secondary education institution affiliated with the Ministry of National Education. Constant communication with adolescents within the institution and the professional qualifications of the author enabled her to take an active role in the data collection process. The research data were collected by the researcher himself. The study's second author works as an academician in the Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance at the Faculty of Education and actively provides psychological counseling.

Ethical Issues

First, research permission was received from the ethics committee of Anadolu University to conduct the study. At the second stage, the necessary permissions were obtained from the Ministry of National Education to perform the intervention. At the intervention stage, coordination was established with the school administrations and school counselors, and voluntary consent forms were received from all participants. The researcher provided information about the study to all participants, and it was guaranteed that the collected data would remain confidential.

The present research was conducted with the permission of Anadolu University Ethics Committee, with decision dated 29/09/2020 and numbered 39950. Within the scope of the study, consent forms were first obtained from the participants' parents, and then the study was conducted by obtaining permission with consent forms from the participating individuals.

Findings

Quantitative and Qualitative Results

Considering the mean, standard deviation, kurtosis and skewness values regarding the descriptive statistics performed for the variables observed in the study, it was seen that the kurtosis (between -.63 and .40) and skewness (between -1.4 and .63) values were within acceptable limits (-1.5, +1.5). The kurtosis and skewness values between -2 and +2 indicate that the data are normally distributed (George & Mallery, 2016). While examining the data

within the scope of the research, it was determined that there was no missing value. In addition, the Z-score method was used to determine the outliers. It was determined that the observations remained within reasonable limits and the analysis was continued without removing any of the collected data (|z|≤3). It was concluded that the data collected within the study's scope were normally distributed and fulfilled the necessary prerequisites for structural equation modeling.

Table 1 contains the correlation values between the latent variables tested with the measurement model.

Table 1
Correlations for the Latent Variables in the Structural Model

Latent Variables	1	2	3
1. RCS	-		
2. ECS	-.22*	-	
3. Moral Disengagement	-.64*	.37*	-
4. Cyberbullying in the Bully Role	-.72*	.42*	.83*

*p<0.05, *RCS refers to real communication skills, and ECS denotes electronic communication skills.*

As seen in Table, the relationship with the highest correlation value was determined between cyberbullying in the bully role and moral disengagement, which was strong positively correlation (p<0.05, r=.83). On the contrary, the relationship with the lowest correlation value was found between real communication skills and electronic communication skills, which was negatively strong correlation (p<0.05, r= -.72).

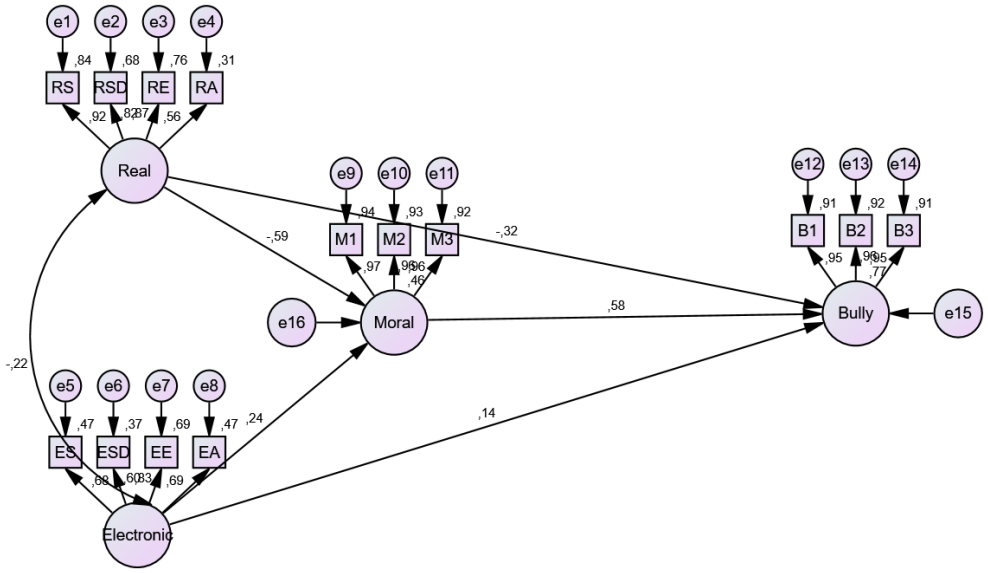
Measurement model. Within the study's scope, 14 observed variables belonging to the four latent variables were processed for the measurement model. The analyses concluded that the goodness-of-fit indices for the model were as follows: χ^2 (174/N= 551) = 499.80, p< .001; CFI= .98; GFI= .92; NFI= .96; RMSEA= .063; AGFI= .89. Upon examining the fit indices related to the mediation model created in the study, it was seen that it had a good level of fit values. As a result of the analyses, when the measurement model and the model's standardized path coefficients were examined, it was seen that the factor loadings ranged from .56 to .96.

Testing the structural model. After the goodness-of-fit values of the structural model established in the study (latent variables of real and electronic communication skills, moral disengagement, and cyberbullying in the bully role) were examined, the analysis phase of the structural model was proceeded to at the second stage. The model in which the mediation effect revealed within the study's scope was attempted to be revealed was determined to have the following goodness-of-fit indices: χ^2 (71/N= 551) = 304.31, p< .001; GFI= .92; CFI= .97; NFI= .96; AGFI= .89; RMSEA= .077. It was concluded that the fit indices that emerged in the analyses performed for the mediation effect showed a good level of fit.

Figure 1 shows the path coefficients obtained from testing the structural model established for the variable of cyberbullying in the bully role.

Figure 1

Standardized Path Coefficients for Cyberbullying in the Bully Role



Real: Real life communication skils; Electronic: Electronic communication skills; Moral: Moral disengagement

As seen in Figure 1, upon examining the standardized path coefficients obtained from the analyses for the structural model, it was revealed that real communication skills significantly predicted electronic communication skills (β=-.22, p<.05); real communication skills significantly predicted moral disengagement (β=-.59, p<.05); electronic communication skills significantly predicted moral disengagement (β=.24, p<.05); real communication skills significantly predicted cyberbullying in the bully role (β=.32, p<.05); electronic communication skills significantly predicted cyberbullying in the bully role (β=.14, p<.05); moral disengagement significantly predicted cyberbullying in the bully role (β=.58, p<.05). A negative relationship was identified between real communication skills and the moral disengagement level, while a positive relationship was found between electronic communication skills and the moral disengagement level. A positive relationship was determined between cyberbullying in the bully role and the level of moral disengagement, for which the mediation effect was examined. An increase in real communication skills causes a decrease in the moral disengagement level and a decrease in an individual's participation in cyberbullying behavior. On the contrary, increased electronic communication skills lead to an increase in an individual's level of moral disengagement, increasing their involvement in the cyberbullying process.

Bootstrapping was applied to determine the significance of the mediation effect within the study's scope. Table 2 lists the results of the bootstrapping analysis conducted in the study.

Table 2

Bootstrap Test Results

Path	Mediator	Path Coefficient	95% CI	*p*
Real Communication Skills-Cyberbullying in the Bully Role	Moral Disengagement	-.34	[-.397, -.281]	.002
Electronic Communication Skills-Cyberbullying in the Bully Role	Moral Disengagement	.14	[.096, .189]	.002

* Note. The bootstrap procedure was performed with 10,000 samples. $p<.05$.

As seen in Table 2, all effects in the analyses conducted to determine the significance of the mediation effect were significant. It supports the conclusion that the participants' real and electronic communication skills levels impact cyberbullying behavior in the bully role through their moral disengagement levels.

Qualitative findings regarding real and electronic communication perceptions in the bully role. Upon examining the data collected from the individuals interviewed within the study's scope, it was concluded that the communication perceptions of the participants involved in the process as bullies were gathered under two main themes: "Real Communication Perceptions and Electronic Communication Perceptions."

Real communication perceptions. In the interviews conducted in the study, the headings of overbearing, stressful, respectful, distressed, disagreement, limited, sincere, uncertain, varying according to the person and environment were reached under the theme "Real Communication Perceptions" of the participants.

The participant, Vaveyla, stated that she could not express herself comfortably to her family and friends in daily life and experienced problems in her relationships by saying the following, "The first thing that comes to my mind is that I cannot say that I am very good in my relationships. Sometimes, I think I cannot express myself well and get upset." It can be said that the relationships established by the participants defining individuals who participate in the cyberbullying process in the role of bullies are ineffective and unhealthy in daily life, the communication process generally includes negative elements, and consequently, the real communication skills of bullies are low.

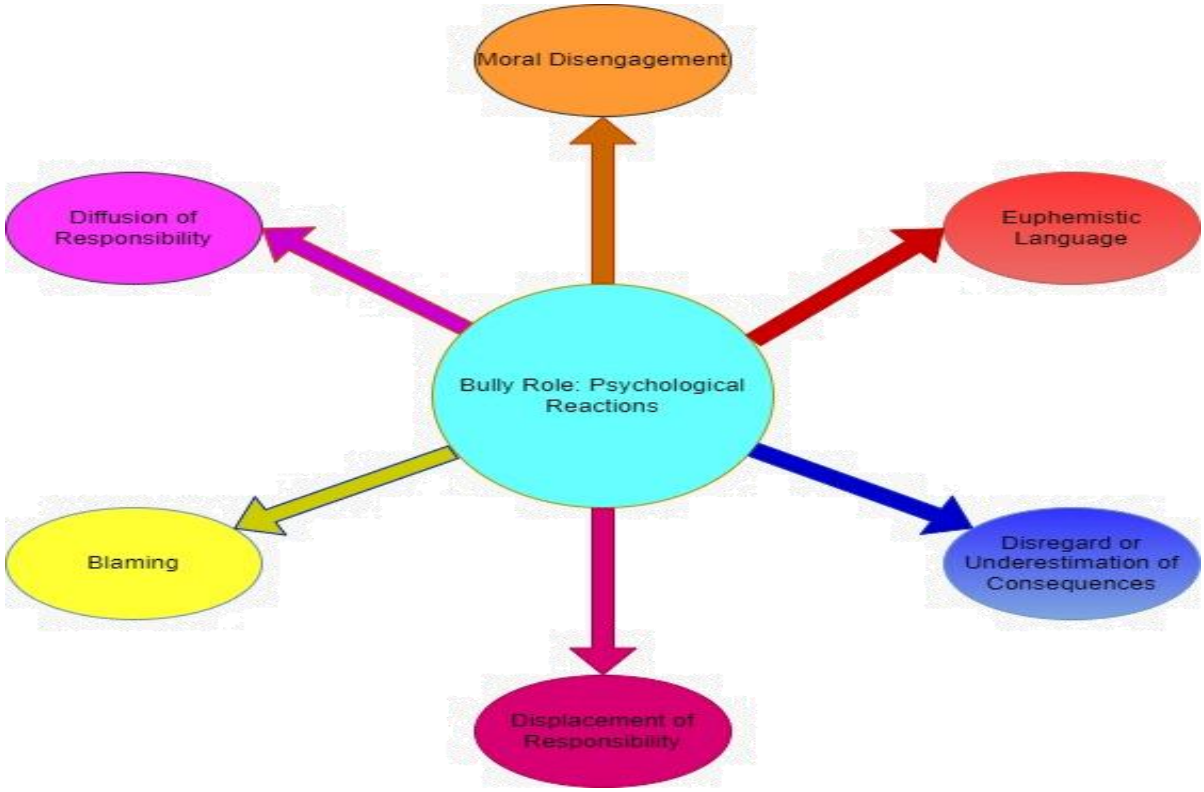
Electronic communication perceptions. In the interviews conducted within the scope of the study, the headings of self-confident, sincere, secure, fun, expressing oneself comfortably, anxious, fluctuating, distant, superficial, careful, and insecure were reached under the theme "Electronic Communication Perceptions" of the particpants. Toprak, who stated that he was involved in the process as a bully, said the following, "I feel more confident and comfortable in the virtual environment. I feel very happy when my photos are liked. It is very important to me." and indicated that the positive feedback he received in the electronic environment made him happy when responding to the sub-themes of self-confident and expressing oneself comfortably. It can be concluded that individuals involved in the process as bullies generally perceive their electronic communication skills as positive.

Qualitative findings regarding the psychological reactions of adolescents in the bully role in the cyberbullying process. The feelings and thoughts of individuals involved in cyberbullying as bullies can affect the process of executing the behavior. Figure 2 presents the

statements concerning the thoughts and psychological reactions of individuals involved in cyberbullying in the bully role obtained by analyzing the interviews conducted with the participants in the study.

Figure 2

Thoughts and Psychological Reactions of Individuals in the Bully Role Regarding Cyberbullying



As seen in Figure 2, the psychological reactions of individuals involved in cyberbullying as bullies were gathered under six main themes: *"Moral Justification, Euphemistic Language, Disregard or Underestimation of Consequences, Displacement of Responsibility, Blaming, and Diffusion of Responsibility."*

As a result of the interviews conducted with individuals in the bully role within the study's scope, the headings of conforming to the group, acting without thinking, feeling worthless, trying to establish superiority, feeling resentment toward the victim, disliking the victim, becoming angry at the victim, punishing the victim, and the idea of taking revenge were reached under the theme of "Moral Justification." Toprak, who was involved in the process in the bully role and stated that he could not defend himself in daily life, said, "Sometimes I get bored of being on the oppressed side. In this way, I can defend myself even though I am not physically strong. I trust my keyboard a lot." He indicated that that he committed cyberbullying in an electronic environment to take revenge for the problems he experienced in daily life and to defend himself.

The headings of sincerity indicator, being successful, being happy, gaining popularity, having fun, and protecting oneself were reached under the theme of "Euphemistic Language." Şeker Adam, who performed cyberbullying in the bully role, said the following, "As a message,

I only write something to my close friends to make fun of them." and Seçici said, "I can make fun of some aspects my close friends dislike or issues they do not want to joke around with them." stating that they regard bullying as a fun way to spend time.

The headings of normalizing bullying and not caring about-ignoring bullying were reached under the theme of "Disregard or Underestimation of Consequences." Su, involved in the process in the bully role, said, "I don't care at all. Sometimes, people I fight with at school open fake accounts and attack from there to get their revenge." She indicated that she did not care about the bullying behavior she faced.

The headings of the thought that someone else provides control, insufficient family love, and the problem of not being able to communicate were reached under the theme of "Displacement of Responsibility." Vaveyla, who thought that she received insufficient attention and value from her family members and was involved in the process as a bully, stated that the bullying behavior she executed in the electronic environment was effective in making her feel valuable and free by saying, "While no one cares about my presence or absence in the family and no one values my thoughts, being valued in the virtual environment, being able to swear, and make fun of give me a little bit of freedom."

The headings of blaming the victim and being provoked by the victim were reached under the theme of "Blaming." Pastacı, who was involved in the cyberbullying process in the bully role and thought that the goodwill she displayed was used by other people, said, "I want other people to experience similar feelings about the issues that I experience and that make me angry and sad and understand what they make me experience." and stated that she thought that cyberbullying would be effective in making other people empathize with her.

The headings of the idea that everyone bullies, establisihing untrustworthy relationships, and establishing insincere relationships were reached under the theme of "Diffusion of Responsibility." Fenerbahçe, who participated in the process in the bully role thinking that many people were committing bullying behavior in the electronic environment, said, "Of course, it happens. As a result, we can be affected by the platforms we are on." He indicated that the electronic environment affected him and was a part of cyberbullying behavior.

Conclusion, Discussion and Implications

The study examined the mediating effect of moral disengagement strategies in the relationship between real and electronic communication skills (social skills) of individuals in the bully role and cyberbullying behaviors. It was concluded that the level of moral disengagement had a mediating effect on the relationship between the real communication skills of individuals involved in cyberbullying as bullies and cyberbullying levels. The findings obtained from the study revealed a negative relationship between real communication skills and moral disengagement and a positive relationship between moral disengagement and cyberbullying behavior. Consequently, it can be said that participants with high real communication skills have low moral disengagement levels and engage in cyberbullying in the bully role at a low level. When the relevant literature is reviewed, it is determined that individuals with real communication skills are less likely to exhibit bullying behaviors in their relationships (Gomez-Ortiz, Romera & Ortega-Ruiz, 2017; Malchanov & Almazova, 2020). The participants' social skills in adolescence can be effective in empathizing with the people they communicate with and performing healthy behaviors without using moral disengagement strategies (Antoniadou

& Kokkinos, 2013). On the contrary, an individual's low real communication skills can prevent them from establishing effective and healthy relationships by using moral disengagement strategies (advantageous mitigating comparison, euphemistic language, and moral justification) and, consequently, can pave the way for cyberbullying behavior (Gini, Pozzoli & Bussey, 2015; Killer, Bussey, Hawes & Hunt, 2019; Runions & Bak, 2015; Wang, 2021). Individuals involved in the process as bullies can cope with their negative emotions (resentment-guilt-shame) during the assessment processes they conduct toward themselves using moral disengagement strategies (Doramajian & Bukowski, 2015; Gasser & Keller, 2009; Macháčková, 2020; Wang, Ryoo, Swearer, Turner & Goldberg, 2016). When the qualitative findings obtained within the scope of the research are examined Ece, involved in the cyberbullying process in the bully role, said, “My relationships with my friends are a little more fluctuating; sometimes they are good, and sometimes they are bad. I also communicate with other people around me, but it is not sincere; it is superficial communication.” She expressed that she established fluctuating and superficial relationships in daily life. Concerning cyberbullying behavior, she said that she easily implemented behaviors that she could not perform in daily life by taking advantage of the electronic environment’s anonymity feature by stating,

> “I like to act freely as I want. However, I know that I do something I don’t want to be done to me. However, it is very easy to do it; making fun of people, swearing seems so easy in the dialogue on the internet. I cannot be in a place where my identity is unknown, I cannot be punished, etc. I never say bad words to people outside, but it seems very easy on the internet.”

Kral engaged in the process in the bully role stated that he experienced problems in communicating in daily life by saying the following,

> “I have problems with my family. The fights we had come to my mind. It is not right to oppress a young person so much. I regard myself as a bird; I think I will run away if they oppress me too much. I do not think that they understand me at all; they always think of themselves, they never think of me.”

However, in the virtual environment, he stated that he could not control his anger and responded to the bullying behavior he faced in a bullying way in the following way, “I also respond negatively to the negative behavior done to me. I get angry, my anger takes precedence over the behaviors.” The study results showed that social skills and moral disengagement contribute to preventing cyberbullying, and that individuals with high real communication skills establish healthy communication without the need for moral disengagement strategies.

Another finding of the study is that the level of moral disengagement mediates the relationship between the electronic communication skills of individuals engaged in cyberbullying in the bully role and cyberbullying. The findings obtained from the study revealed a positive relationship between electronic communication skills and moral disengagement levels and a positive relationship between moral disengagement and cyberbullying in the bully role. In other words, the high electronic communication skills of the participants may increase the use of moral disengagement strategies, while also leading to an increase in the participation of individuals in cyberbullying. Various reasons, such as the feelings of revenge experienced by individuals in adolescence as a result of the bullying behavior they encounter in their relationships in daily life, their desire to gain popularity in the social environment, and increasing their social status, may cause them to employ moral disengagement strategies and

commit aggressive behaviors in the electronic environment (Bhat, 2008; Bjahered et al., 2020; Lampe, Ellison & Steinfield, 2008; Wang & Goldberg, 2017). Individuals who benefit from the advantages offered by the electronic environment can feel safe and use moral disengagement strategies (moral justification, advantageous-mitigating comparison, and displacement of responsibility) and can engage in cyberbullying by ignoring moral principles (Bauman, 2010; Bjahered et al., 2020; Kowalski, Schroeder, Giumetti & Lattanner, 2014; Runions et al., 2019). In addition to meeting their socialization needs by acquiring new skills using electronic media, adolescents who have problems in daily life due to their shy, timid, and introverted personality traits try to compensate for their deficiencies using electronic media (Hunt, Aktin & Krishnan, 2012; Kardefelt-Winther, 2014; Peter, Valkenburg & Schouten 2005; Rothschild, 2015). The contextual factors of electronic media, such as communicating without meeting face-to-face and anonymity, can lead individuals to feel freer and more comfortable, activate moral disengagement strategies, and can cause individuals to commit cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Romera, Ortega-Ruiz, Runions & Falla, 2020). When the qualitative findings obtained within the scope of the research are examined Toprak, who was involved in the cyberbullying process in the bully role, indicated that he committed cyberbullying to take revenge for the bullying behavior he faced and to increase his social status by saying the following,

> "I feel more confident and comfortable in the virtual environment. Sometimes, I get bored of being on the oppressed side. In this way, I can defend myself even though I am not physically strong. I trust my keyboard a lot."

Another participant engaged in the process in the bully role, Vaveyla, said,

> "I am actually aware that the environment is virtual, but I think I express myself better in the virtual environment. It is more relaxing to do this in the virtual environment where other people do not know who I am."

She stated that she established free and comfortable communication without knowing who the person in front of her was. This finding of the study shows that electronic communication skills and moral disengagement play a facilitating role in cyberbullying.

In light of the findings obtained from the study, it was concluded that the moral disengagement level mediated the relationship between real and electronic communication skills and cyberbullying behavior in the bully role. When the bootstrapping analysis conducted to reveal whether the mediation effect of real and electronic environment communication skills was significant was examined, it was concluded that the mediation effect of the moral disengagement level in the relationship between real and electronic communication skills and cyberbullying behavior in the bully role was significant. The qualitative findings obtained in the study support the finding that the real communication skills of individuals in daily life prevent the use of moral disengagement strategies and prevent participation in cyberbullying in the bully role. On the other hand, they support the finding that electronic communication skills increase the use of moral disengagement strategies and lead to engagement in cyberbullying in the bully role.

The findings obtained within the scope of the study are limited to the variables and qualities addressed by the scales used. The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews used in the research are limited to individuals who voluntarily participated in the process. 8 female and 3 male students participated in the qualitative part of the research, and considering the situation in the number of participants, it may lead to differences depending on the gender variable. Within the scope of the research, the voluntary criterion sampling method was used.

The methodological factors determined by the researcher within the scope of the study may have an effect on the generalizability and accuracy of the results. Self-selection bias that occurs in the sampling process can lead to the inclusion of participants who are not suitable for the purpose and to the emergence of systemic errors. With the help of the cyberbullying scale used within the scope of the research and with the preliminary interviews in which information about the process was given before the interviews started, systematic errors were were prevented.

The national literature reports that cyberbullying behaviors are especially common during adolescence. It is thought that the current study provides a detailed understanding of the characteristics of individuals engaged in cyberbullying and the reasons for their behaviors with quantitative and qualitative research methods. Upon examining the analyses conducted in the study, the importance of studying personality traits that prevent cyberbullying behavior emerges. It is considered that individual and group psychological counseling and psychoeducation studies that reduce adolescents' moral disengagement levels and increase their social skill levels can prevent cyberbullying. In this sense, psychological counselors working with adolescents have great roles. Conducting studies with different groups and researching other personality traits with a preventive role can contribute to a better understanding of cyberbullying in research. In addition, in the study, only adolescents who participated in the cyberbullying process in the role of bullies were determined as participants, and it is predicted that the inclusion of teachers and parents in new studies will reveal important results.

Contribution Rate of the Researchers

First author: Author of the thesis.

Second author: Thesis director.

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Statement of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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