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Cyberbullying Versus Self-Image Creation on the Internet: Are the Underlying Mechanisms Different in Young Adults with Disabilities?

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Today's media exert significant impact on young peoples' social life by transforming many social and development aspects. On-line activity of young adults not only increases the availability of positive and educational experiences, but also maximises exposure to on-line threats. The main scope of this article is to explore the role of appearance and social practices concerning its' creation in the process of peer cyberbullying among young Polish adults (N=329). On-line body auto-presentation has been found an important factor moderating the process of on-line aggression. The dissemination of beliefs was also examined – assessment of own attractiveness, apprehension of the appearance assessment by others and the scale of activities focused on editing and improving the appearance depicted in the pictures posted on social websites. The differences in these areas were examined between people with disabilities or those who suffer from injuries or specific health conditions that affect their appearance and other young people. The results have revealed that

particular research and intervention focus should be put on young people suffering from a condition or injury affecting appearance and/or having a disability or serious health problems, as this group has been found to be more prone to victimisation (as far as traditional bullying and cyberbullying is concerned).

KEY WORDS: bullying, cyberbullying, body image, social media, body image

Introduction

Internet use is common among young adults. In-depth analyses show that one of the dominant modes of using the Internet in this age group is to have an account and be active on social media websites. Even though, as noted in several countries, it is the teenagers who are most often engaged in this activity, yet young adults are very similar to them in this respect. American studies show that the percentage of users of social media websites, primarily Facebook, in this age group reaches 90%¹. Similar results are also recorded in Poland. Pupils and students are one of the groups in the Polish society which is very active on-line, at the same time being the leading group that uses mobile Internet². Most recent studies show that persons who use Internet in the age group between 18 and 24 constitute 99% of the population in this age group, whereas the percentage of Internet users registered on social media websites amounts to 94% in this age group and is the highest in comparison to other age groups of adult Internet users in Poland³. It is worth noting that even though changes are observed in a long-term perspective in the dynamics of use of individual websites (e. g. “aban-

¹ A. Lenhart, K. Purcell, A. Smith, K. Zickuhr, Social Media and Young Adults, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2010/02/03/social-media-and-young-adults/> [access: 17.02.2017].

² D. Batorski, *Technologie i media w domach i w życiu Polaków. Diagnoza Społeczna 2015, Warunki i Jakość Życia Polaków – Raport*, “Contemporary Economics” 2015, No. 9/4, p. 373–395. DOI: 10.5709/ce.1897-9254.1.

³ CBOS, Wykorzystanie internetu. Report from the survey. No. 49/2017, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K_049_17.PDF [access: 15.02.2018].

donment” of Facebook for the sake of Snapchat), yet the percentage of users using social media websites globally still remains on a very high level.

The Internet, and in particular social media websites, are a platform to present photos, including photos that show the Internet users (so-called selfies). Moreover, the possibilities of digital edition and photo modification result in the fact that not only improvement of their quality is possible, but also acquiring a more attractive image. Additionally, interactivity and possibility of multi-directional communication results in the fact that such photos may be sent through social networks, where they are assessed and commented on, which provides such processes with social nature and plays an important role in the process of shaping the identity of young adult Internet users.

In the contemporary society, dominated by the image culture, one of the most important criteria of position in a social environment is the physical attractiveness, thus positive self-presentation in the social media is primarily oriented at visual aspects of self-image⁴. On account of its’ open and interactive nature, social media are an ideal arena for self-presentation, defined as purposeful activities aimed at making an impression that is desired by the individual with respect to his/ her image in the social environment⁵. In the modern world, photographs have become images aimed at exciting applause from an often invisible audience⁶. The purpose of both the content and the mode of display of photographs is presentation, or, more precisely, construction of an ideal “I”, testifying to attractiveness and success. This is done by means of control of information

⁴ A. Ostaszewska, *Popkulturowe ramy tożsamości. Media, kultura popularna, Internet jako nowe środowiska kształtowania tożsamości*, ORE, Warsaw 2012.

⁵ A. Szmajke, *Autoprezentacja – niewinny spektakl dla innych i siebie*, [in:] *Złudzenia, które pozwalają żyć*, ed. M. Kofta, T. Szutrowa, Wydawnictwo PWN, Warsaw 2001, pp. 147–156.

⁶ A. Brosch, *Autoprezentacja nastolatków w mediach społecznych*, [in:] *Oblicza Internetu. Sieciowe Dyskursy. (Roz)poznawanie cyfrowego świata*, ed. M. Sokołowski, Elbląg 2014.

about oneself and other people, disclosed by the subject to the audience⁵. From the perspective of interpersonal relations, this is also a specific form or technique of exerting social impact, functioning next to such skills and social competence as assertiveness, efficient verbal and non-verbal communication or efficient recognition or solving of problems⁷. The main motive for undertaking self-presentation activities is aiming for maximisation of the balance of profits and costs in social relations, increase and protection of self-esteem and formation and maintenance of a specific identity⁸. It is also necessary to point out to the huge significance of gender stereotypes which shape the image of own sex and the opposite sex, of what is attractive, desired and socially enticing⁹.

Digital self-presentation may be incorporated into the self-image of an individual, influencing such self-image in a positive manner and resulting in improved self-esteem. However, if self-presentation is negative or is modified for the purpose of ridiculing the presented person, it forms an important risk factor for behaviour in the area of cyberbullying and sexting¹⁰. This is of particular relevance in the context of significance of appearance, self-assessment of appearance and correlation of these variables with the mental health indices. It turns out that the perception of own appearance, self-esteem and negative self-esteem in this respect is very common and refers, in a substantial degree, to young persons (more frequently women

⁷ M. Aryle, *Umiejętności społeczne*, [in:] *Zdolności a proces uczenia się*, ed. N. J. Mackintosh, A. M. Colman, Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2002, pp. 113–121.

⁸ M. R. Leary, R. M. Kowalski, *Impression Management: A Literature Review and Two Component Model Psychological Bulletin*, 1990.

⁹ E. Mandal, *Podmiotowe i interpersonalne konsekwencje stereotypów związanych z płcią*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 1990.

¹⁰ S. Berne, A. Frisén, J. Kling, *Appearance-related cyberbullying: a qualitative investigation of characteristics, content, reasons, and effects*, "BodyImage" 2014, No. 11(4), pp. 527–533. DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2014.08.006. Sexting is a phenomenon consisting in recording and sending personal sexual-type materials via mobile or Internet network: quoted after Wojtasik Ł. (2014), *Seksting wśród dzieci i młodzieży*. „Dziecko krzywdzone. Teoria, badania, praktyka”, 13(2), p. 80.

than men)¹¹. It has to be indicated that the ideal appearance promoted by the media is a very important reference point and exerts pressure on individuals, who sometimes, in order to improve their appearance, undertake even health-threatening activities, i.e. dangerous operations or detrimental diet, motivated by lack of satisfaction with body mass)¹².

The Internet, and social media websites in particular, exert significant impact on the life of young people in multiple aspects pertaining to their functioning. Use of the new media not only offers positive experiences, but also tends to be an area for threats. A particularly negative phenomenon, which may be related to on-line social interactions, is cyberbullying. Nowadays, it is most often qualified as a series of acts of aggression intentionally and repeatedly targeted at another person who cannot defend himself/herself and who experiences helplessness in this respect¹³. This definition makes a clear reference to traditional bullying, the definition of which contains similar characteristics¹⁴. Cyberbullying is inflicted with the use of various instruments of mediated communication. These instruments are diverse not only on account of the applied

¹¹ L. Neighbors, J. Sobal, *Prevalence and Magnitude of Body Weight and Shape Dissatisfaction among University Students*, *Eating Behaviors* 2007, No. 4, 2007, pp. 429–439. DOI: 10.1016/j.eatbeh.2007.03.003.

¹² I. Wronka, E. Suliga, R. Pawlińska-Chmara, *Perceived and desired body weight among female university students in relation to BMI-based weight status and socio-economic factors*. *Annals of Agricultural and Environmental Medicine* 2013; No. 20(3), pp. 533–538.

¹³ S. Bauman, *Cyberbullying: What Does Research Tell Us?*, *Theory Into Practice* 2013, No. 52(4), pp. 249–256, DOI: 10.1080/00405841.2013.829727; R. S. Tokunaga, *Following you home from school: A critical review and synthesis of research on cyberbullying victimization*, *Computers in Human Behavior* 2010, No. 26, pp. 277–287; J. Pyżalski, *Agresja elektroniczna i cyberbullying jako nowe ryzykowne zachowania młodzieży*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2012.

¹⁴ J. Pyżalski, *Agresja elektroniczna i cyberbullying jako nowe ryzykowne zachowania młodzieży*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków, 2012; J. Pyżalski, *Beyond Peer Cyberbullying – Involvement of Polish Adolescents in Different Kinds of Electronic Aggression*, *„Studia edukacyjne”* 2013, No. 28, pp. 147–167.

technical solutions, but also the social models of their use and significance for the users.

Quality diversification of the acts of electronic violence is directly related to the potential damages that such acts may cause. However, the victimogenic potential of such acts of aggression is varied. It includes qualitatively diverse phenomena, e. g. unpleasant comments during one-to-one on-line communication (e. g. chat), unpleasant public comments (e. g. social media website), disclosure of secrets of a given person via on-line communication, popularisation of embarrassing visual materials, or theft of a person's identity (impersonating somebody else on-line). Furthermore, it is worth noting that electronic aggression often co-exists with its' traditional variety¹⁵. Thus, some victims, irrespective of the fact whether such acts have high or low victimogenic potential, are attacked both on-line and off-line¹⁶, which may intensify the suffered consequences of aggression or violence, especially in the context of the same peer group.

Results of multiple studies show increasing significance of on-line image also in the context of cyberbullying. On the one hand, it is the on-line image that is one of the targets of attacks of cyberbullies, who in particular focus on the aspects of physical appearance. On the other hand, the role of controlled and conscious on-line self-presentation is indicated as one of the significant potential moderators limiting the escalation of the phenomenon¹⁷. In particular, sharing photos or video content presenting the victim in unfavourable light has significant victimogenic potential¹⁸.

¹⁵ e.g.: J. Pyżalski, *Agresja elektroniczna i cyberbullying jako nowe ryzykowne zachowania młodzieży*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2012.

¹⁶ e.g.: T. E. Waasdorp, C. P. Bradshaw, *The Overlap Between Cyberbullying and Traditional Bullying*, “Journal of Adolescent Health” 2015, No. 56(5), pp. 483–488. DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2014.12.002.

¹⁷ S. Berne, A. Frisén, J. Kling, *Appearance-related cyberbullying: a qualitative investigation of characteristics, content, reasons, and effects*, “BodyImage” 2014, No. 11(4), pp. 527–533. DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2014.08.006.

¹⁸ J. Barlińska, A. Szuster, M. Winiewski, *Cyberbullying among adolescent bystanders: role of the communication medium, form of violence, and empathy*, “Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology” 2013, 23, pp. 37–51. DOI: 10.1002/casp.2137 14.

Materials published on-line have specific properties, e. g. durability, copiability, and possibility of access to it on the part of the so-called invisible (but also unlimited) audience, as well as searchability¹⁹. This means that usually after a while, control over such material is lost and irrespective of the will of the involved persons (including original perpetrators), it starts to be commonly accessible. Awareness of this fact aggravates the situation of the victim, often making him/ her helpless. The fact of publication of materials and their extensive availability may be, on the one hand, treated as different understanding of repetitiveness than it was in the case of traditional bullying. On the one hand, it happens that even a one-time action of a perpetrator who published the materials results in repeated victimisation. On the other hand, the situation overwhelms the victim, who often has no idea about the modes of defence – thus, it is a specific situation of power imbalance, also present in the traditional bullying, however manifested with the use of other mechanisms (at least in some cases).

The main purpose of the article is to explore the significance of physical appearance of young adults in the process of peer cyberbullying (in particular being a victim), which often co-exists with its' traditional form in the light of the studies. On-line self-presentation, strongly related to the user's appearance, is nowadays considered an important factor intermediating in engagement in electronic aggression²⁰. It is worth emphasising that there is a common consent that certain sub-populations of young people are more exposed to becoming victims of violence, both with respect to the experience of traditional aggression and violence, as well as inflicted with the use of the new media. They include persons with disa-

¹⁹ D. Boyd, *Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Public in Teenage Social Life*, [in:] *McArthur Foundation on Digital Learning – Youth, Identity, and Digital Media Volume*, ed. D. Buckingham, MA, MIT Press, Cambridge.

²⁰ S. Berne, A. Frisé, J. Kling, *Appearance-related cyberbullying: a qualitative investigation of characteristics, content, reasons, and effects*, "BodyImage" 2014, No. 11(4), pp. 527–533. DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2014.08.006.

bilities and the so-called special education needs (e. g. chronically ill persons). Some disabilities or illnesses are accompanied by altered appearance and, what is obvious, greater “self-evident nature” of the situation of such persons and their visibility. In the presented paper, special attention will be paid to such cases²¹.

Cyberbullying related to publication of visual materials related to appearance is a special phenomenon forming a part of a broader context of on-line violence. On the other hand, it requires inclusion of certain specific aspects – it should be analysed in the context of lack of satisfaction with own appearance, objectively evaluated aspects related to the body (e. g. the Body Mass Index), and communication practices related to self-presentation concerning own appearance on the Internet.

Methodology

The main purpose of the presented study was to search for an answer to the following research questions:

1. What is the scale of cyberbullying and traditional bullying among young adults?

²¹ P. Plichta, *Socjalizacja i wychowanie dzieci i młodzieży z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w erze cyfrowej*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2017, p. 308; E. J. Cross, B. Richardson, T. Douglas, J. Vonkaenel-Flatt, *Virtual Violence: Protecting Children from Cyberbullying*, London, 2009, <http://www.beatbullying.org/static/cm/pdfs/virtual-violence-protecting-children-from-cyberbullying.pdf?335317101213> [access: 16.02.2017]; Sentenac M., Gavin A., Nic Gabhainn, et al., *Peer victimization and subjective health among students reporting disability or chronic illness in 11 Western countries*, “European Journal of Public Health” 2012, No. 23(3), pp. 421–426; A. Małkowska-Szkutnik, *Przemoc w szkole (bullying)*, [in:] *Zdrowie i zachowania zdrowotne młodzieży szkolnej w Polsce na tle wybranych uwarunkowań socjodemograficznych. Wyniki badań HBSC 2014*, ed. J. Mazur, Instytut Matki i Dziecka, Warsaw 2015, pp. 205–211), http://www.imid.med.pl/images/do-pobrania/Zdrowie_i_zachowania_zdrowotne_www.pdf [access: 16.02.2017].

- 1a. What are the differences in this respect between persons with disabilities or persons who suffer from altered appearance and other young people?
2. What is the dependence between on-line bullying and its' traditional variety?
3. What is the scale of convictions pertaining to fear of appearance assessment made by others and what are the differences in this respect between persons with disabilities and or persons with visible body damages and other young people?
4. What is the scale of editing activities aimed at improving the appearance of photos presenting the respondents that they post on social media websites?
- 4a. What are the differences in this respect between persons with disabilities or persons who suffer from altered appearance and other young people?

The utilised tools include a questionnaire designed for comparative international studies pertaining to the scale of aggression related to the Internet image on social media websites entitled "Appearance Matters On-line Questionnaire". It was prepared by the members of a working group called Social Media as part of an action organised by COST IS1210 "Appearance Matters: Tackling the Physical & Psychosocial Consequences of Dissatisfaction with Appearance" representing seven countries (Australia, Cyprus, Greece, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and Great Britain). The studies were conducted at the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017 among social study major students at Polish universities²².

Apart from the study on engagement in traditional bullying and cyberbullying (experienced in the course of the year preceding the study), the questionnaire was used to examine whether bullying referred to the physical appearance (body size, weight, figure, individual body parts, e. g. ears, nose, hair, skin, clothes and style of clothing). Furthermore, it contained measurement scales pertaining to:

²² In Poland, the results were collected by the Polish representatives of COST 1210: Piotr Plichta, Jacek Pyżalski and Julia Barlińska.

- intensity of using social media sites;
- convictions and fears related to own appearance;
- opinions about visual materials (e. g. photos, films) which other people post on their social media websites;
- undertaken editing activities with respect to photos with own image posted on-line;
- feelings and behaviour in relation to photos and/ or films posted on social media websites;
- disability or presence of visible body damages.

The examined group consisted of Polish students (N = 329) (entire international sample N = 1916) aged between 19 and 25. Women made up 70% of the sample and men 30%. Six percent of the respondents had visible body damages (e. g. skin damages, loss of hair) and every tenth person (11%) indicated that they suffered from a disability or a serious health problem.

Results

The respondents, referring to the questions pertaining to engagement (both in the role of a victim and the perpetrator) in peer violence, implemented traditionally and via social media websites, determined the frequency of experiencing such situations in the course of 12 months preceding the study (Table 1).

Perpetration of cyberbullying referred to 4% of respondents and was significantly related to the traditional bullying (Table 2). A similar regularity also refers to victimisation. Co-existence of both types of violence is also confirmed by other studies, which indicates a necessity of joint examination of both types of violence – on-line and off-line in studies and preventive activities.

Experiencing injustice via social media websites was not common and referred only to 2% of the respondents. In the discussed study, a rigorous degree of engagement in cyberbullying was employed, with a very narrow range indicating a significant victimisation potential of the experienced violence with high intensity, opera-

Table 1. Percentage distribution of engagement in traditional violence and cyberbullying and significance of differences on account of visible body damages and disabilities

	Never % ²³	Several times a year %	Several times a month %	Several times a week %	Body damages	Disabilities
Bullying - perpetration	86	11	2	2	Ni	Ni
Bullying - victimisation	82	12	0	6	p = ,006	p = ,004
Cyberbullying - perpetration	88	6	3	3	Ni	Ni
Cyberbullying - victimisation	89	8	1	1	p = ,01	p = ,004

p - significance level

ni - statistically insignificant

Table 2. The values of the chi-squared test with respect to the relation of roles in traditional bullying and cyberbullying

	cyberbullying - victimisation	cyberbullying - perpetration
traditional bullying - victimisation	p < ,0001 $\chi^2 = 322,6$; df = 9	p < ,0001 $\chi^2 = 193,5$; df = 9
traditional bullying - perpetration	p < ,0001 $\chi^2 = 372,7$; df = 9	p < ,0001 $\chi^2 = 95,2$; df = 9

p - level of significance, χ^2 - chi-square value, ni - statistically insignificant

df - number of degrees of freedom.

tionised as the selection of answers "Several times a month" or "Several times a week". It is worth nothing that there were many more persons involved in bullying and cyberbullying on lower levels of frequency - "several times a year" (approx. 11% in the case of

²³ In all tables in the article, the results are rounded to full percent, thus they do not always add up to 100%.

traditional bullying and victimisation and 6% and 8% respectively for cyberbullying and cyber-victimisation). Each of such situations may have serious effects that negatively impact various dimensions of functioning and experienced well-being.

Statistically significant values of chi-squared test were recorded for the relation between cyber-victimisation and problems with visible body damage or disability or a serious health problem (Table 1). Thus, such persons constitute a group that is most exposed both to traditional and Internet-mediated forms of violence. On the other hand, men were significantly more exposed to being victims – both in traditional bullying and cyberbullying.

As emphasised earlier, on-line self-presentation and appearance of users are currently considered important mediating factors that expose to victimisation via acts of electronic aggression. Image tends to be one of the dimensions related to the most frequent and most polarised social assessment. Fears related to this may constitute an important factor that influences initiation of specific activities aimed at improvement of on-line image (e. g. edition of photos to make one look better). With respect to some beliefs – fears related to the assessment of appearance by other people (Table 3), significant differences were observed between persons without disabilities and visible problems with appearance and the group of people with disabilities and/ or body damages, suffering from illnesses adversely impacting appearance.

In cases where differences were identified (with respect to fears: “I am stressed when I am aware that somebody is assessing my physical condition”, “I worry when people find faults in my appearance”, “When I meet new people I wonder what they think about my appearance”), their statistically greater intensity referred to the group of persons with disabilities. In the case of the group suffering from visible body damages, as compared to the group without such problems, also such fears were statistically significantly more intense (excluding the questionnaire item “I am stressed when I am aware that somebody is assessing my physical condition”).

Table 3. Scale of convictions pertaining to fears related to image assessment by other people and significance of differences on account of disability and diseases/damages affecting appearance

	Not at all %	A little bit %	Moderately %	A lot %	Greatly %	Appear- pear- ance ²⁴	Disa- bility ²⁵
I care what other people think about my appearance	14	29	39	16	2	Ni	Ni
I am stressed when I am aware that somebody is assessing my physical condition	17	27	29	20	7	,0001	,0004
I worry when people find faults in my appearance	26	28	24	18	4	Ni	,02
When I meet new people I wonder what they think about my appearance	24	26	27	16	6	,03	,03
I fear that others may notice my physical faults	31	27	25	11	7	,002	Ni
I think that opinions of others about my appearance are too important for me	44	18	18	12	8	Ni	Ni

p - significance level

ni - statistically insignificant

Analysis of the scale of editing activities (image improvement) with respect to photos posted on the Internet shows that the most frequent techniques used were filters changing the overall appearance of photos, regulation of photo brightness and removal of the red-eye effect. Seventeen percent of respondents frequently or always make changes to hide skin imperfections. Other editing procedures (Table 4) are used much less frequently and their frequent

²⁴ Significance of differences measured by chi-squared test among groups of persons indicating an illness or damages affecting physical appearance and other respondents (columns in Table 4 are marked in a similar manner).

²⁵ Significance of differences measured by chi-squared test among groups of persons indicating a disability or health conditions significantly affecting their life and other respondents (columns in Table 4 are marked in a similar manner).

use referred to 3 – 10% of respondents. However, if persons who sometimes or rarely improve their on-line image are to be included here, such results turn out to be much higher (e. g. in total 17% of respondents edit photos posted on social media websites in order to look thinner). Thus, the scale of activities improving overall appearance of the photo (e. g. colour, brightness, background) is greater than with respect to the activities directly targeted at the respondents' image (e. g. slimming).

Table 4. Popularity of photo editing techniques, improving the appearance of respondents and significance of differences on account of disability or illness/ body damages

Photo editing techniques	Never %	Rarely %	Sometimes %	Often %	Always %	Appearance	Disabilities
Use of filters to change the overall appearance of photos, e. g. changing colour to black and white, blurring or smoothing the image	25	17	23	26	8	Ni	Ni
Regulating the brightness of the photo (intensity of light and shadow)	27	19	23	24	7	Ni	,004
Removal of the red-eye effect	52	15	14	9	9	Ni	Ni
Making changes to hide imperfections (e. g. such as spots)	53	17	13	9	8	Ni	p = ,02
Editing or use of skin-smoothing apps	75	11	6	5	3	Ni	Ni
Highlighting facial features, e. g. cheekbones or colour or brightness of eyes	72	12	9	5	1	Ni	Ni
Making specific body parts look bigger or smaller	82	10	3	2	3	Ni	Ni
Making oneself look thinner	84	9	2	3	2	Ni	Ni
Teeth whitening	86	7	3	4	1	Ni	Ni
Making oneself look taller	90	4	3	2	1	Ni	,0001

p - significance level

ni - statistically insignificant

In a definite majority, no significant differences were observed between these groups and in cases where they occurred, greater scale of on-line image correcting activities (making changes to look bigger in the photo, to hide skin imperfections or to regulate the brightness of the photo) pertained to the group indicating a disability or a serious health problem affecting the appearance. However, on account of the small sample of respondents, such results are to be interpreted cautiously.

A question appears whether persons who intensely correct their image in the on-line context also undertake traditional activities (e. g. in order to accomplish the ideal figure). Krzysztof Puchalski²⁶ notices that health may be put in danger relatively often in order to accomplish attractive appearance (for example, every fifth adult person who put information about silhouette modelling to practice was aware of the fact that, at the same time, it might be detrimental to health). Such phenomenon constitutes a challenge in the area of health education and promotion of health at schools, implementation of tasks conducive to the conduct of a healthy lifestyle by young people and limiting the negative effects of socially popular models related to the desired appearance. It seems that in the case of persons strongly focused on their own image and having serious doubts with respect to being negatively assessed by others with respect to appearance, the potential consequences of negative cyberbullying-type behaviour on the part of other users of social media websites constitute a serious and real risk. This primarily relates to cyberbullying where the underlying cause is the appearance of victims or the victims' conviction that it had serious significance in such situation.

Recapitulation

Image-related cyberbullying among young adults is not a common phenomenon, which is also confirmed by other data; such be-

²⁶ K. Puchalski, *Internet a możliwości poprawy efektów edukacji zdrowotnej*, „Studia Edukacyjne” 2012, No. 23, p. 131.

haviour tends to reach its' peak in the period of adolescence (e. g. Smith, 2011). It is however clear – as shown in the study – that persons with disabilities and persons whose appearance was altered by disability experience it significantly more often. More frequent victimisation refers both to face-to-face aggression, as well as its' on-line version (cyberbullying). When analysing these results, it is worth remembering that they refer to students. In this age group, as indicated by the majority of studies, interpersonal peer violence is lower than in comparison to the earlier period, in particular adolescence (Pyżalski, 2012). This allows for assuming that many victims of peer violence at this stage had also experienced similar situations at earlier stages.

Special attention should be paid to on-line violence. In spite of the fact that the study shows its' relatively low scale, yet on account of the potential negative individual and social effects resulting from the modern significance of “digital self-presentation”, it is necessary to undertake further diagnostic and preventive activities²⁷, also on the level of work with the community of students.

Attractive physical appearance is one of the most significant components of self-presentation and may often turn to be the key to interpersonal success. Furthermore, the role of the media which nourish the obsessive dreams about ideal appearance is undoubtedly significant in the popularisation of physical attractiveness standards in the modern media world²⁸. Nevertheless, the mode of defining this standard tends to be varied, e. g. determined by the image of thin models from catwalks, but also the practice of ritualising purposeful body damages, e. g. scarification.

In the face of such data, the obtained result which shows that fear of assessment of physical appearance in persons with disabilities or body damages affecting appearance is significantly more

²⁷ S. Berne, A. Frisé, J. Kling, *Appearance-related cyberbullying: a qualitative investigation of characteristics, content, reasons, and effects*, “BodyImage” 2014, No. 11(4), pp. 527–533. DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2014.08.006.

²⁸ N. Rumsey, *Psychological consequences of appearance dissatisfaction*. In: *International Congress of Paediatric Dentistry*, Glasgow, Scotland, UK, 2015.

frequent than in the case of the rest of the population, is not surprising. As shown by our study, this also refers to such dimensions as, e. g., “fear when meeting new people in relation to the fact of what they may think about my appearance” or “being stressed by the assessment of physical condition”. On-line self-presentation offers – thanks to the various options of technical modification of materials – possibilities of improving own image. As shown in our study, they are used quite commonly in the entire population of students, but some categories of such modifications are applied more frequently by persons from specific groups that were distinguished by us. Such differences primarily referred to persons with disabilities and pertained to more frequent editing with respect to the regulation of light, corrections of appearance imperfections or showing the person as bigger/ smaller. The differences showed here indicate the necessity of taking into account specific victimisation mechanisms for this group in the area of cyberbullying, along with special preventive activities addressed to this group, also at earlier stages of education. This is particularly important, as the trend of focusing on the physical appearance results in the fact that the process of building self-image on-line often acquires a risky nature. Self-presentation is replete with clear stimuli, which may easily attract the attention of cyberbullies, e. g. in the form of intensely negative, vulgar comments testing the borders of social standards, or naked photos. Such behaviour often leads to the accomplishment of goals and becomes the source of popularity, even though not necessarily the type of popularity that the person publishing the photo was hoping for. It forms a part of the catalogue of risky on-line behaviour, carrying a significant victimisation potential²⁹.

Special attention should be devoted to young people who suffer from visible body damages, disabilities or who have serious health

²⁹ S. Berne, A. Frisén, J. Kling, Appearance-related cyberbullying: a qualitative investigation of characteristics, content, reasons, and effects, “BodyImage” 2014, No. 11(4), pp. 527–533. DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2014.08.006; M. R. Leary, R. M. Kowalski, Impression Management: A Literature Review and Two Component Model *Psychological Bulletin*, 1990.

issues. It is worth educating such persons, stimulating the awareness of building own on-line image and paving a path for proper stances of emotional resistance with respect to the assessment on the part of other people. It is interesting to note that certain researchers acknowledge that³⁰ many people with disabilities make positive integration of own disability with a positive self-concept and own image. Unfortunately, those who do not succeed, develop a negative self-image, at the same time sustaining serious consequences, e. g. of psychological and adjustment nature, which may be related to being prone to cyberbullying.

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³⁰ e.g.: J. M. Behel, B. D. Rybarczyk, *Physical Disability and Body Image in Adults*, [in:] *Encyclopaedia of Body Image and Human Appearance* 2012, pp. 644–649, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-384925-0.00101-2> [access: 16.02.2017].

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