Even if they don't say it to you, it hurts too: Internalized homonegativity in LGBTQ+ cyberbullying among adolescents

Aunque no te lo digan, también duele: La homonegatividad internalizada en el ciberacoso LGBTQ+ en adolescentes

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying is a problem that is more prevalent and serious among LGBTQ+ people. Previous research has mostly analysed sexual orientation and homophobic cyberaggression. Hence, becomes necessary to consider sex-gender diversity as a whole and aggressions of a general nature. Moreover, existing prejudices underline the need to consider homonegativity as a key variable in this type of cyberviolence. This sequential mixed study explores, in a first qualitative step with focus groups, perceptions on the characterisation of LGBTQ+ cyberbullying and, in a second quantitative step, cybervictimisation in terms of affective-sexual, bodily and gender diversity, and the possible moderating role of internalised homonegativity. The qualitative study involved 175 students and the quantitative study involved 1,971 students aged 12-18 from secondary schools in Andalusia (Spain). Qualitative results identified valuable dimensions of cyberbullying, such as collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation. Quantitative results revealed differences in collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation according to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. It also highlights the moderation of internalised homonegativity, with those at a low level being more sensitive to collective LGBTQ+ cyberaggression. LGBTQ+ cyberbullying is made visible as a construct that includes various types of aggressions aimed at the whole spectrum of affective-sexual diversity and emphasises the need to address internalised homonegativity in psychoeducational interventions involving all students.

RESUMEN

El ciberacoso es un problema con mayor frecuencia y gravedad entre las personas LGBTQ+. La investigación previa ha analizado, mayoritariamente, la orientación sexual y las ciberagresiones homófobas, siendo necesario incorporar la diversidad sexo-genérica en su conjunto y las agresiones de carácter general. Además, los prejuicios existentes subrayan la necesidad de considerar la homonegatividad como variable clave en este tipo de ciberviolencia. Este estudio mixto secuencial explora, en una primera etapa cualitativa con grupos focales, las percepciones sobre la caracterización del ciberacoso LGBTQ+ y, en una segunda etapa cuantitativa, la cibervictimización en función de la diversidad afectivo-sexual, corporal y de género, y el posible papel moderador de la homonegatividad internalizada. En el estudio cualitativo participaron 175 estudiantes y en el cuantitativo 1.971 de 12 a 18 años de centros de educación secundaria de Andalucía (España). Los resultados cualitativos identificaron dimensiones valiosas del ciberacoso, como la cibervictimización LGBTQ+ colectiva. Los resultados cuantitativos revelaron diferencias en la cibervictimización LGBTQ+ colectiva según la orientación sexual, la identidad y la expresión de género. También destaca la moderación de la homonegatividad internalizada, siendo quienes tienen un nivel bajo más sensibles a las ciberagresiones LGBTQ+ colectivas. Se visibiliza el ciberacoso LGBTQ+ como un constructo que incluye diversos tipos de agresiones dirigidas a todo el espectro de la diversidad afectivo-sexual y se enfatiza la necesidad de incluir la homonegatividad internalizada en las intervenciones psicoeducativas con todo el alumnado.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the identity of young people and adolescents is formed by both physical and online environments (Mascheroni et al., 2015). Their social life takes place in a mutually dependent continuum of virtual and face-to-face relationships (Wright, 2020). In fact, in many countries, such as Spain, the time they spend using digital platforms has doubled in two years, from 2018 to 2020. As well as accessing information, adolescents and young people are constantly interacting online with others (Smahel et al., 2020).

This widespread use of the Internet at an increasingly early age has facilitated the transfer of certain social problems from the physical world into online relationships. This is the case of cyberbullying, one of the phenomena that has caused most social concern due to its impact and possible negative consequences (Campbell & Bauman, 2018).

Cyberbullying shares the same main features as bullying. It is based on unjustified, intentional, and repeated aggression towards another individual who does not feel able to defend themself, based on a clear imbalance of power or dominance (Menin et al., 2021; Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014). However, the online environment radically changes some of these characteristics, making cyberbullying a unique phenomenon in its own right.

In the online environment, there are no limits of space or time in which the aggression can be perpetrated, so the victim is continuously exposed to being attacked, and the aggression is witnessed by a much wider audience (Kowalski et al., 2019). Although cyberbullying is slightly less frequent than bullying, with a prevalence varying from 5% to 50% compared to bullying which varies from 20% to 60% (Rodríguez-Hidalgo & Hurtado-Mellado, 2019), neither form of bullying is distributed equally throughout the population, and socially discriminated groups are the most vulnerable (Earnshaw et al., 2018).

1.1. Sex-gender diversity and cybervictimisation

Discrimination based on gender or sex diversity is a "structural" problem which makes people who diverge from heteronormative standards more vulnerable to bullying (Angoff & Barnhart, 2021; Jonas et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2017). This discrimination also occurs in online contexts (Abreu & Kenny, 2018), leading to invalidation of identity, social exclusion, and even the criminalisation of people from sexual minorities (Döring et al., 2022). This is the case of minors and young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, questioning or unsure of their sexual orientation, consider themselves 'queer' or do not conform to the binary patterns of sex and/or gender, and any other biological condition, orientation, identity or gender expression, for example, intersexuality (hereinafter, LGBTQ+; Espelage et al., 2019).

The results suggest that LGBTQ+ people are more frequently victims and suffer more than their heterosexual cisgender counterparts, both worldwide (Jonas et al., 2022) and on a national level (Llorent et al., 2016). In fact, previous studies have shown that the prevalence of victimisation depends not only on sexual orientation, but also on other dimensions such as gender identity and gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2018) and that adolescents and young people perceive transgender people and those recognised as gender-incongruent as the most frequently victimised (Gower et al., 2018).

However, despite the fact that cyberbullying has been shown to have more serious consequences than traditional bullying (Kwan et al., 2020), its study in relation to the LGBTQ+ community is still in its infancy. Due to inconsistencies in the use of terminology, the systematic reviews produced to date have found that the prevalence of cybervictimisation among LGBTQ+ youth varies enormously between 10.5% and 71.3% (Abreu & Kenny, 2018). In fact, these figures could be even higher, since the studies tend to analyse either homophobic aggression or general aggression exclusively, and not both types together (Rodríguez-Hidalgo & Hurtado-Mellado, 2019).

In addition, with respect to sex-gender diversity, they usually only deal with sexual orientation (Elipe et al., 2022; Garaigordobil & Larrain, 2020). It is therefore crucial to study cyberbullying in LGBTQ+ by analysing young people's perception of how these acts of aggression take place and the different dimensions of sexuality (sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression), as well as the underlying beliefs.

1.2. The role of internalised homonegativity in LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation

LGBTQ+ cyberbullying is a type of bullying based on the stigma attached to beliefs and social ideas that devalue sexual and gender minorities (Earnshaw et al., 2018). Young people, whether LGBTQ+ or not, grow up in environments mainly dominated by the heteronorm or heterosexism, imbued with homonegativity (Russell & Bohan, 2006). Here, the social messages are that heterosexuality is the single most desirable form of sexuality and that it is acceptable to discriminate against any other form of sexual diversity. These environments lead to internalised homonegativity, in other words, the inevitable internalisation of these messages due to the reiteration of generalised and largely unreflective cultural beliefs (Herek, 2007; Russell & Bohan, 2006), and result in feelings of shame and discomfort about belonging to sexual minorities (Puckett et al., 2016).

Internalised homonegativity has been shown to be a risk factor for involvement in face-to-face violence (Berg et al., 2016) and justification of violence (Quirk et al., 2018), as well as having a detrimental impact on mental health (Puckett et al., 2016). However, it is vital to analyse the relationship between this type of prejudice and our awareness about, and identification of virtual phenomena such as cyberbullying and, in particular, cybervictimisation, whether in general, or directed specifically against LGBTQ+.

In recent years, progress has been made in taking action to address cyberbullying, such as the introduction of evidence-based psychoeducational programs (Del-Rey et al., 2018), or the creation of LGBTI government regulations and innovative experiences (Pichardo & Puche-Cabezas, 2019). Despite this, evidence-based psychoeducational programs that focus on this specific type of cyberbullying are still scarce, and it is therefore essential to study the role of internalised homonegativity in this phenomenon, in order to lay the foundations for future educational progress in this field.

1.3. The present study

Studying LGBTQ+ cyberbullying requires a comprehensive analysis of cybervictimisation based on sexual-gender diversity as a whole, to obtain an integrated vision that will enable us to develop psychoeducational strategies to prevent and intervene in this form of cyberaggression (Abreu & Kenny, 2018). For this reason, in this research, we used a mixed sequential qualitative and quantitative methodology (Sampieri, 2018) in order to explore perceptions of cybervictimisation in a community sample of adolescents comprising both LGBTQ+ and cisgender heteronormative (hereinafter, CH).

The specific objectives of our exploratory research were, in the qualitative stage, (1) to find out the pupils' perceptions about LGBTQ+ cyberbullying and the type of aggression it involves, which, in turn, provides a basis for the quantitative study. In the quantitative stage, the research objectives were (2) to analyse general cybervictimisation and collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation based on affective-sexual, bodily and gender diversity (from now on, ASBGD) both as a whole and in its different dimensions: sexual orientation, identity and gender expression; and (3) to examine the possible moderating role of internalised homonegativity between general cybervictimisation and collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation (feeling hurt by cyberbullying directed at LGBTQ+ people), taking into account ASBGD.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

In the qualitative study, 175 adolescents took part, with an age range between 12 and 18 (60% girls, 40% boys; $M_{age}=14.12$, $SD_{age}=1.88$), from eight secondary state schools in Andalusia (Spain). In total, 27 discussion groups took place: 12 focus groups in 1st year of secondary school (aged 12-13), two in 2nd year (aged 13-14), three in 3rd year (aged 13-14), five in 4th year (aged 15-16); three in 1st year of High School/Baccalaureate (age 16-17) and two in 2nd year of High School/Baccalaureate (age 17-18).

The quantitative study included 1,971 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 ($M_{age}=15.01$, $SD_{age}=1.70$) from 12 secondary state schools in Andalusia (Spain). 14.1% were in 1st year of secondary, 18% in 2nd year, 19.2% in 3rd year, 17.3% in 4th year and 31.5% in High School/Baccalaureate or Professional Training. Table 1 shows the details of the sexual diversity of the participants.

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample for the quantitative study		
Variables	**N**	**%**
Sex		
Female	1068	54.3
Male	898	45.7
Gender Identity		
CIS boy	850	43.8
CIS girl	1000	51.5
Transgender boy	18	0.9
Transgender girl	22	1.1
Bigender	26	1.3
Agender	24	1.2
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	1487	78.0
Lesbian/gay	66	3.5
Bisexual	147	7.7
Pansexual	84	4.4
Asexual	26	1.4
Questioning	97	5.1
Gender Expression		
Concordant	1052	55.4
Androgynous	789	41.5
Discordant	58	2.9
ASBGD		
LGBTQ+	452	24.3
CH	1405	75.7

2.2. Instruments

Semi-structured script. A discussion guide was used in the focus groups to explore perceptions about LGBTQ+ cyberbullying and types of aggression (see in: https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.21724160.v4). The guide consisted of 20 open-ended questions divided into four dimensions: sex-gender diversity in schools, LGBTQ+-phobic aggression and bullying, associated factors, and the impact of aggression, and contained questions such as: "Why do you think these situations occur? Why do some people attack others because of their diversity?".

Cybervictimisation. To assess cybervictimisation suffered over the past two months, we used the cybervictimisation subscale from the European Cyberbullying Intervention Project Questionnaire (ECIP-Q; Del-Rey et al., 2015), which contains 11 Likert-type items ($\alpha_{cybervictimisation} = .81$) with five response options, ranging from "Never" to "Yes, more than once a week". The statements referred to the frequency of being the victim of online aggression, such as insults, threats, or spreading rumours. Sample question: "Someone has used swear words or insulted me on the Internet, social media or WhatsApp".

Collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation. As a result of the information obtained in the first qualitative stage with focus groups, an ad hoc Likert-type item was added to assess collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation: "I have felt upset because someone posted a meme on the Internet, social media or WhatsApp making fun of someone or something related to the world of LGBT".

Internalised homonegativity. To assess negative beliefs and feelings regarding LGB orientations, from oneself or from others, we used the Spanish version (Vinces, 2016) of the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale (LGBIS; Mohr & Kendra, 2011), which includes five Likert-type items ($\alpha = .77$) with five response options, ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree". Sample item: "If it were possible, I would choose to be heterosexual." The research team also added a sixth item: "My life would be easier if I were heterosexual" ($\alpha = .78$). In addition, the scale instructions were tweaked slightly so they could also be completed by non-LGB people, by asking them to respond through the eyes of how an LGB person would answer, which involves attributing internalised homonegativity.

Sex and gender identity. Following previous studies (Bradlow et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2018), a direct item was used to assess sex identity with the response options "male" or "female". For gender identity, a direct item was used: "Do you consider yourself...", with the response options being "boy", "girl", "both" or "none".

Sexual attraction. In line with other researchers (Collier et al., 2013), we followed the recommendations given by Austin et al. (2008) to measure sexual attraction with the item: "Generally, do you feel romantic and/or sexual attraction towards...", with the response options: "boys", "girls", "boys and girls", "people, regardless of their sex or gender", "neither boys nor girls" or "I'm not sure".

Gender expression. To assess gender expression, we used an item adapted from the Socially Assigned Gender Nonconformity (Wylie et al., 2010) to ask pupils how they think others regard them in relation to their gender expression: "Our appearance, or the way we dress, and our gestures (the way we speak, move our hands, walk...) can affect what others think of us. In general, how do you think people perceive your appearance, way of dressing and gestures?" The answers were positioned on a continuum of seven options, ranging from "Very feminine", through "Equally feminine and masculine", to "Very masculine". The inclusion of this item has added value, given its importance as a risk factor and the fact that it has rarely been included in previous studies, as it is difficult to evaluate.

2.3. Procedure

This study was approved by the University of Jaén Ethics Committee (DIC.18/1.PRY). Incidental sampling was used. Collaboration was requested from a large number of schools via email and telephone. In total, 19 secondary state schools agreed to participate and, before the data was collected, informed consent was obtained from the families and pupils.

The first qualitative stage (Objective 1) took place in eight schools, with 27 focus groups of four to 10 participants each from April to June 2021 (23 face-to-face and four online), in sessions lasting approximately 50 minutes each. Four out of the eight schools had no previous experience of conducting awareness-raising activities about sexual diversity (in total, 13 focus groups), whereas four did (14 focus groups). At the beginning of each focus group, the pupils were asked to use an alias for the recording, and it was emphasised that the aim was to learn about their perceptions of everyday school life and not their personal experiences. The main focus for exploration in the focus groups, therefore, was the pupils' general perception about LGBTQ+ cyberbullying and the type of aggression involved. The discussions were recorded, and the audio was later transcribed. Using a "bottom-up" approach, we used the views expressed by the pupils, for example, the allusion to collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation, to specify the choice and extension of the instruments used for the quantitative study, which allowed us to contextualize the phenomenon better.

For the second quantitative stage (Objectives 2 & 3), the study had a cross-sectional, prospective, and unified ex post facto design (Montero & León, 2007), with a fixed minimum number of LGBTQ+ pupils, taking into account the percentages found in previous studies (Garaigordobil & Larrain, 2020), as well as the size required to avoid exceeding a sample error of +5.5%, with a confidence interval of 95.44% (Osuna et al., 1991). We used two formats for the data collection: online, via a SurveyMonkey link, or using a printed questionnaire. In both cases, the pupils completed a series of questions during school hours about their involvement in cyberbullying in general, as well as in LGBTQ+ cyberbullying, their experience of LGBTQ+ prejudice, and their appreciation of ASBGD in their school. During the data collection, we stressed the anonymous and voluntary nature of the study, the confidential treatment of the data, and the importance of answering the questions honestly.

2.4. Data analysis

In the first stage, we explored the qualitative data through thematic analysis and basic descriptive analysis, using the Nvivo v.1.6.1 software. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying and analysing themes within data, which organizes and describes the data in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2014). To provide a result for Objective 1, we first identified the most relevant dimensions to include in the quantitative study, which were as follows: a) various types of aggression, from general personalised aggression to LGBTQ+-phobic aggression towards other people; and b) the full spectrum of sex-gender diversity, including sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

In the second stage, we used SPSS v.26.0 software to analyse the quantitative data. In the quantitative study, to meet Objective 2, we calculated the mean values of cybervictimisation and internalised homonegativity, and then recoded the variables related to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and the integral ASBGD variable. Specifically, sexual orientation was calculated by crossing data from the variables of gender identity and sexual attraction to obtain the values for "heterosexual", "lesbian/gay", "bisexual", "pansexual", "asexual" and "questioning". Gender identity was calculated

by crossing the data of the variables sex and gender to obtain the values for "cis boys", "cis girls", "transgender boys", "transgender girls", "bigender" and "agender". Gender expression was calculated by crossing the gender identity and expression data, obtaining the values for "concordant", "androgynous" and "discordant". From this data, the integral ASBGD variable was calculated by crossing sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, making a distinction between "LGBTQ+" and "CH". The first category included people whose orientation, identity, or expression diverged from heteronormative ones, that is, lesbian/gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, questioning, trans, and heterosexual cisgender people with discordant gender expression; the latter included heterosexual cisgender people and those whose expression agreed with their gender or which was androgynous. Next, we performed the basic descriptive analyses and comparisons of means, using non-parametric tests, given the non-normality of the data. To obtain this, we used Student's t-test for independent samples (or, where appropriate, Welch's t-test) to analyse general cybervictimisation and collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation based on ASBGD. Cohen's d effect sizes were also calculated.

Likewise, one-factor ANOVA tests (or, where appropriate, Welch's t test) were performed to analyse the differences in means between general cybervictimisation and collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation based on sexual orientation, identity, and gender expression. Effect sizes were calculated using eta squared, and post hoc comparisons were made using the Games-Howell test. To give a result for Objective 3, we designed a simple theoretical moderation model (Figure 1), in which we looked at the moderating role of internalised homonegativity (W) in the relationship between general cybervictimisation (independent variable, X) and collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation (dependent variable, Y). Model 1 was tested using the PROCESS v.4.0 macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2017). First, to define Model 1, 10,000 bootstrap samples were selected, using a 95% confidence interval. Next, following the recommendations by Davidson & MacKinnon (1993), we included standard error estimators consistent with heteroscedasticity (HC3) to examine the interaction effect on the variables included in the model. To run the model, we decided to focus the continuous variables on a mean of "0" to make it easier to interpret the direct and indirect effects (Hayes, 2017), as well as integrating the Johnson and Neyman technique to examine their region of significance and simple slopes (Carden et al., 2017). Direct and indirect effects were considered significant if $p<.05$ and only when the lower and upper limits of the confidence interval did not contain the value "0". This theoretical model was tested on the general sample, with ASBGD as the covariate (0=LGBTQ+ and 1=CH), and it was then repeated with both subsamples, LGBTQ+ and CH, respectively, omitting the ASBGD covariate in both cases.
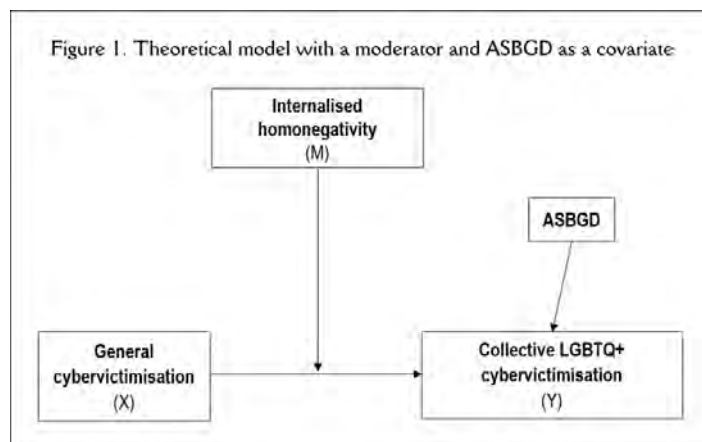
Note. X=independent variable; Y=dependent variable; M=moderator.

3. Results

The following subsections present the qualitative and quantitative results of our exploratory research. The first subsection shows the results of the focus groups, the second specifies the results of the comparisons of means and variances, and the third gives the results of the moderation.

3.1. Perceptions of the nature of LGBTQ+ cyberbullying

The information extracted from the focus groups helped to identify the dimensions which, in the pupils' eyes, are the most relevant for researching LGBTQ+ cyberbullying. The most important of these included those related to the nature of sex-gender diversity, the vulnerable groups of cyberbullying according to ASBGD, the types of aggression, and the reasons for LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation.

When asked about the nature of sex-gender diversity, the participants highlighted gender identity and expression as key aspects, as well as sexual orientation. However, they also showed prejudices, such as the association between gender expression and sexual orientation, and stereotypes about what is masculine and what is feminine. The following examples illustrate some of these perceptions:

- "There are stereotypes and you're supposed to comply with them. Men are meant to be, like, more masculine and women more feminine, but I don't agree with that. I think all of us are people and it doesn't matter if you like someone or not, or if you act in a more masculine or more feminine way" (Boy, 13 years old).
- "Some people get noticed because of their gestures, but some of these can be misinterpreted. For example, I've got two friends who are like this, and they don't have to be lesbians. But there are other people who, even if they don't say so specifically, you can tell by what they're like, by how they speak..." (Boy, 13 years old).

Regarding the groups most vulnerable to cyberbullying, there were young people in all the focus groups who reported that people from sexual minorities are more likely to be attacked, especially boys. The following examples illustrate some of these perceptions:

- "I think people who show their sexual diversity get attacked more than people who are heterosexual (...) and I think trans people tend to get bullied even more" (Girl, 15 years old).
- "I think that men attack other men more" (Girl, 16 years old).

Among the different types of cyberbullying attacks, they considered the most common to be verbal aggression or social exclusion and pointed out that their heterosexual cisgender peers tended to play down behaviour considered offensive by LGBTQ+ youth through jokes or normalisation. Likewise, in various focus groups, acts of aggression towards collectives were mentioned in which a person witnesses' situations of cyberbullying towards other people due to their affective-sexual diversity. The following examples illustrate some of these perceptions:

- "If a type of orientation is used as an insult, then clearly, the person who it's aimed at, or someone who hears it without it being directed at them, thinks, well, this must be bad, I'd better shut up and keep it to myself" (Girl, 15 years).
- "There are a few kids in class who tease each other and call each other 'puff' and things like that. I've sometimes wanted to tell them not to make those comments, because although they say it as a joke, they're perfectly capable of saying it to someone on the street because of their clothes and make that person upset. Sometimes, even though they don't say it to you, and it's aimed at someone else, it still bothers you" (Boy, 13 years old).

As regards the reasons for cybervictimisation towards LGBTQ+ youth, they highlighted internalised homonegativity and negative beliefs and emotions towards the LGBTQ+ collective. The following examples illustrate some of these perceptions:

- "Apart from the fact that you see your insecurities reflected in the other person, the way you're brought up is also a big influence. If you grow up in a house where everyone is very traditional and where being gay or lesbian is seen as wrong, you grow up with those ideas" (Girl, 15 years old).
- "Because many people say that if you were born a man and want to be a woman, you have to just put up with it. You have to just be a man, because it's not 'natural', in inverted commas" (Girl, 13 years old).

3.2. General cybervictimisation and collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation, according to ASBGD

Taking ASBGD into account, no significant differences were found in cybervictimisation experienced in the form of general aggression aimed at LGBTQ+ and CH youth (t[574.65]=−1.72, p=.085;

$M_{LGBTQ+}=0.23$, DT= 0.34; $M_{CH}=0.27$, SD=0.38), but differences were found in collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation (t[574.65]=9.65, p<.001, d=.49), with a medium effect. LGBTQ+ youth feel significantly more affected by LGBTQ+-related cyberbullying ($M_{LGBTQ+}=1.10$, SD=1.35; $M_{CH}=0.45$, SD=0.87).

With regard to the dimensions of ASBGD, significant differences were found based on all of them in collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation. In particular, regarding gender identity, the greatest differences in collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation were found among cis girls, who scored higher than cis boys and transgender girls.

According to sexual orientation, pansexual, lesbian/gay, and bisexual people were the most affected and, regarding gender expression, people with discordant or androgynous gender expression scored highest in this type of cybervictimisation. As for general cybervictimisation, although significant differences were found based only on gender identity and sexual orientation, the effect size was minimal (Table 2).

Table 2. Differences in mean values for cybervictimisation according to gender identity, sexual orientation and gender expression									
Variables	General cybervictimisation (N=1,939)					Collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation (N=1,938)				
	M (SD)	F	p	η²	Post Hoc Games-Howell	M (SD)	F	p	η²	Post Hoc Games-Howell
Gender identity										
Cis boy	0.24 (0.36)				-	0.36 (0.85)				a < b
Cis girl	0.28 (0.38)				-	0.79 (1.12)				d < a < b
Transgender boy	0.27 (0.29)	2.59	.034	.007	-	0.89 (1.32)	19.74	.000	.050	-
Transgender girl	0.15 (0.21)				-	0.32 (0.65)				d < a
Bigender	0.45 (0.81)				-	1.00 (1.30)				-
Agender	0.34 (0.74)				-	1.38 (1.61)				-
Sexual orientation										
Heterosexual	0.27 (0.38)				-	0.45 (0.88)				a < f < c < b < e
Lesbian/gay	0.18 (0.26)				-	1.29 (1.44)				a < d < b
Bisexual	0.25 (0.32)	3.18	.009	.004	-	1.16 (1.35)	22.84	.000	.096	a < d < c
Asexual	0.15 (0.21)				-	0.50 (0.81)				d < c < b < e
Pansexual	0.33 (0.47)				-	1.61 (1.48)				a < d < f < e
Questioning	0.22 (0.36)				-	0.90 (1.20)				a < f < e
Gender expression										
Concordant	0.25 (0.37)				-	0.40 (0.82)				a < c < b
Discordant	0.27 (0.35)	2.83	.059	.003	-	0.93 (1.37)	48.10	.000	.051	a < b
Androgynous	0.29 (0.41)				-	0.87 (1.20)				a < c

Note. M=anthmetic mean; SD=standard deviation; Welch's F=F, except in general cybervictimisation*Gender expression, where ANOVA was used; p=significance; η²=eta squared.

3.3. Internalised homonegativity in the general population

Model 1, from the general sample, was statistically significant, $F_{(4, 1882)}=57.67$, p<.001, accounting for 16.02% of the variability in the data. ASBGD showed a negative effect on collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation [$\beta=-.634$, $t_{(4, 1882)}=-9.86$, p<.001], indicating that the LGBTQ+ subsample has a higher risk of feeling hurt in this way.

- Direct effects: As can be seen in Table 3, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analyses revealed that overall cybervictimisation had a positive effect [$\beta=.776$, $t_{(4, 1882)}=9.57$, p <.001] on collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation, while internalised homonegativity had a negative effect [$\beta=-.139$, $t_{(4, 1882)}=-5.84$, p<.001]. In other words, a high level of general cybervictimisation and a low level of internalised homonegativity have a strong relationship with feeling hurt or considering oneself a victim of cyberaggression towards the LGBTQ+ collective.

Table 3. Direct and indirect effects				
Effect	B	EE	95% IC	
			LI	LS
Model 1, general sample (n=1,887)				
General cybervictimisation (GC)	0.776***	.081	0.617	0.936
Internalised Homonegativity (IH)	−0.139***	.024	−0.186	−0.093
GC*IH	−0.188*	.090	−0.363	−0.012
ASBGD	−0.634***	.064	−0.760	−0.508
Model 2, LGBTQ+ subsample (n=460)				
GC	1.447***	.242	0.970	1.923
IH	−0.124	.074	−0.269	0.021
GC*IH	0.033	.335	−0.624	0.691
Model 3, CH subsample (n=1,427)				
GC	0.597***	.083	0.435	0.759
IH	−0.146***	.023	−0.191	−0.101
GC*IH	−0.178*	.089	−0.353	−0.003

Note[1]. Analysis performed using the PROCESS v.4.0 macro for SPSS (Model 1; Hayes, 2017).
Note[2]. Abbreviations: CI, confidence interval; SE, standard error; LL, lower limit; UL, upper limit.
Note[3]. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

• Indirect effects: as can be observed in Figure 2, the indirect effect revealed a negative moderation of internalised homonegativity in the association between general cybervictimisation and collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation [$\beta = -.188$, $t(4,1882) = -2.10$, $p < .05$]. In other words, low scores in internalised homonegativity, or in attribution of internalised homonegativity, moderate the association between being a victim of general cyberaggression or feeling hurt by cyberaggression related to the LGBTQ+ collective.

Figure 2. Effect of internalised homonegativity on the association of general cybervictimisation and collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation in the total sample, with ASBGD as covariate
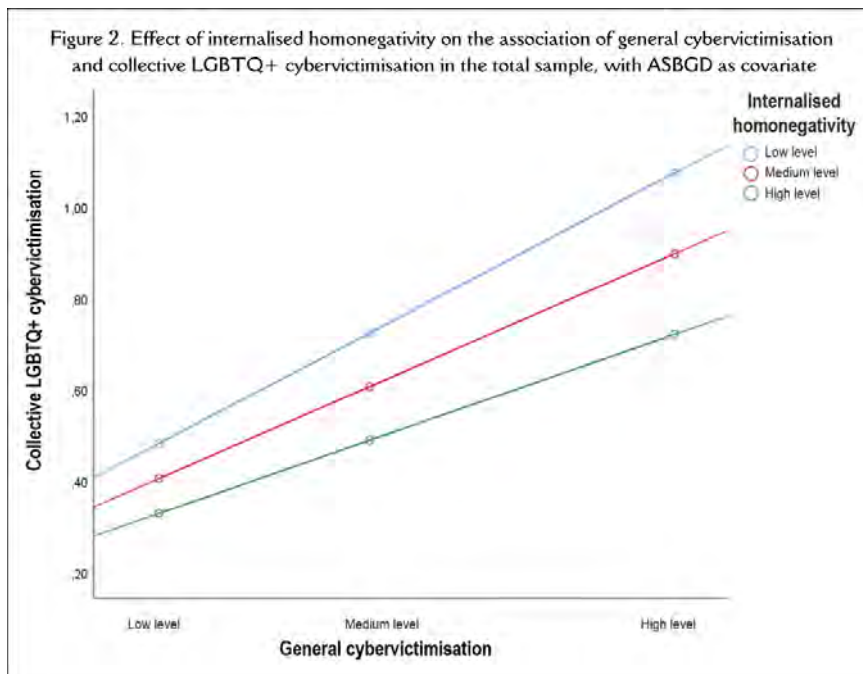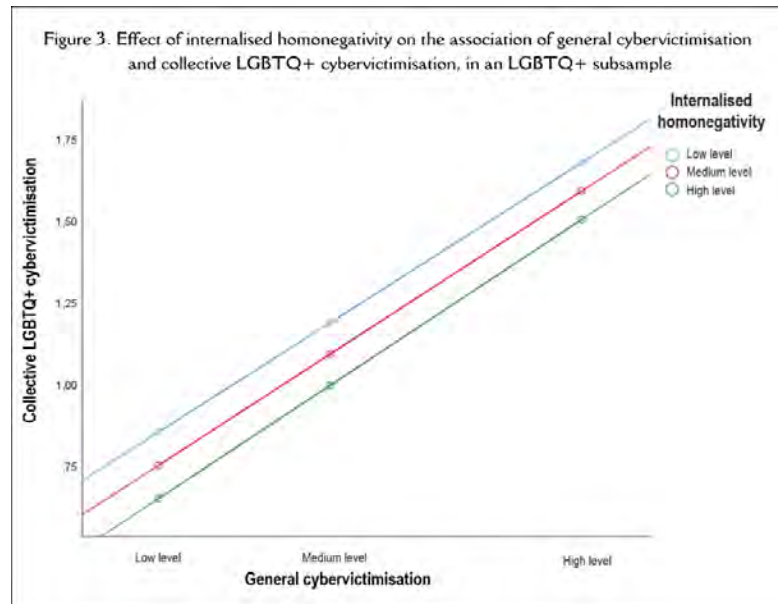
3.4. Internalised homonegativity in relation to ASBGD

Model 2, from the LGBTQ+ subsample, was not statistically significant, $F(1,456) = .010$, $p = .921$ (Figure 3), which indicates that, among LGBTQ+ people, feeling harmed by collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation is not explained by general cybervictimisation or internalised homonegativity.

Model 3, from the CH subsample, was statistically significant, $F(3.1423) = 30.68$, $p < .001$, accounting for 9.25% of the variability of the data.

• Direct effects: As shown in Table 3, the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analyses revealed that overall cybervictimisation had a positive effect [$\beta = .597$, $t(3.1423) = 7.23$, $p < .001$] and internalised homonegativity a negative effect [$\beta = -.146$, $t(3.1423) = -6.34$, $p < .001$] on

collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation. In other words, a high level of general cybervictimi-sation and a low level of attribution of internalised homonegativity have a strong relationship with feeling harmed or considering oneself a victim of cyberaggression towards the LGBTQ+ collective.

Figure 3. Effect of internalised homonegativity on the association of general cybervictimisation and collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation, in an LGBTQ+ subsample

• Indirect effects: as can be seen in Figure 4, the indirect effect revealed a negative moderation of internalised homonegativity in the association between general cybervictimisation and collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation [$\beta=-.178$, $t(3.1423)=-1.99$, $p<.05$]. That is, low scores in the attribution of internalised homonegativity, or perception of the experience of the LGBTQ+ collective, moderate the association between being a victim of general cyberaggression and feeling, in addition, harmed by LGBTQ+ cyberaggression.

Figure 4. Effect of internalised homonegativity on the association of general cybervictimisation and collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation, in the CH subsample
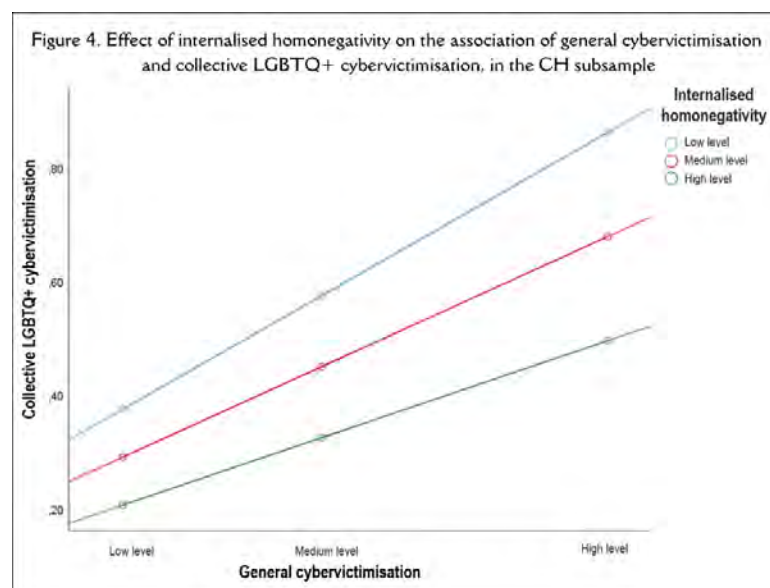
4. Discussion and conclusions

In many societies, the ASBGD inherent in the human condition poses a challenge to the prevailing heteronormativity. Thus, sexual orientations and non-normative gender identities and expressions have sometimes fallen victim of new forms of online hostility, such as cyberbullying (Jonas et al., 2022). Deepening our knowledge about this type of violence, for the well-being of adolescents and young people, is a key challenge. This research has attempted to advance this knowledge by analysing pupils' perceptions of LGBTQ+ cyberbullying, general and collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation, and the possible moderating role of internalised homonegativity in these dynamics.

As regards the first objective, which was to learn about the opinions of adolescents and young people on LGBTQ+ cyberbullying and the type of aggression it includes, the qualitative results have helped us to identify extremely valuable dimensions for research into this type of cyberbullying based on the stigma towards the LGBTQ+ collective. The pupils' discourse revealed that their definition of sexual diversity includes, in addition to the traditional views on sexual orientation, other dimensions such as gender identity and expression, thus constituting sex-gender diversity. However, it can also be seen that, despite being recognised, ASBGD is still not viewed in a normalised way in schools, and there is still fear of experiencing one's own sexuality openly (Akers et al., 2021). In fact, pupils also recognize that the LGBTQ+ collective is one of the most vulnerable groups within minority groups and that within this group there are people who are more likely to suffer cybervictimisation, such as transgender people. This appreciation is consistent with previous studies which found that transgender people and those perceived as incongruent with their gender are more commonly victimised (Gower et al., 2018; Heino et al., 2021).

This research also highlights the relevance of understanding LGBTQ+ cyberbullying as a construct consisting of various types of aggression and not only LGBTQ+ aggression (Elipe et al., 2022). Among the types of aggression, the pupils considered verbal abuse or social exclusion to be particularly common in LGBTQ+ cyberbullying, coinciding with the forms highlighted by Olweus and Limber (2018). However, they also mentioned another type of aggression that, to our knowledge, has not been included in previous studies and has proven to be fundamental in understanding LGBTQ+ cyberbullying as a form of violence: those situations in which a person sees episodes of cyberbullying aimed at others because of their sex-gender diversity and also feels offended (collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation). It is therefore of particular interest to delve deeper into these situations, since they reflect the fact that there are adolescents and young people who are especially sensitive to this specific form of cyberaggression, and are able to perceive and define it, which could help them adopt a defensive role when they witness it. After carrying out the focus groups, we considered it essential to make this distinction in the quantitative study, since, as in other phenomena such as cyber-hate (Cover, 2022), although the aggression is not directly aimed at them, they can also cause offence, as these individuals empathize, perhaps more affectively, with the LGBTQ+ collective. This result is closely related to the subjectivity and perception of harm that characterizes cyberbullying (Campbell et al., 2012).

As far as the second objective is concerned, which was to analyse general cybervictimisation and collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation based on ASBGD and its dimensions (sexual orientation and gender identity and expression), the quantitative results reveal that bigender, agender, cis girls, transgender boys, lesbian/gay, pansexual, or bisexual people, and those with a discordant or androgynous gender expression are more often victims of collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation. This confirms the need to consider, in research, not only sexual orientation, but also diverse orientations, identities, and expressions of gender. In addition, coinciding with previous studies (Rice et al., 2015), cisgender girls presented higher levels of cybervictimisation and feel more harmed by collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation than cisgender boys. However, in the present study, the lack of differences between LGBTQ+ and CH people in overall cybervictimisation differs from the results found by Jonas et al. (2022), who identified a higher prevalence and worse consequences of cyberbullying among the LGBTQ+ collective.

In line with previous studies which stressed the importance of addressing internalised homonegativity to protect the mental and physical health of LGBTQ+ people (Berg et al., 2016), this research goes one step further, highlighting its importance as regards cybervictimisation in heterosexual cisgender people too. The qualitative results show that negative beliefs and emotions regarding the LGBTQ+ collective

could be a risk factor for both cybervictimisation and cyberaggression. As regards the third objective, which was to examine whether internalised homonegativity moderated the relationship between general cybervictimisation and collective LGBTQ+ cybervictimisation, the quantitative results confirm the relevant role of homonegativity in cybervictimisation, in that people who have less internalised homonegativity are more sensitive to LGBTQ+ cyberaggression.

In summary, this research reveals the existence of prejudice and stereotypes in adolescent discourses regarding sex-gender diversity, the various degrees of involvement in LGBTQ+ cyberbullying between sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions, as well as the determining role of internalised homonegativity in awareness of, and identification with, this problem. One of the main educational implications of these findings is the need to continue implementing relevant psychoeducational strategies (Camodeca et al., 2018). Prevention and intervention in LGBTQ+ cyberbullying in schools should involve the whole educational community and focus on elements we know are essential, such as social responsibility offline and online (Cohen-Almagor, 2018), the presence of internalised homonegativity, or group beliefs, stereotypes, and prejudice about sex-gender diversity (Earnshaw et al., 2018), both in offline (Petrou & Lemke, 2017) and online (Espelage et al., 2019) phenomena. Taking these key factors into account would allow us to design and implement more comprehensive psychoeducational programs, thus increasing their effectiveness among the entire LGBTQ+ and CH population. These specific measures could also be incorporated into existing evidence-based practices that have proved to be effective, such as the "Asegúrate" program (Del-Rey et al., 2018). All this would help us to continue our progress towards equality in education, in accordance with Andalusian Law 8/2017, which expresses a commitment to equality and exposes the eradication of any discrimination associated with sex-gender diversity in society in general, and particularly in the field of education

This study has its strengths, such as the use of sequential mixed methodology (Sampieri, 2018); the use of a community sample which includes LGBTQ+ and CH youth; or the recognition of beliefs and prejudice as the origin of the problem, not the affective-sexual diversity itself. However, the results of this mixed sequential study should be taken with caution, given the existence of certain limitations, such as the use of an incidental sample in a specific sociocultural context (Andalusia), thus limiting its generalisation; its cross-sectional nature, which prevents us from establishing causal relationships between the variables analysed; and the use of self-reports in the quantitative study, which can lead to a possible social desirability in the responses and result in missing data. Future lines of research could address these limitations and, in particular, taking into account the qualitative and quantitative findings of our investigation, evaluate not only direct cyberaggression, but also non-personalised cyberaggression or that directed towards collectives. It would also be of interest to include certain behaviour which is offensive to LGBTQ+ youth and which is played down, laughed off, or normalised, for instance, the use of terms referring to sexual orientation in a joking way (Elipe & Martos-Castro, 2022).

Authors' Contribution

Idea, R.R., P.E.; Review of the literature (state of the art), M.O., E.E.; Methodology, R.R., P.E.; Data analysis, M.O, E.E..; Results, M.O., E.E.; Discussion and conclusions, R.R., P.E., M.O., E.E.; Writing (original draft), M.O.; Final revisions, R.R., P.E., E.E., M.O.; Project design and sponsorships, P.E., R.R.

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