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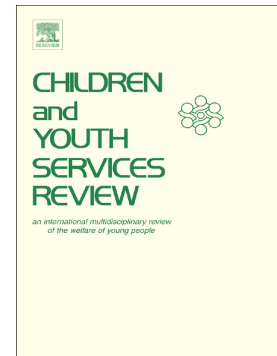
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“Arguments Online, But in School We Always Act Normal”: The Embeddedness of Early Adolescent Negative Peer Interactions Within The Whole of Their Offline and Online Peer Interactions

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Abstract

The goal of the present study was to investigate how negative peer interactions offline and online are associated with each other and with other daily interactions amongst early adolescents. To this aim, photo-elicitation interviewing was used to gather data amongst a sample of 34 early adolescents (13-14 years). A thematic analysis revealed that adolescents experience a wide range of different types of negative peer interactions offline and online. Most of the negative interactions recalled by the participants took place exclusively offline or online, and only a few were continued and/or managed in another environment. When participants were involved in online negative interactions they often acted as if nothing happened afterwards in the offline environment. On the other hand, offline negative interactions were often not continued online because the persons involved did not interact online. Further implications of the results for prevention and intervention, and for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Online Aggression, Online conflicts, Adolescents, Photo-Elicitation Interviewing

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1. Introduction

Through communication technologies, such as social media, texting, and instant messaging, adolescents can maintain and even strengthen their offline relationships and friendships (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009a, 2009b). However, via these technologies problems and aggression between peers may arise or be carried on from the offline world (Marwick & boyd, 2014; Reich et al., 2012). Previous research on the interconnection of offline and online aggressive interactions has mainly been carried out within the domain of bullying, investigating the co-occurrence of traditional bullying and cyberbullying (e.g., Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014, Shin, Braithwaite, & Ahmed, 2016; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015). For instance, a number of studies have shown that those who are involved in traditional bullying, as a victim and/or a perpetrator, are often also involved in cyberbullying, as a victim and/or perpetrator (e.g., Casas, Del Rey & Ortega-Ruiz, 2013; Del Rey, Elipe & Ortega-Ruiz, 2012; Jose, Kljakovic, Scheib & Notter, 2012; Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra & Runions, 2014; Tanrikulu & Campbell, 2015). However, these studies do not consider whether and how aggressive interactions offline are continued online or vice versa, as they focus on the role of individuals and not on specific interactions. Also it is unclear how offline and online aggressive interactions influence other (online and offline) peer interactions.

Although there is a wealth of research on adolescent bullying and aggression, much less is known about adolescents' day-to-day negative peer interactions, such as conflicts, which are

disagreements between individuals with similar social status and which may or may not involve a form of aggression, and discussions, and how these are related with each other and with bullying and aggression. Adolescents' negative peer interactions have mostly been described from the perspectives of bullying and aggression scholars. Adolescents' own views on these interactions (e.g., how they label them, how serious they perceive them to be) have been heard (e.g., Agatston, Kowalski & Limber, 2012; Dredge, Gleeson & de la Piedad Garcia, 2014; Jacobs, Goossens, Dehue, Völlink & Lechner, 2015; Ševčíková, Šmahel, & Otavová, 2012; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008), but these studies focus mainly on more serious forms of aggression and less on smaller daily negative peer interactions.

Therefore, the present study examined how adolescents' daily negative peer interactions are embedded within the whole of their offline and online peer interactions. Two research questions guided the present study. Focusing on daily negative interactions with peers offline and online, which similarities and differences exist between offline and online negative interactions early adolescents experience (RQ1)? The second research question (RQ2) focuses on how daily offline and online negative interactions are connected to each other and to other daily offline and online interactions early adolescents have with their peers. With a combination of photo diaries and semi-structured interviews (i.e., photo-elicitation interviewing, PEI), 13- to 14-year old adolescents' experiences with offline and online peer interactions and aggression are explored. To elucidate the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of the study, the literature on adolescent offline and online negative interactions is reviewed first.

1.1. Adolescents' negative interactions offline and online and their interpretations of these interactions

Due to the particular affordances of digital technologies, such as the potential to be anonymous, 24/7 availability, lack of parental supervision, and less non-verbal cues (Heirman et al., 2015; Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011), the way adolescents interact with each other online often differs from their offline interactions. When adolescents interact through digital technologies, they adapt their online communication to these features of the online context (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). This sometimes results in different or exaggerated online versions of behavior, compared to how they act offline (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). This phenomenon has been explained by the “online disinhibition effect” (Suler, 2004): When individuals go online, they often behave less restrained than they would in an offline context. In this way, adolescents’ online behavior is governed by other rules and expectations than their offline behavior.

Adolescents can experience a wide array of negative peer interactions offline and online and a significant amount of studies has been published on defining these interactions, especially with regard to bullying and aggression. Bullying is a form of intentional aggression that is carried out repeatedly over time and involves a power imbalance between the individuals involved (Olweus, 1999). In accordance with Olweus’ definition of traditional bullying, cyberbullying among adolescents has been described as “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (Smith et al., 2008, p. 376). However, there is much debate about the criteria that define cyberbullying (e.g., Langos, 2012; Menesini & Nocentini, 2009; Thomas, Connor, & Scott, 2015), such as the need for repetition and the imbalance of power. Aggression has often been defined without characteristics such as power imbalance or repetition, e.g., “any form of behavior directed toward the goal of harming or

injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment” (Baron, 1977, p.7).

According to Grigg (2010, p. 152) cyber-aggression can be defined as “intentional harm delivered by the use of electronic means to a person or a group of people irrespective of their age who perceive(s) such acts as offensive, derogatory, harmful or unwanted”.

In the past decade, a number of qualitative studies have focused on how adolescents define cyberbullying, online conflicts, online gossip, and online discussions (e.g., Agatston, Kowalski & Limber, 2012; Dredge, Gleeson & de la Piedad Garcia, 2014; Jacobs, Goossens, Dehue; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Ševčíková, Šmahel, & Otavová, 2012; Völlink & Lechner, 2015; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). For instance, research has shown that scholars’ definitions of cyberbullying do not always align with adolescents’ perspectives on this phenomenon (Nocentini et al., 2010; Pieschl, Kuhlmann, & Porsch, 2015). For instance, Nocentini and colleagues (2010) showed that for some adolescents the effect on the victim and his/her perception of the acts is a more relevant characteristic than the intention of the aggressor to define cyberbullying. Their study also showed that adolescents perceive repetition as necessary to speak of cyberbullying, however not for public behaviors as these can be viewed (and thus repeatedly viewed) by a large audience. Students perceived the imbalance of power only necessary for more technological sophisticated behavior, where the imbalance lies in the more technological sophisticated skills (Nocentini et al., 2010). In a later study, Menesini and colleagues (2012) found that adolescents perceived the imbalance of power, defined as consequences on the victim who was upset and did not know how to defend him/herself, as the strongest criterion to speak of cyberbullying. The study of Pieschl and colleagues (2015) showed that subjective definitions of cyberbullying can differ between age groups or cohorts (e.g., young adults versus adolescents), however the associated harm is similar across groups.

Adolescents often call online conflicts, aggression, gossip, and discussions “drama” (Allen, 2015; Marwick & boyd, 2014). According to Marwick and boyd (2014), teenage drama is “performative, interpersonal conflict that takes place in front of an active, engaged audience, often on social media” (p. 1187). Adolescents consider drama to be distinct from bullying and relational aggression, although drama does incorporate some elements of bullying and aggression, and would often be characterized as such by adults (Marwick & boyd, 2011). The results of the study of Marwick and boyd (2011, p.6) show that “the participatory aspects of drama” differentiate it for adolescents from (cyber)bullying which is most of the times unidirectional. Also, the study showed that drama is not always intrinsically aggressive, as adolescents often perceive it as “fun to use when you’re bored” or “a form of entertainment” (Marwick and boyd, 2011, p.8).

1.2. Interconnectedness of adolescents’ negative peer interactions offline and online

A considerable amount of studies has been conducted investigating the overlap between offline and online bullying (e.g., Casas et al., 2013; Del Rey et al. 2012; Jose et al., 2012; Kowalski et al., 2014; Modecki et al., 2014; Shin et al., 2016; Tanrikulu & Campbell, 2015; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015). For instance, in a meta-analysis of studies on cyberbullying, Kowalski and colleagues (2014) showed there are significant associations between offline and online bullying victimization and perpetration. In other words, when adolescents are involved in bullying and aggression online, they are also often involved in offline bullying or aggression. Research has shown that adolescents are rarely only victimized online, but offline-only victimization is more frequent (Glüer & Lohaus, 2015; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015). Longitudinal studies might give first indications about the continuation of bullying interactions. For instance, in the study of Del Rey and colleagues (2012) traditional bullying involvement

predicted cyberbullying involvement at a later time point but not vice versa. The authors note in their discussion that traditional bullying involvement seems to carry over into cyberbullying, but cyberbullying does not appear to turn into traditional bullying. However, this study did not investigate whether these involvements were related to each other, for instance, in terms of the persons that perpetrated or that were targeted. A few studies have investigated the interconnectedness of bullying with other forms of negative peer interactions (e.g., Deiss, Savage & Tokunaga, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin; 2007). For instance, relying on the General Strain Theory, Hinduja & Patchin (2007) indicated that victims of cyberbullying may be at risk for perpetrating school violence, such as assaulting a peer at or near school. Deiss and colleagues (2012) discussed in their study that cyberbullying perpetration might lead to relational turbulence within their interpersonal relationships with the victim and with others, as they found a correlation between these variables in their cross-sectional study. Taken together, previous research shows an overlap between online and offline negative behavior, but it remains unclear whether and how specific aggressive interactions offline are continued online or vice versa.

Recently, two qualitative studies have explored the interconnection between adolescents' online and offline social worlds by focusing on specific negative interactions offline and via Facebook and how these are connected to each other and to other interactions with peers (Ging & O'Higgins Norman, 2016; Stevens, Gilliard-Matthews, Dunaev, Woods, & Brawner, 2016). In the first study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 60 adolescents (13-24 years old) living in disadvantaged neighborhoods in the US about their offline and online social worlds (Stevens et al., 2016). When discussing the interplay between offline and online conflicts, adolescents discussed how interpersonal conflicts could start out and escalate online (on Facebook), and later spill over into offline social interactions, often even leading to physical

fights. Others explained that offline conflicts could also be reproduced online. As a result, some adolescents tried to limit their Facebook use. Some did this to refrain from all the drama, namely to avoid witnessing or becoming involved in online incidents. Others regarded using Facebook as a waste of time; time that could otherwise be spent being social in the real world. The authors concluded there is a dynamic interplay between youths' offline and online contexts, in which negative offline interactions are often reproduced and amplified online (Stevens et al., 2016).

In the second study, which combined quantitative and qualitative methods to explore 13 and 17-year-old Irish school girls' friendships on Facebook, 26 semi-structured interviews were conducted with students from an all-girls' school (Ging & O'Higgins Norman, 2016). Although in the initial stages of the interviews, the girls said everybody in their school related well to each other, later they admitted they had experienced or witnessed online and offline conflicts between peers. Two conflicting discourses emerged: on the one hand, there was a "nice girl" narrative in which everybody got along and acted nice towards each other, and on the other hand, there was a "mean girl" narrative, which emerged when they discussed interpersonal conflicts, in which girls were considered to be "naturally bitchy" and mean to each other. Furthermore, many girls described how online conflicts were often never even acknowledged face-to-face. Probably because physical and direct verbal aggression were unacceptable at school, conflicts often escalated online. Nevertheless, the broader conflict still existed offline, as those involved pretended it did not happen, ignored each other, or stayed out of each other's way. Facebook was seen as ideally suited to sending ambiguous signals, for example by posting and tagging unflattering photos of others. In this way, passive-aggressive behavior was common on Facebook and seemed to be more acceptable than face-to-face conflicts, which were seen as more risky as these could result in the end of a friendship.

The two previously cited qualitative studies investigating the interplay between adolescents' online and offline worlds (Ging & O'Higgins Norman, 2016; Stevens et al., 2016) provide valuable contributions in understanding how adolescents' negative interactions offline are intertwined with their interactions online, however, these studies focused mainly on Facebook as the platform for online interactions. Significantly though, many adolescents engage in online communication on multiple platforms, not only on Facebook but also on other social network sites, as well as via instant messaging, text messaging, (video) calling, etc. Recent studies have shown that platforms other than Facebook, such as Snapchat and Instagram, are gaining in popularity amongst adolescents (Mediaraven and LINC, 2016). Furthermore, adolescents use online platforms differently to interact with peers according to their tie strength: with close ties, they seem to use all types of online communication platforms, but with weak ties, they prefer face-to-face communication and social network sites (Van Cleemput, 2010). Therefore, the types of conflict may also differ between platforms. For instance, text messaging is used more often for close ties, and therefore negative peer interactions through text messaging may be more likely to be conflicts between friends (who are often "equals") rather than acts of cyberbullying (which involve power imbalance).

1.3. This study

The present study aimed to contribute to the existing knowledge about how offline and online negative peer interactions are embedded in the whole of daily offline and online interactions of early adolescents with their peers. Based on the literature overview, two research questions emerged. The first research question (RQ1) investigates which similarities and differences exist between the daily offline and online negative interactions early adolescents experience. The second research question (RQ2) focuses on how daily offline and online

negative interactions are connected to each other and to other daily offline and online interactions early adolescents have with their peers. In the present study, a photographic methodology, namely photo-elicitation interviews (PEI) was used (Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006; Harper, 2002). PEI is a research method that uses images to elicit discussion in semi-structured interviews (Harper, 2002). In our study, participants were asked to generate these images themselves, by means of a one-week photo diary of their online and offline peer interactions, in the week preceding the interview. The images provide a unique view into adolescents' daily experiences with peer interactions. Using self-recorded images in the interviews as a discussion opener to talk with adolescents about their experiences can diminish memory and social desirability biases, and ensure that the interviews originate from the participants' perspective rather than from the researcher's. Moreover, having students take photos and screenshots of their daily interactions encourages them to be more actively involved in the research, by engaging their participation through a fun activity, as many adolescents habitually use their smartphone's camera to take photos and screenshots and to share these with others. The use of this method in this study is unique within the field of adolescents' offline and online negative peer interactions research, and facilitates investigation of the interconnection between online and offline peer interactions in a more comprehensive way.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Participants

Three classes of students in the second grade of secondary school from three schools in the city of [blinded for review] participated in the present study. In [blinded for review], there are three types of schools: state schools, subsidized public schools, and subsidized free schools.

Schools can offer at least one of the three types of secondary education: general, technical, and vocational. One class from each type of school and from each type of education were selected to obtain a diverse sample of adolescents. The sample was limited to this grade as these adolescents are at high risk of being involved in (cyber) aggression (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009) and (cyber)bullying (Pabian & Vandebosch, 2016). Convenience sampling was used to select the schools. Within each school, the school principal selected one class to participate, based mainly on practical considerations such as being able to conduct the research during spare hours. More details about the selected classes are displayed in Table 1. The sample consisted of 34 early adolescents (50% girls) aged between 13 and 14 years old ($M_{\text{age}} = 13.62$, $SD = .60$).

Table 1

Information about participating classes

School	Type of school	Type of education followed by participants	Participation rate of the selected class	Number of participants	Number of boys
A	State school	General	81.81 %	18	7
B	Subsidized public school	Technical	66.67 %	6	6
C	Subsidized free school	Vocational	71.43 %	10	4

2.2. Procedure

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities of the University [blinded for review] and followed APA Ethical Guidelines for Research with Human Subjects. Each participant received an information sheet and parental consent form and was asked to return the form to a relevant school staff member. After receiving

the parental consent forms, an information session was organized by the researchers with the help of trained student researchers in the classroom to explain the research design, to answer any questions, and to complete the participants' consent forms. Participants were asked to take at least three pictures, i.e., photographs or screenshots, per day with their smartphone of their negative and positive interactions with peers, both online and offline, during five consecutive days. All participants owned a smartphone and were used to using it. Participants were asked to send their images to the researchers daily via a private message to a Facebook profile or by means of email. During the information session, the ethical considerations with regard to recording images, as described by Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001), were explained to the students. For instance, participants were asked not to take photographs without permission of others. If others were recognizably portrayed, they had to complete a consent form to allow the researchers to use the photograph for the study. Also, participants were asked to make names of others invisible/unreadable in the images. During the period that the images were taken, each participant received reminders and short motivational messages to keep him/her motivated to continue capturing and sending images. Despite these efforts, not all participants provided the requested number of images and there were six participants who did not provide any images at all. The pictures that were received displayed online and offline interactions with peers, such as taking selfies with friends, hanging out with friends in the offline world, having private and group conversations via WhatsApp, Snapchat, and/or Facebook, liking Instagram posts, commenting on Facebook posts, sending text messages (SMS), making phone calls (smartphone screenshots from telephone calls), playing online games, and commenting on YouTube videos.

A few days after the five consecutive days, semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted by the researchers and the trained student researchers. At the onset of each interview,

participants were reminded of confidentiality and were asked whether they agreed to have their interview audiotaped. During the interviews, participants were asked to recall their online and offline peer interactions in the past week and to reflect on these interactions. The images they had collected were used as a trigger to tell personal stories and experiences of their negative and positive offline and online peer interactions. A semi-structured interview guide, which is presented in Appendix A, was used during the interviews to probe the participants further about their offline and online interactions. Interviews varied in length, ranging from 19 to 55 minutes.

2.3. Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researchers and the trained student researchers. The transcripts were imported into NVivo 11, and thematic analysis of the transcripts was performed by the first two authors using an inductive approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). Firstly, three interviews (about 10% of the sample) were randomly selected for preliminary open coding. All passages of text relevant to the study topic were categorized into descriptive categories that related to the research questions and the recurring themes by the first and the second author separately (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). These categories included offline negative interactions (with subcategories that represented types, bullying acts, management styles, and downplaying); online negative interactions (with subcategories that also represented types, cyberbullying acts, management styles, and downplaying); and comparison and interconnectedness of offline and online interactions (with subcategories that represented interaction styles, preferences for offline or online interaction, and transfers of conflicts from offline to online or vice versa). Next, the coding schemes of both

authors were compared, combined, and refined to create one codebook. In a third step, the two authors recoded the three interviews and a coding comparison query was executed in order to calculate the coder agreement. The average Cohen's kappa coefficient across all nodes was 0.74, which indicates good agreement. Consequently, the coders independently coded the remaining interviews. When a coder felt that a new subcategory was required during the coding of the remaining interviews, this was discussed first with the other coder. All adjustments to the codebook were documented. Appendix B represents the final coding scheme. The main purpose of the images was to serve as conversation starters and these were not coded. It is important to note that all negative interactions were coded and included in the analyses, irrespective of the role of the participant(s) who reported the incident. Also, an interaction was coded as negative if the participant perceived it as a negative interaction, when he/she indicated that others perceived it as negative, or when he/she indicated that it could be perceived as negative. No definitions of different forms of negative behaviour were provided to the participants. The codes or labels that are given to indicate the type of incidents matched closely with the words participants used to talk about these incidents. However for (cyber)bullying, negative interactions were coded as bullying or cyberbullying when participants used the term explicitly and, based on their stories, their interpretation matched with Olweus' definition of traditional bullying (1993, 1999) or the definition of cyberbullying by Smith and colleagues (2008) which are used in the present study.

3. Results

Four themes that are related to the research questions resulted from the data analysis (RQ1: Which similarities and differences exist between the daily offline and online negative interactions early adolescents experience?; RQ2: How are daily offline and online negative interactions connected to each other and to other daily offline and online interactions early

adolescents have with their peers). These four themes are: types of negative interactions offline and online, ways of dealing with offline and online interactions, communication styles offline and online, and continuation of offline and online negative interactions. The first two themes are mainly related to the first research question, whereas the last two themes help to answer the second research question.

3.1. Offline negative interactions

This section discusses adolescents' negative offline interactions with each other. First, the types of negative offline interactions are reviewed, followed by the ways adolescents deal with these interactions. Table 2 and 3 represent the number of participants that reported the different types of incidents and the reactions.

3.1.1. A continuum of negative interactions, conflicts, and aggression

When describing offline interactions with their peers, adolescents discussed a wide range of negative interactions, going from rather innocent gossip and making fun of each other, to serious physical aggression and bullying.

Overall, conflicts and arguments were very frequently reported, with all adolescents recounting conflicts they had experienced themselves or had witnessed between others. The conflicts varied in the number of persons involved: some were one-on-one, whereas others involved multiple people or even entire groups of friends or classes. Adolescents often complained that they were unwillingly involved in conflicts between peers, having to choose sides against their will: "Very often he tried to provoke arguments and last year we very often had arguments with the whole group and then you really had to choose sides and you don't want that at all" (participant 1, school A, girl).

Next to conflicts, many adolescents recounted experiences with irritating each other (reported by 41% / $N = 14$ of the respondents) calling each other names (reported by 29% / $N = 10$ of the respondents) and making fun of each other (reported by 23% / $N = 8$). These interactions were often described as just for laughs or for fun: “Sometimes we just laugh at each other and like, call each other names, but, like, as a joke, not meant harshly or so” (participant 25, school C, girl). It seemed that some adolescents considered these interactions a normal way to behave. Yet, there appear to be implicit rules about which insults are seen as acceptable and which are not:

When they call me “elephant” or so then I let it be, as if they haven’t said anything, but if they cross the line, for example “your mother” and so, I mean, talk about mothers and stuff, she doesn’t have anything to do with it, then I *will* react.” (participant 19, school B, boy)

Also, some adolescents (9% / $N = 3$) observed that remarks intended to be funny are not always perceived as such by everyone: “Yes, I know it is for laughs, but in the long run I don’t find it funny” (participant 26, school C, girl).

Other (less serious) types of negative peer interactions that were less frequently reported were people being taken advantage of, tattling, and uncooperative behavior (reported by 6% / $N = 2$, 3% / $N = 1$, and 12% / $N = 4$ respondents, respectively). Telling lies and spreading rumors were also reported by three female participants (9% / $N = 3$).

Social exclusion, physical aggression, and bullying were the more serious types of conflicts and aggression reported by participants. Social exclusion incidents (reported by 38% / $N = 13$) went from being a “clique” and, for example, not involving the whole class in group gatherings, to deliberately excluding or ignoring particular peers. This distinction was strikingly

illustrated by participant 3 (school A, boy): “He doesn’t know the difference between excluding someone and not wanting to hang out with someone.” Although most adolescents reported exclusion instances in which they themselves did not play a significant role, one girl admitted to deliberately having excluded another girl: “I have literally... I mean, it’s my fault, I have literally all those, all friends of that girl... I mean, I have her... I mean, I made her feel lonely” (participant 4, school A, girl).

Physical aggression (reported by 44% / $N = 15$) most often happened after provocation and was more common among boys, although it was also reported between girls (20% of total / $N = 7$). Some forms of physical aggression, described as “fikfakken” in Dutch or “romping”, were seen as acceptable and normal behavior, as a sort of playful way to interact with each other: “It is not really fighting, but, like, weak kicks, weak punches, it is just like... yes... I can’t really explain it, just to play actually” (participant 5, school A, boy). However, adolescents also recounted more serious, aggressive physical fights. One boy even trained himself in combat sports to be better prepared to handle physical confrontations: “That’s because last year I had an argument with a boy. And he acted cool because he did kickboxing and I am going to take him back one day with my taekwondo” (participant 6, school A, boy). Physical aggression also seemed to be a coping strategy for adolescents who are not skilled in expressing themselves verbally: “I don’t talk much. If I talk, it is with fists. That’s how I solve it” (participant 2, school A, boy).

Bullying was reported relatively frequently in our sample: Three participants said they were current victims (9%), five participants (15%) reported that they had been victims in the past, and three participants (9%) admitted to having bullied others. There were remarkable differences between the three schools: In one school (school B, class with only boys) bullying

seemed to be going on heavily between all students in the class, in the second school bullying was reported between two students, and in the third school students said bullying did not happen in their class, although some students did describe incidents of teasing which could be perceived as bullying. Two students (6%) were bully-victims, who explained that they started bullying others as a reaction to seeing others being bullied or being bullied themselves. Different types of bullying were reported, from physically hurting the victim and his or her belongings, to verbal bullying, and social exclusion. Several different motives or reasons for the bullying were provided: physical characteristics (being overweight, wearing the wrong clothes), ethnic differences (different background, language difficulties), and behavior (ADHD, autism).

Finally, many participants (24% / $N = 8$) downplayed the severity of conflicts, aggression, and bullying. Two participants stated they just laughed when other participants were angry with them or when conflicts happened. Calling each other names was also often seen as a joke, or as a way of fooling around (reported by 9% / $N = 3$ respondents). Physical aggression was also toned down by some (9% / $N = 3$) of the interviewed boys. As explained above, they often engaged in so-called “playful fighting”. However, also more serious physical incidents were recounted and subsequently toned down: “Yes so a boy had insulted my mother and then I have given him one kick against his head. He was unconscious for maybe one minute or so, but yeah...” (participant 5, school A, boy).

Table 2

Percentages and absolute numbers of participants that reported the different types of incidents for the offline environment versus the online environment

Type	% of participants (N) – Offline environment	% of participants (N) – Online environment
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Physical aggression	44 (15)	/
Calling each other names	23 (8)	9 (3)
Conflict	100 (34)	85 (29)
Irritating each other	41 (14)	12 (4)
Uncooperative behavior	12 (4)	N.R.
Exclusion	38 (13)	9 (3)
Tattling	3 (1)	N.R.
Taking advantage of someone	6 (2)	N.R.
Telling lies or spreading rumors	9 (3)	18 (6)
Celebrity bashing	N.R.	3 (1)
Posting negative comments	/	26 (9)
Posting or tagging unwanted pictures	/	6 (2)
Hacking	/	3 (1)
Stalking	N.R.	3 (1)
Threatening	N.R.	3 (1)
Bullying	35 (12)	3 (1)

Note. The table represents the number of participants who reported the incident, independent of their role. “N.R.” stands for “not reported”. “/” indicates that this behaviour is not possible in the environment.

Table 3

Percentages and absolute numbers of participants that reported the different types of reactions for incidents in the offline environment versus the online environment

Managing negative interactions	% of	% of
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	participants (N)	participants (N)
	Offline environment	Online environment
Conciliation – Making amends	15 (5)	21 (7)
Conciliation – Trying to find a solution together	26 (9)	N.R.
Confrontation – Asking to stop	24 (8)	12 (4)
Confrontation – Take physical distance	21 (7)	N.R.
Confrontation – Physical aggression	15 (5)	N.R.
Confrontation – Payback with same behavior	18 (6)	6 (2)
Confrontation – Asking for an explanation	N.R.	12 (4)
Avoidance – Ignore each other	41 (14)	18 (6)
Avoidance – Block the other(s)	/	9 (3)
Avoidance – Ignore incident	32 (11)	62 (21)
Involvement of others – Seeking support from friends or peers	26 (9)	12 (4)
Involvement of others – Standing up for each other	32 (11)	12 (4)
Involvement of others – Telling an adult	38 (13)	N.R.

Note. The table represents the number of participants who reported the type of reaction, independent of their role. “N.R.” stands for “not reported”. “/” indicates that this reaction is not possible in the environment.

3.1.2. Adolescents’ reactions to offline negative interactions.

Similar to the repertoire of negative interactions, adolescents also reported many different ways of reacting to these negative interactions. Their specific reaction seemed to depend on the type of incident (e.g., bullying vs. gossip), on the severity of the incident (serious or relatively harmless), and on who was involved (a friend or relative vs. a less-known peer). Out of all the reported reactions, four overarching conflict management styles emerged: conciliation, confrontation, avoidance, and involvement of others.

Conciliation. Some adolescents (35% / $N = 12$) tried to rely on conciliation to solve a conflict. Two conciliatory approaches were reported: making amends, for example by apologizing or asking for and giving forgiveness to each other, and trying to find a solution

together, by approaching the other(s) to resolve the incident. These approaches were most common in disagreements or conflicts, or when someone got hurt unintentionally.

Confrontation. Secondly, adolescents sometimes confronted the peer with whom they had a problem directly. Some simply asked or demanded the other(s) to stop their behavior (24% / $N = 8$) or to take physical distance (21% / $N = 7$). This was most often done in cases of bullying, but also in case of less serious conflicts, when others disrupted the classroom, to avoid further escalation of conflicts, or to avoid others getting hurt. Others used more aggressive confrontational actions, for example, by reacting with physical aggression to provocation or bullying (15% / $N = 5$), or by giving the offender a ‘taste of his or her own medicine’, e.g., calling each other names back and forth, or counter-bullying: “If they bully me then I bully back” (participant 19, school B, boy) (18% / $N = 6$).

Avoidance. In contrast, many adolescents reacted more passively to incidents, either to avoid further conflicts or escalations, or because they did not want to interact with the other(s) any longer because they were angry. A commonly reported practice (reported by 41% of the sample / $N = 14$) after conflicts or arguments, seems to be to ignore each other. When someone does something irritating or unwanted, for example, disrupting the class, adolescents often try to ignore that person’s behavior. Remarkably, many participants (32% / $N = 11$) explained that conflicts or disagreements were often not resolved; instead, everyone just pretended as if nothing happened and behaved normally with each other afterwards:

Participant 6 (school A, boy): “Sometimes, like, a quarrel but then the following day that just becomes normal again.”

Interviewer: “Do they settle the argument then?”

Participant 6: “No, just... The following day they just start talking to each other.”

Students also often turned away or pretended nothing happened when they witnessed a conflict but were not part of it and wished to stay out of it. One student reported he and his peers laughed about it when they realized a conflict was not worth becoming angry about.

Involvement of others. Finally, adolescents frequently involved others when dealing with negative peer interactions. They sought support from friends or peers (26% / $N = 9$). When they sought support, they asked for help or advice on how to cope with the situation or they involved other peers to be in the majority. Sometimes this led to increased conflicts because whole groups or classes were being involved. Adolescents also often intervened during conflicts, bullying or physical aggression incidents by standing up for the victim or supporting their friends (reported by 32% / $N = 11$). Lastly, in specific situations, adolescents told adults about the incident (38% / $N = 13$). When incidents took place in the classroom or on the playground, and in some cases of bullying, victims or witnesses told a teacher or even went to the school principal (18% / $N = 6$). Although most adolescents indicated that the actions of the teachers and principals, such as having group conversations or punishing, were helpful in terms of diminishing or stopping incidents and bullying, a boy from school A and a boy from school B perceived that their teachers and school principals not always did enough. In serious conflicts or bullying incidents, parents were sometimes involved (reported by 12% / $N = 4$). One boy even described a case where the police was involved in a serious bullying incident. Further, two girl participants reported having sought help from a health care professional to deal with their depressive symptoms as a consequence of bullying victimization.

3.2. Online negative interactions

In this section, parallel to the section above, adolescents' negative online interactions with each other are discussed. The types of negative online interactions are reviewed first,

followed by a discussion of the ways in which adolescents deal with these interactions. Table 2 and 3 also represent the number of participants that reported the different types of incidents and the reactions with regard to the online environment.

3.2.1. Offline-parallel and online-exclusive negative interactions, conflicts, and aggression

The types of online negative interactions that adolescents reported were quite similar to the offline conflicts and acts of aggression, but they were reported less frequently than offline incidents. Similar to the offline world, adolescents described one-on-one and group conflicts and arguments, calling each other names or making fun of each other, irritating behavior, spreading lies or rumors, social exclusion, and bullying. Three types of negative interactions were exclusively reported when asked about online conflicts and acts of aggression: threatening, stalking, and celebrity bashing. Although these interactions can in theory also occur offline, none of the participants mentioned this when asked about offline negative interactions. Participants also reported negative interactions that can only occur online, such as posting negative comments, posting or tagging unwanted pictures, and hacking. Three types of negative interactions were reported to have happened only in the offline environment, but not in the online, namely taking advantage of someone, tattling, and uncooperative behavior.

A few participants (15% / $N = 5$) indicated they never had arguments or conflicts online, but most said they do. Those conflicts could transfer between platforms, for example starting on Whatsapp and continuing on Facebook, and took place both in private and in group conversations. Often, screenshots were used to inform others about the conflicts and as a catalyst to choose sides: “For a large part of the arguments, screenshots... if it happens via Messenger there are a lot of people who choose a team and then forward screenshots to people” (participant 5, school A, boy).

Posting negative comments was one of the most frequently reported online offenses (26% / $N = 9$). Negative comments on each other's posts seemed quite common, but were not always seen as hurtful or harmful:

Interviewer: "For example, have you ever seen on Facebook that there are negative reactions to what someone posts?"

Participant 2 (school A, boy): "I do that myself, but to play. And that person knows that too. I don't want to ruin that person's picture. I think it happens, but I've never experienced it. We do bully each other, but really to play."

All but one participants said they had not received negative comments themselves, but had seen negative comments on other people's posts. As with offline communication, some participants (9% / $N = 3$) recounted experiences with calling each other names online, which was often considered normal and done for fun, although participants also called each other names in arguments or fights. Also similar to the offline world, the behavior of some peers online, such as drawing attention with provocative pictures, caused irritation in some participants (reported by 12% / $N = 4$). Spreading lies or rumors online was reported by a minority of participants (18% / $N = 6$). This type of negative interaction was also less common offline. Two participants (6%) recounted incidents in which pictures of them were manipulated, tagged, or shared without their consent, which they found unpleasant or unacceptable. One participant told an incident that involved threatening. This type of negative interaction was not reported with regard to the offline environment. Lastly, one participant admitted he had bashed a celebrity (vlogger).

On the more severe side of the spectrum of negative interactions, social exclusion, hacking, stalking, and cyberbullying were reported by the participants. Interviews revealed anecdotal evidence of social exclusion occurring online (reported by 9% / $N = 3$), although none

of the participants recounted personal experiences with being excluded online. Most adolescents liked to converse in group chat conversations and private Facebook groups. They often did not include their whole class, but this was not seen as exclusion, but rather as a selection of who they *do* want in it. Hacking and stalking were only reported by one participant each. With regard to bullying online, only one girl described herself as a victim of cyberbullying, others said they had never witnessed or experienced it. Some adolescents (26% / $N = 9$) did recall vague stories of having heard of an incident with a friend of a friend or someone from school. When asked about their opinion on cyberbullying cases, some blamed the victims: “Depends on what you do primarily. They are not going to suddenly out of nowhere say ‘yes, this, that’. It [being cyberbullied] is always for a reason” (participant 27, school C, boy).

3.2.2. *Adolescents’ reactions to online negative interactions*

Similar to the reactions to offline negative peer interactions, the management of online negative interactions seemed to depend on factors such as type and severity of the incident, and connection to the persons involved. Adolescents reported similar strategies to deal with online incidents as they did to deal with offline incidents, although there were also some online-specific strategies. The same four overarching conflict management styles emerged for online negative interactions, although the underlying strategies were not always identical to those used in offline incidents.

Conciliation. Only one type of conciliatory strategy was reported for online conflicts: making amends. Some adolescents tried to resolve conflicts through restorative interactions such as talking about it or apologizing, which could take place offline and online (reported by 21% of participants / $N = 7$).

Confrontation. With regards to confrontation, as for offline conflicts, adolescents reported they asked or demanded to stop the behavior (12% / $N = 4$), or they gave the other person a ‘taste of his or her own medicine’, by counter-reacting in the same way (6% / $N = 2$). These strategies were mostly used in conflicts with peers or when their peers irritated them with their behavior. Another confrontational strategy that was mentioned by a few participants (12% / $N = 4$) as a reaction against unwanted online actions by others was asking for an explanation.

Avoidance. Reported avoidance strategies to manage online negative interactions were to ignore the person(s) involved in the conflict (reported by 18% of the sample / $N = 6$), to block the other(s) (9% / $N = 3$), to stop reacting (15% / $N = 5$), to leave the conversation (6% / $N = 2$), to pretend nothing happened (29% / $N = 10$), and to lighten the conversation (12% / $N = 4$). Ignoring, not reacting, leaving the conversation, and blocking were all ways to stop interactions with the other(s) to avoid further involvement in the conflict. Some participants avoided confrontations by pretending there was no conflict in the first place and acting as normal in following interactions (practice reported by 29% / $N = 10$): “But what is like this with us is, like, arguments on online chat, but at school we act normal, always, that’s really always” (participant 9, school A, girl). This reaction type is also particularly popular among witnesses of conflicts, who do not want to have anything to do with the incident. Further, two participants tried to take the steam off the conflict by posting irrelevant messages to change the subject. Others (6% / $N = 2$) just laughed with potentially offensive messages or tried to make jokes about it.

Involvement of others. Finally, involving others was also a frequently reported style to cope with negative online interactions. However, in contrast to the management of offline conflicts, none of the participants discussed involving an adult, such as a teacher or a parent, to deal with online incidents. If a good friend was involved in an incident or when participants

perceived that someone else was being treated unfairly, some participants (12% / $N = 4$) reported they stood up for them and stood by their side to support them. Furthermore, even when incidents were initially private, participants sometimes involved others through sending them screenshots of the conversations (12% / $N = 4$). As such, small conflicts have the potential to quickly escalate.

3.3. Communicating online versus offline with peers

This section describes how adolescents perceive their interaction style offline versus online and which environment they prefer to interact with their peers. Although this was not discussed with all the participants, most of them (11 out of 16 / 69%) described their interaction styles online and those of others as different compared to how they and others interact offline. In this regard, a recurring comment was that early adolescents dare to say more online than offline: “I think we just cannot say our true words to each other face-to-face” (participant 9, school A, girl). Participants provided two recurring explanations for the differences in their interaction styles online and offline, namely that they are not confronted with the reactions of their interaction partner(s) and that the interaction partner(s) is/are not able to take(s) immediate revenge in a physical way. However, three respondents out of 16 (19%) noted they interact in the same way offline and online. Two participants out of 16 (13%) noted their communication style depends on with whom they are interacting. These participants used similar interaction styles online and offline when they interacted with good friends, but non-equivalent styles when they interacted with peers they do not know very well. When they interacted with these peers, they dared to say more online compared to offline: “During offline interactions I try to be serious, but when I talk with them online, I send a lot of funny things such as memes and photographs” (participant 10, school A, boy).

Six participants (18%) reported to have a general preference for offline interactions, rather than online interactions (none preferred online over offline interactions). One recurrent reason was the high probability of misinterpretation during online interactions: “Something which is intended as a joke, might be interpreted by others as something really mean” (participant 11, school A, girl). Another reason for the preference for offline interactions is the ability to see the reactions of your interaction partner(s) when you interact offline. A boy noted that emojis can facilitate online interactions, but they do not always represent the true facial expressions of others. Another participant (girl) reported to have a preference for Skype when she interacts online with her peers to avoid misinterpretation and to be able to see the reactions of her interaction partner(s).

Five participants (15%) stated that they even refrained from using certain digital tools for online interactions with their peers. Six participants (18%) did not use Facebook (temporarily) often or at all for different reasons, such as having no interest in it, finding it boring, being restricted by parents, having no friends who are on Facebook, and disliking the negative peer interactions on the platform. Two male participants noted that they refrained from group conversations on Facebook and Whatsapp and preferred private conversations on these platforms. One of them stated that he especially hated the amount of (useless) messages that others send.

3.4. Continuation of negative peer interactions from offline to online and vice versa

Conflicts and aggression can arise during online interactions, offline interactions or both online and offline interactions, and can be transferred from online to offline or vice versa. As previously discussed, most negative peer interactions mentioned by participants took place offline. Only four respondents (12%) discussed interactions that shifted from the offline to the

online environment. Most of the offline negative peer interactions remained offline and were not continued online. Three participants (9%) who were engaged in offline negative peer interactions explained there was no transfer because they were not in contact online with the peer(s) involved in the conflict or aggression. Also with regard to bullying, some of the perpetrators and victims were not in contact with each other online.

The participants described a few incidents (12% / $N = 4$) that shifted from face-to-face to the online environment. Individuals who were involved in these incidents could reach each other easily via digital tools, because they knew each other's phone number, were friends with each other on social network sites, or were in the same group chat. These incidents mostly involved irritations and disagreements that were generated offline and expressed online: "We don't have many conflicts in school because we are afraid to say it out loud. But we have our fights on social media" (participant 3, school A, boy).

With regard to online negative peer interactions, five respondents (15%) discussed incidents that started online and were continued offline, and in five cases (15%) the negative interactions happened online and offline simultaneously. Eight participants (24%) described incidents that happened exclusively online. Participants referred to the disconnection between online and offline behavior (see 3.3. Communicating online versus offline with peers) to explain the lack of continuation.

Finally, only one girl (3%) reported multiple shifts from offline to online bullying and vice versa. This participant was victimized for a longer period of time.

4. Discussion

The goal of this article was to increase current knowledge on how negative peer interactions offline and online are related to each other and to other daily interactions early

adolescents have with their classmates and peers. In order to achieve this goal, the present study investigated two research questions: Which similarities and differences exist between the daily offline and online negative interactions early adolescents experience (RQ1)? How are daily offline and online negative interactions connected to each other and to other daily offline and online interactions early adolescents have with their peers (RQ2)? Related to these research questions, four overarching topics emerged: types of negative interactions offline and online, ways of dealing with offline and online interactions, communication styles offline and online, and continuation of offline and online negative interactions. Furthermore, several subthemes emerged, revealing the complexity and variety of adolescents' online and offline negative peer interactions and strategies they have developed to manage these.

With regard to the first research question, our data revealed that the types of reported negative interactions online seemed to parallel those offline, as do the ways in which adolescents manage those interactions. Nevertheless, some types of negative interactions were either exclusively reported offline, such as tattling, taking advantage of someone, and uncooperative behavior, or online, such as threatening, stalking, and celebrity bashing. Related to this, some adolescents differentiated their interaction style online from the way they interacted offline with peers. More specific, some adolescents noted that they and their peers dare to say more online than offline. This might indicate the presence of the online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004). However, adolescents noticed that their interaction style online mostly depends on with whom they are interacting. This might indicate that adolescents adapt their communication style to those of their partner. This is also described by interpersonal theory (Carson, 1969; Kiesler 1983) which states that communication partners retain some of their habitual style but at the same time

adapt to accommodate the style of their partner and in this way the communication style of each becomes a reflection of the other.

A recurring finding in our interviews was the downplaying of daily aggression both offline and online. Youth described some forms of interaction that scholars would define as aggressive behavior, as normal. This was particularly evident not only in relation to relatively minor conflicts such as name calling and making negative comments, but also for physical aggression, especially among boys. Calling each other names was often done for laughs, and participants seemed to agree on what was acceptable and what clearly crossed the line. However, somewhere in between there was a gray zone of utterances which might be considered funny by some but hurtful by others. In particular, the absence of cues in online environments means it is often hard to distinguish whether someone is joking or actually trying to offend someone. Some participants made negative comments as a form of playing. However, they only did that towards friends who would understand that it was for playing. Boys also downplayed physical aggression. Some said they engaged in “fikfakken” (play-fighting), which is perceived as just for fun. But even more serious fights were minimized in that the boys involved laughed these off. It seems that in this way adolescents justify their behavior and reduce their own responsibility in possibly causing harm to others (Marwick & boyd, 2014; Pornari & Wood, 2010).

With regard to adolescents’ reactions to negative peer interactions, online negative peer interactions were sometimes managed offline, whereas the opposite seemed far less common. Our finding that online conflicts were sometimes resolved offline contrasts with the study among Irish school girls, where it was reported that online conflicts are rarely acknowledged face-to-face (Ging & O’Higgins Norman, 2016). The authors framed this finding within the special taboo about/related to physical and verbal aggression in the girls’ school, whereas it seemed that

in the schools selected in this present research, no such taboo existed. This might explain why our participants were less hesitant to talk about online conflicts offline. Also, which reaction adolescents choose might depend on the severity and type of conflict, and relationship with the other(s): If it is not worth the risk of harming the relationship, they might pretend nothing happened, whereas if the relationship may suffer serious damage from not discussing what happened and making amends, adolescents might talk about it offline.

It is remarkable that in the management of offline incidents adults were sometimes involved, whereas this did not occur in online incidents. This might be a consequence of adolescents being taught to tell adults about peer problems in particular offline contexts such as the school. However, the online world lacks clear adult authority figures, which seems to inhibit participants from involving adults in the management of their online conflicts. This finding was also reported in a qualitative study on adolescents' online and offline bystander behavior in bullying incidents (Patterson, Allan, & Cross, 2016). In that study, adolescents indicated that they are expected to tell adults when bullying happens on school grounds, and that telling an adult is therefore also accepted when bullying takes place offline, but that there is a lack of rules and authority figures online which decreases the likelihood of them informing adults about online peer conflicts (Patterson et al., 2016).

Respecting the connection between daily negative interactions offline and online and their connection to other daily offline and online interactions (RQ2), the majority of the negative interactions took place either exclusively offline or online, and only a minority of the events were continued in another context. This finding is in contrast with the study of Stevens and colleagues (2016) in which adolescents aged 13 to 20 years old from disadvantaged neighborhoods described how interpersonal conflicts were often transferred from the online

world (Facebook) to the offline or vice versa. Compared to the participants of Stevens and colleagues' (2016) study, the age of the sample of the present study was lower and the age range was smaller. In the present study, some participants explained the non-continuation of conflicts, aggression, and bullying from the offline world to the online by the absence of contact online with the involved peer(s). The lack of continuation of online negative peer interactions in the offline environment was explained by the experienced disconnection between online and offline communication styles. Recurring in the interviews was that when adolescents had conflicts online, the next time they met each other face-to-face, they often acted as if nothing happened, as also occurred in the Irish study (Ging & O'Higgins Norman, 2016).

Concerning having daily interactions with peers, most of the interviewed adolescents made frequent use of digital tools to interact with their peers, yet many preferred offline interactions over online interactions. Some adolescents refrained from using (all or specific) digital tools, such as Facebook, for various reasons, ranging from just not being interested in them, to wanting to avoid the drama and emotional turmoil on these platforms. This finding corroborates the findings on non-usage of social networks sites in a study with American youth, in which youth also refrained from using Facebook for similar reasons (Stevens et al., 2016).

Taken together, it seems that the online and offline social worlds of the participants of the present study differed in terms of with whom they interact and how they interact and these differences induce a non-continuation of negative peer interactions from the offline context to the online or vice versa. Also, it is important to take into account that some of the adolescents of the present study started only recently with using social media platforms and some even currently refrained from using some platforms.

5. Implications

Our findings revealed that some of the participants described a distinction between interaction styles used for online and offline interactions, especially when communicating online with peers who are not their good friends. As some of these interactions appeared to be influenced by online disinhibition, this suggests the importance of improving adolescents' digital literacy skills (Koltay, 2011). This in turn will increase their understanding about how the online world differs from the offline world, and the strengths and weaknesses of communicating online and/or offline with peers.

The phenomenon of downplaying aggression amongst early adolescents should also be addressed, by drawing adolescents' attention to the potential harm caused through seemingly innocent acts, such as calling each other names for joking. Adolescents should be encouraged to acknowledge the potential adverse effects of aggression, and schools and parents should make clear that no form of aggression can be tolerated. Additionally, clear peer norms against aggression can be a powerful counterweight to aggressive behavior. As some (male) participants suggested that their only way to deal with peer conflicts was to react with physical aggression, it is also recommended that non-aggressive techniques to handle conflicts are included in school curriculums. Additionally, schools could screen which students tend to resort to physical aggression and offer these students courses and workshops to manage their aggression, such as the "Rock and Water" program (Ykema, Hartman, & Imms, 2006).

Finally, the present study revealed that adolescents ask for help from adults for some offline incidents, such as in the case of bullying or physical aggression, whereas they do not do this for online negative interactions. Although this can be interpreted positively, as a sign of agency, for serious incidents calling for the help of adults may be necessary to prevent further escalations. Therefore, adolescents might benefit from knowing when and how to involve adults

in online incidents, and from learning skills to cope more adequately with online incidents.

Schools and parents could offer clear and easy guidelines about how adolescents can involve adults in cases of serious online negative peer interactions, and which adults they can contact.

This should encourage adolescents to contact authority figures when experiencing serious online incidents. Additionally, there is a need for training for adults on how to helpfully respond when adolescents approach them for help with an online incident. Further, teaching adolescents adequate conflict management skills can help them to react constructively to conflicts, whether they happen online or offline.

6. Limitations and suggestions for future research

These findings have to be interpreted in light of some limitations. First, the present study used a convenience sample and therefore the results may not be fully representative of the population ([blinded for review] adolescents aged 13 to 14 years old). Furthermore, not all students in each class participated, either because they or their parents did not provide consent, or because they were not present at the time the interviews were conducted. The requirement of active consent from the participant and the participants' parents may have resulted in a biased sample of adolescents who have a relatively strong relationship with their parents (since they felt comfortable talking with them about the present study) and/or are more motivated to engage in conversations with adults. For these reasons, the results cannot be generalized to all adolescents. Nevertheless, our results are mostly in accordance with previous qualitative studies on adolescents' online and offline negative interactions (Ging & O'Higgins Norman, 2016; Patterson et al., 2016; Stevens et al., 2016), lending support to the validity of our findings.

Although we believe that photo-elicitation interviewing is an innovative and highly useful method to actively engage adolescents in the research and to explore their experiences in depth,

this methodology also has its limitations. Firstly, not all participants succeeded in generating at least three images per day. A few participants provided no images at all, whereas others did not provide images each day or provided less than three per day. Therefore, the advantages of using images during the interviews, such as having a discussion opener, diminishing memory biases, and facilitating the expression of the participant's perspective, were not equally present during each interview. This might have influenced the atmosphere of the interview, but also the responses of the interviewee. Secondly, the interviews were conducted by several interviewers. Although the interviewers were instructed to conduct the interviews in the same way across participants, using a semi-structured interview guide, they still had their own interviewing style. This resulted in notable differences in the ways the interviews proceeded, and consequently not all interviews reached the same level of depth. Nevertheless, the identified themes emerged across the interviews and schools, which makes it unlikely that the results are idiosyncratic of (a small section of) the study sample. Thirdly, participants had to ask permission of others for taking a recognizable picture of them, which may have made the pictures less authentic and representative. However, the pictures themselves were not the focus of the analysis, as they were mainly used as conversation starters and memory aids.

Finally, it should be noted that there has been some discussions in the literature about the definition of cyberbullying and many researchers do not consider characteristics such as power imbalance or repetition, which were included in the definition used in the present study, necessary for cyberbullying (e.g., Langos, 2012; Menesini & Nocentini, 2009; Thomas, Connor, & Scott, 2015). Although our main focus was on all kinds of negative offline and online interactions early adolescents experience and not on cyberbullying alone, it might be that researchers who would use another definition of cyberbullying might categorize more negative

interactions as cyberbullying. This might have led to an underreporting of the number of cyberbullying cases. The definitions used in the present study for cyberbullying (Smith et al., 2008) and traditional bullying (Olweus, 1993, 1999) should be taken into account when interpreting the present results.

7. Conclusion

This study suggests that adolescents' negative peer interactions and the way they handle these interactions are similar offline and online, but also differ in some respects. The present study demonstrated that negative interactions are sometimes carried-over from the offline to the online world and vice versa, but most incidents stay exclusively online or offline. The findings of the present study may provide important insights for schools and parents on the nature of adolescents' offline and online negative peer interactions.

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Appendix A

Interview guide

1. Introduction

- Q1: What are your thoughts about the assignment?
- Q2: Was it a fun activity?
- Q3: Was it difficult?

2. Discussing the first image¹

- Interviewer: “Please select the first image you would like to discuss”
- Q4: What is displayed on the image?
- Q5: What happened?
- Q6: How did you feel?
- Q7: How did you react? How was the interaction managed?
- Q7: What were the reactions of others?
- Q8: Are there other interactions (offline and/or online) that are related to this one that happened?

3. Discussing the rest of the images²

- Interviewer: “Please select the next image you would like to discuss now”
- Q4-Q8

4. Discussing other specific interactions

- Q9: Did you have peer interactions this week that were important for you and that were not displayed by an image?
- Q5-Q8
- Q10: Why did you chose not to take an image of this interaction?

5. Communication styles offline and online

- Q11: Do you interact differently with peers offline compared to online?
- Q12: What do you prefer, offline communication or online communication?

6. Closing of the interview

¹ If the participant did not provide any images, the interviewer moved directly on to the fourth part of the interview guide.

² This part was repeated until all the images of the participant were discussed.

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Appendix B

Coding scheme

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Offline negative interactions	Types of interactions	Physical aggression Calling each other names Conflict Irritating each other Uncooperative behavior Exclusion Tattling Taking advantage of someone Telling lies or spreading rumors
	Involvement in bullying	
	Managing offline conflicts	Ignoring the persons involved in the conflict Pretend nothing happened Physical Swearing Calling each other names Involve others Tell an adult Make amends Trying to find a solution together Payback (by performing the same behavior) Walk away Standing up for someone Asking to stop Seeking support from friends or family Laugh about it
	Downplaying	
Online negative interactions	Different types	Conflicts Exclusion Celebrity bashing Calling each other names Negative comments Posting or tagging unwanted pictures Hacking Irritating each other Stalking Threatening Telling lies or spreading rumors
	Involvement in cyberbullying	
	Managing online conflicts	Ignoring the persons involved in the conflict Pretend nothing happened Calling each other names Involve others Make amends Leave the conversation Blocking Payback Standing up for someone Stop reacting Asking to stop React with humor Asking for an explanation
	Downplaying	

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(Continuation Appendix B)

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Comparison and interconnectedness of offline and online aggression	Interaction styles online and offline	
	Preference for offline or online communication	Refraining from using digital tools
	Duration	Online Offline
	Transfer of conflicts from offline to online or vice versa	

Conflict of Interest

We declare that we have no competing interests.

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Highlights

- Adolescents experience daily a wide array of negative peer interactions
- Adolescents react on these incidents mostly within the same context (on-/offline)
- Negative peer interactions are often not continued in another context
- Adolescents act offline as if nothing happened after online negative interactions

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