

Desistance from Adolescent Cyberaggression is Associated with Guilt about Cyberbehavior

Janelle B. Bailey & Kristine M. Jacquin
Fielding Graduate University

Abstract

We examined the relationship between desistance from adolescent cyberaggression and feelings of regret, disappointment, and guilt. Results indicated a relationship between age of desistance from cyberaggression and disappointment, guilt, and regret, with regret as the strongest predictor. Those who desist reported more guilt compared to those who do not.

Introduction

- The prevalence of cyberbullying victimization among adolescents aged 15 to 17 ranges from 23% to 26% in the United States and 40.4% of those victimized considered suicide (Hsieh et al., 2021).
- In previous research, the majority of cyberbullies expressed no remorse and higher levels of cyberbullying were predicted by low levels of remorse (Perren & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012; Slonje et al., 2012).
- Lower levels of anticipated shame and guilt predicted higher levels of cyberbully perpetration in adolescents (Shadmanfaat et al., 2020).
- Our study was the first to examine the relationship between age of desistance from adolescent cyberaggression and guilt, regret, and disappointment about cyberbehavior.
- We hypothesized feelings of guilt, regret, and disappointment would predict younger age of desistance from cyberaggression.

Method

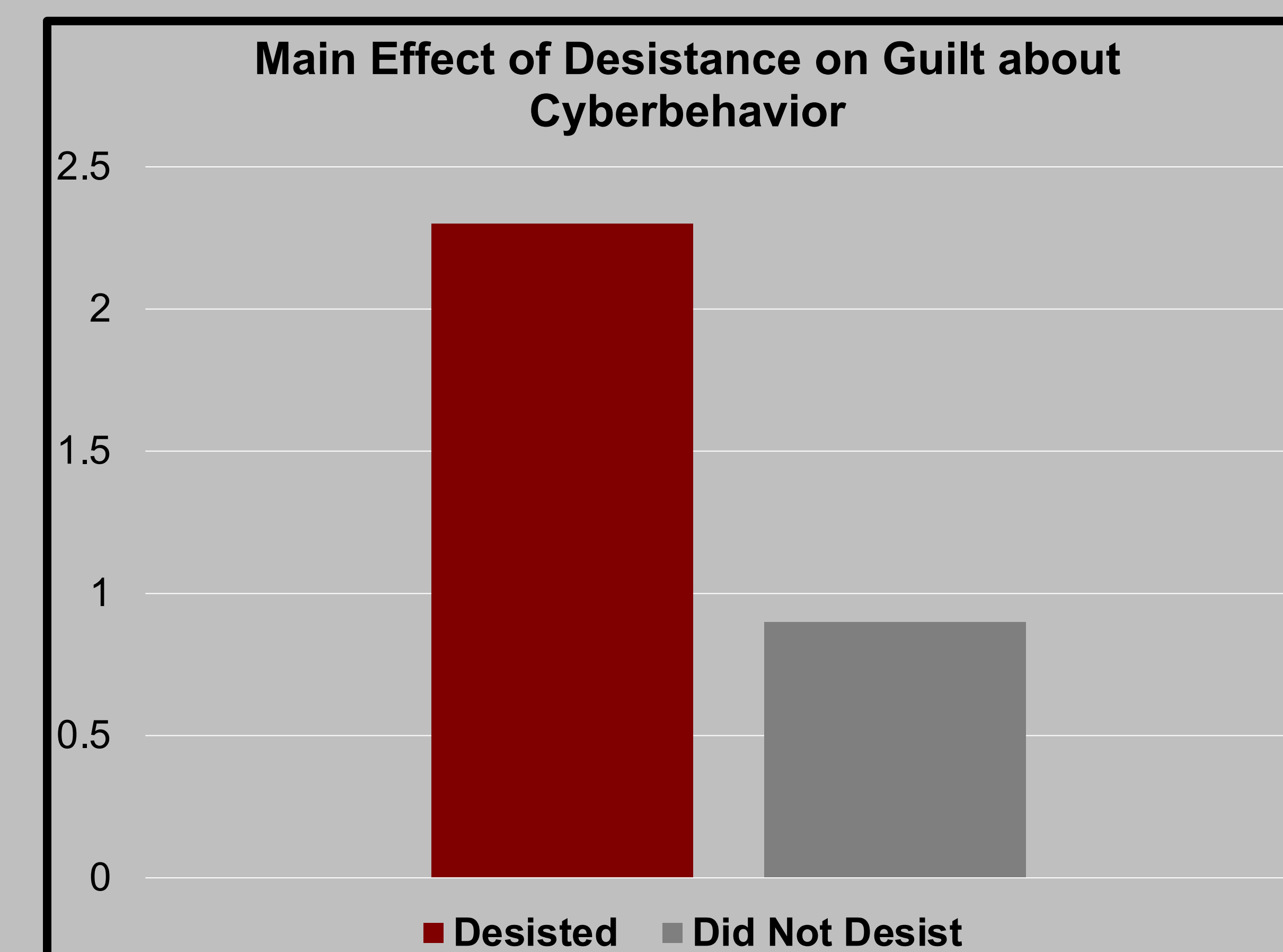
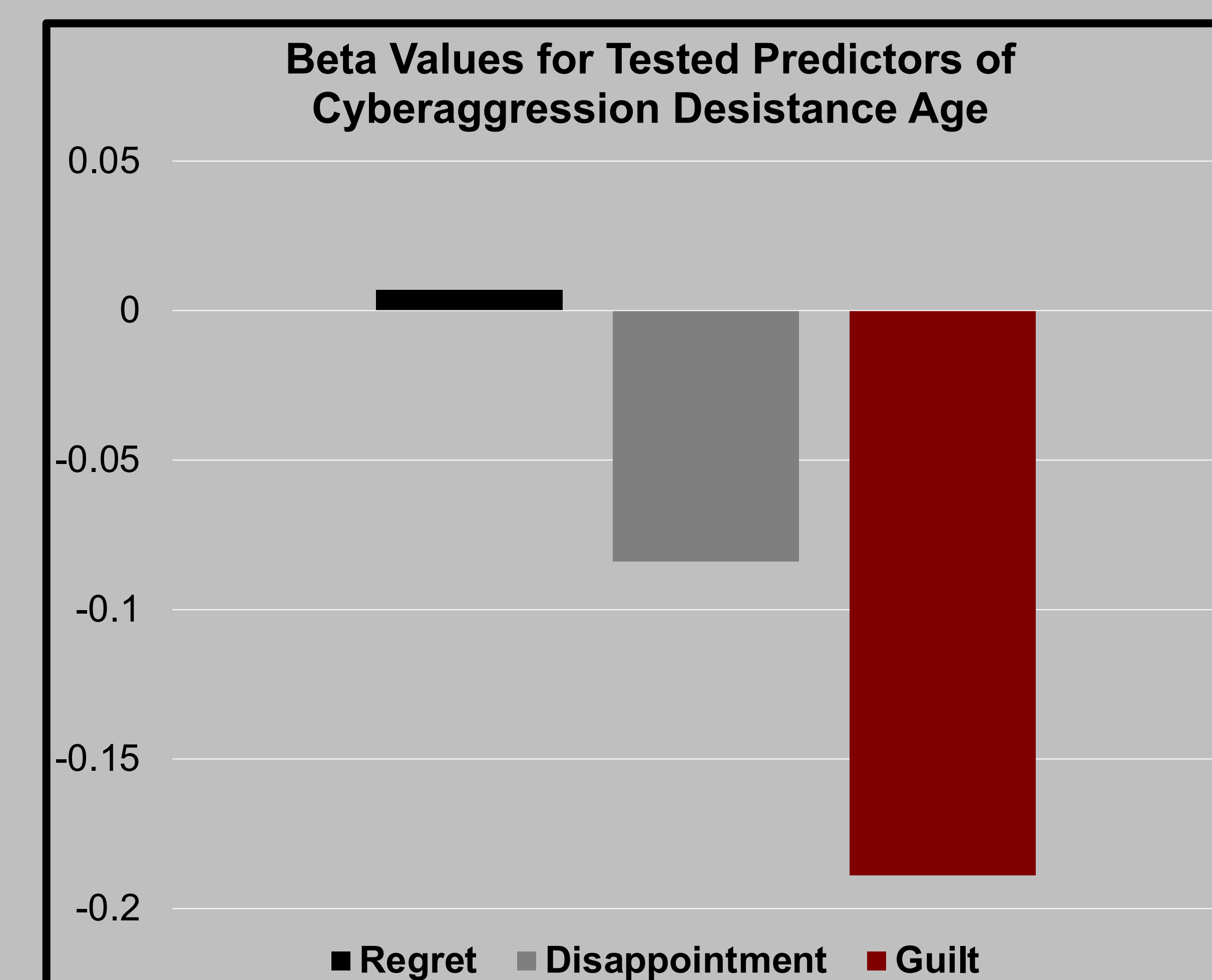
- $N = 400$ young adults (Age: 18-35, $M = 27.5$, $SD = 4.8$) were recruited from the U.S. for a study about cyber experiences from the ages of 10 to 17 years
- Gender identity: men (47.5%), women (45.8%), non-binary (2.3%), transgender men (1.5%), agender (0.8%), transgender women (0.5%), other (0.5%), and genderqueer (0.3%)
- Ethnoracial identity: White (61.5%), African American (11.8%), Asian American (10.8%), mixed (7.2%), Hispanic (7.0%), and other (1.8%)
- Participants were asked about their cyberaggression experiences, when they stopped engaging in cyberaggression (if relevant), and their regret, disappointment, and guilt about their cyberbehavior (questionnaire by Beugelmans et al., 2014)

Results

- Regression was conducted with feelings of regret, disappointment, and guilt about cyberbehavior as predictors and age of desistance from cyberaggression as the DV
- Feelings about cyberbehavior significantly predicted desistance age, $F(3, 142) = 2.96$, $p = .04$, adj. $R^2 = .04$
- The strongest predictor was guilt, such that more guilt about cyberbehavior predicted younger age at desistance (beta = $-.189$)

Results (cont.)

- ANOVA with desistance (yes or no) as IV and guilt about cyberbehavior as DV revealed that those who desist reported significantly higher guilt ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.54$) than those who do not desist ($M = 0.90$, $SD = 0.85$)



Discussion

- In support of our hypothesis, our results indicate a relationship between feelings about cyberbehavior and age of desistance from cyberaggression.
- Participants who felt more guilt about their cyberbehavior stopped their cyberaggression at a younger age.
- Additionally, participants who desist from cyberaggression report higher guilt compared to those who do not desist.
- Therefore, programs aimed at decreasing cyberaggression should aim to teach adolescents about moral emotions.

References

- Hsieh, Y., Jain, P., Veluri, N., Bhela, J., Sheikh, B., Bangash, F., Gude, J., Subhedar, R., Zhang, M., Shah, M., Mansuri, Z., Patel, U., Aedma, K. K., & Parikh, T. (2021). Mood and suicidality among Cyberbullied adolescents: A cross-sectional study from youth risk behavior survey. *Adolescents*, 1(4), 412-420. <https://doi.org/10.3390/adolescents1040031>
- Perren, S., & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, E. (2012). Cyberbullying and traditional bullying in adolescence: Differential roles of moral disengagement, moral emotions, and moral values. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 9(2), 195-209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2011.643168>
- Shadmanfaat, S. M., Choi, J., Kabiri, S., & Yun, I. (2020). Assessing the links between parenting practices, moral emotions, and cyberbullying perpetrations among a sample of Iranian sports fans. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 64(16), 1674-1695. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624x20923252>
- Slonje, R., Smith, P. K., & Frisén, A. (2012). Processes of cyberbullying, and feelings of remorse by bullies: A pilot study. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 9(2), 244-259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2011.643670>