MUNI

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University	
Faculty	Faculty of Social Studies
Procedure field	Social Psychology
Applicant	Mgr. et Mgr. Hana Macháčková, Ph.D.
Applicant's home unit, institution	Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University
Habilitation thesis	Cyberaggression in Context: Youth Involvement and Responses
Reviewer	Prof. Heidi Vandebosch, Ph.D.
Reviewer's home unit, institution	Department of Communication Studies, University of Antwerp

I think Dr. Hana Macháčková has made an important contribution to the field of cyber aggression (and, more specifically, cyberbullying), which has also been acknowledged by other scholars in this domain. Her research on the profiles of perpetrators, victims and bystanders; on the different-level factors that influence their behaviours; and on the overlap and difference with traditional aggression and bullying; …has inspired the work of many others. Dr. Hana Macháčková has obviously also been involved in relevant international networks (e.g. the COST Action on Cyberbullying, the EU Kids Online project, …), that have provided a very interesting basis for the exchange of ideas and information.

The Habilitation thesis provides a nice overview of Dr. Hana Macháčková's past work on cyber aggression amongst youth, and also refers to some of her more general studies on young people's online engagement. (It is, however, less clear to me how study IV fits in.) After focusing on the conceptualisation of cyberbullying and cyber aggression (which is, indeed, still the subject of a heated discussion in the field), she also presents the state-of-the-art regarding the different types of involvement, before sketching her own studies.

Given the large number of studies that Dr. Hana Macháčková has conducted in the past, and the limited length of the habilitation thesis, the part on the "Discussion and key conclusions" can only provide a quite "dense" overview of her main findings. But I appreciate how she tried to create a "red line" throughout the different parts, by focusing on what makes online aggression similar to, or different from, offline aggression.

Personally, I would have liked to see some more suggestions for future research in this area, as I think Dr. Hana Macháčková's studies provide an excellent basis for new ideas.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence (number of questions up to the reviewer)

1. Dr. Hana Macháčková convincingly describes the issues and discussions regarding the definition of cyberbullying and cyber aggression. I wonder, however, if she could suggest how we could find a way out of the impasse? Are there ways to eventually

come to an agreed upon definition of cyberbullying? Related to this, I also wonder how she would distinguish cyberbullying from other types of online aggression (such as Trolling or Flaming.)

2. Another important issue pertains to (the lack of) theory in the field of cyberbullying and online aggression. What theories are, according to Dr. Hana Macháčková, most useful to study these phenomena? Can we just rely on theories that are used to explain "traditional" bullying/aggression (e.g. the General Aggression Model), or do they fall short when we try to apply them in an online context? Or the other way around, could theories that explain people's general online behaviours, be specified in such a way that they are able to explain aggressive online behaviour? Or, as a last option, do we actually need new theories? And how then could Dr. Hana Macháčková's findings provide a basis for them?

3. In the text there are several references to the "characteristics of the online environment". I wonder, however, if this approach is not too unnuanced. The online environment provides opportunities for different types of communication, includes many different types of communication platforms, …. Although they might share some similarities, they might also differ on several important aspects (e.g. textual versus visual communication, synchronous versus a-synchronous communication, private versus public communication, anonymous versus non-anonymous communication, etcetera). Could Dr. Hana Macháčková perhaps elaborate a bit on this? What does this actually imply for our research on online aggression/ cyberbullying?

4. As mentioned in the Habilitation thesis, cyberbullying may have an important impact on young people's mental health. What recommendations can be made, based on the findings with regard to victims' and cyber bystanders' responses, to improve prevention and intervention efforts? In addition, I would like to ask what Dr. Hana Macháčková considers to be the role of the Industry in the prevention, detection and intervention of cyberbullying and online aggression? If the characteristics of the online environment (and the related "affordances") sometimes "facilitate" engagement in cyberbullying, how then, for instance, can developers design a safer environment (e.g. by "changing" these characteristics)?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled "Cyberaggression in Context: Youth Involvement and Responses " by Hana Macháčková **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Social Psychology**.**

Date: 26 april 2019   Signature: Heidi Vandebosch