



Original

## Possible common correlates between bullying and cyber-bullying among adolescents



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### ABSTRACT

The present study investigates possible individual characteristics associated with traditional and cyber-bullying/victimization among 146 Greek junior high school students and their contribution in the prediction of the phenomena. Participants completed a self-report questionnaire, measuring online disinhibition, personality traits, social skills, and relations, as well as Internet use. Results indicated that although some students participated with the same role in traditional and cyber-bullying/victimization and shared common characteristics, most of them participated in either one or both phenomena with opposite roles. In terms of predictive factors, cyber-bullying was predicted by being a male, online disinhibition, online activity and psychopathic traits, while traditional bullying was predicted by being a male, online disinhibition and sensation seeking. Cyber-victimization was predicted by online disinhibition, assertion, and few peer relations, while traditional victimization by Internet skills and impulsive-irresponsible traits. Findings are discussed in terms of common and differentiated prevention and intervention practices.

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### Posibles correlatos comunes entre el acoso y el ciberacoso en adolescentes

#### RESUMEN

Este estudio investiga las posibles características individuales asociadas a la victimización tradicional y por ciberacoso en 146 estudiantes de secundaria griegos y su contribución a la predicción del fenómeno. Los participantes cumplimentaron un cuestionario de autoinforme que medía la desinhibición en la red, rasgos de personalidad, habilidades y relaciones sociales y la utilización de internet. Los resultados indican que a pesar de que algunos estudiantes participaron con el mismo rol en la victimización tradicional y en la de ciberacoso y compartían características, la mayoría participaron en uno de los fenómenos o en ambos con roles opuestos. En relación a los factores predictores, el ciberacoso se predijo por el género masculino, la desinhibición online, la actividad online y rasgos psicopáticos, mientras que el acoso tradicional por el género masculino, la desinhibición online y la búsqueda de sensaciones. La victimización cibernética la predecía la desinhibición online, asertividad y escasas relaciones con compañeros, mientras que la victimización tradicional la predecían las aptitudes cibernéticas y los rasgos de impulsividad y falta de responsabilidad. Se comentan los resultados en cuanto a la prevención común y diferenciada y a la praxis en intervención.

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#### Palabras clave:

Ciberacoso

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Adolescentes

Cyber-bullying has recently emerged as an aggressive, intentional act that is carried out by a group or an individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time, against a victim who cannot easily defend him/herself (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, & Tippett, 2006). Although several researchers consider cyber-bullying a sub-category of traditional bullying<sup>1</sup> that occurs through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (e.g., Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011), others regard it

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<sup>1</sup> The term traditional bullying refers to conventional bullying and is introduced henceforth as a synonym of school bullying, in order to make the distinction with cyber-bullying.

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as a completely different type of aggression with distinctive participant profiles, motives, personal characteristics, and roles (see Antoniadou & Kokkinos, 2015a, for an extended review). According to the first position, cyber-bullying/victimization and traditional bullying/victimization have significant high correlations (e.g., Hinduja & Patchin, 2008), and factor analyses indicate that the items for their assessment load into common factors (Bauman & Newman, 2013; Olweus, 2012), while it has been suggested that only a small number of students is involved exclusively in cyber-bullying/victimization incidents (Olweus, 2012). Furthermore, in most cases, students who simultaneously participate in both phenomena adopt the same role (e.g., Dempsey, Haden, Goldma, Sivinsk, & Wiens, 2011). Nevertheless, not all studies support these arguments, since other findings indicate that cyber-bullying/victimization also involves a number of students who have no participation in traditional bullying/victimization (e.g., McLoughlin, Meyricke, & Burgess, 2009), as well as students who participate with different or multiple roles (e.g., Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla, & Daciuk, 2012). The aforementioned differences have been frequently attributed to the distinct characteristics of ICTs and the perceived safety that they provide to users (Antoniadou & Kokkinos, 2015a). Similarly to traditional<sup>2</sup> bullying, cyber-bullying may cause discomfort, depression, and anxiety to the victim, while it may involve other participants as well, who support and/or observe those involved, or even adopt a dual role (i.e., bully-victims; Antoniadou & Kokkinos, 2013; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008).

Despite the emerging body of research examining cyber and traditional bullying/victimization jointly in order to allow for meaningful comparisons, still little is known about the possible common participants' individual characteristics, while the existing studies differ considerably in terms of sampling, assessment methods, and statistical analysis (e.g., Antoniadou & Kokkinos, 2015b; Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Thus, the present study examines possible common individual characteristics among cyber and traditional bullying/victimization participants that emerge as the most prevailing in the study of both phenomena (i.e., gender, personality, social skills, and social relations) (e.g., Fanti & Kimonis, 2013; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003), as well as those that may distinguish students' participation in cyber-bullying/victimization (i.e., Internet use and online disinhibition).

### Individual Characteristics Related to Traditional and Cyber-bullying/ Victimization

The literature on traditional bullying is often taken as a framework to understand cyber-bullying, while due to their complexity, they both require an interdisciplinary approach, so that their forms, causes, and correlates can be sufficiently investigated. Within the field of psychology, the individual differences perspective of bullying remains of particular interest for three reasons: firstly, several individual factors can be more easily influenced, and contrary to contextual factors, allow school communities more possibilities for prevention and intervention (Farrington & Baldry, 2010). Secondly, although individual factors prevail in the power imbalance between bullies and victims, they may differently influence the power imbalance in terms of cyber-bullying, since it takes place within an anonymous context that provides less information regarding power (Currie et al., 2012). Finally, research indicates that individual factors account for a greater amount of variance in cyber-bullying and victimization (Schumann, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> The term traditional bullying refers to conventional bullying and is introduced henceforth as a synonym of school bullying, in order to make the distinction with cyber-bullying.

The existing studies on adolescents' concurrent involvement in both traditional and cyber-bullying/victimization explore participants' psychosocial profile as examined in traditional bullying/victimization research (e.g., Katzer, Fetschenhauer, & Belschak, 2009). Even though researchers are currently investigating associations between psychological factors and cyber-bullying/victimization, the literature has focused on the examination of the effects of one or two psychological variables on these behaviors, and not the simultaneous effects of multiple variables. Since behaviors do not have simple causes but multiple causes that are determined by a large number of interacting individual and contextual variables, the present study aims at examining the possible common traditional and cyber-bullying/victimization participants'<sup>3</sup> individual characteristics that emerge as the most prevailing in the study of both phenomena (i.e., personality, social skills, and social relations), as well as those that may distinguish participation in cyber-bullying/victimization (i.e., Internet use and online disinhibition).

### Internet Use and Online Disinhibition

The excessive and dangerous use of ICTs is related to students' cyber-bullying/victimization participation, as well as their ability to use ICTs effectively (i.e., advanced use of computers, networks, and digital information) (Walrave & Heirman, 2012). As proposed by Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, and Ólafsson (2011) a wide range of online activities indicates better ICTs skills, while those who make excessive and dangerous Internet use are more likely to be involved in antisocial and delinquent behavior offline (e.g., Ko, Yen, Liu, Huang, & Yen, 2009).

An antecedent factor involved in cyber-bullying/victimization is online disinhibition (Suler, 2004), which is defined as "any behavior characterized by an apparent reduction in concerns for self-presentation and judgment of others" (Joinson, 1998, p. 44) and can lead to aggressive behavior. Although the Internet may allow individuals to express aspects of themselves which they would not manifest in real life, this does not mean that all individuals will employ it for aggressive purposes. Previous studies have indicated that personal characteristics, such as personality, social skills, and emotional control, affect the way that people use the Internet (e.g., Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel, & Fox, 2002), and whether they will use it for negative purposes. Online disinhibition has been implicated in cyber-victimization as well (Kokkinos, Antoniadou, Asdre, & Voulgaridou, in press), since students who exhibit uninhibited behavior (e.g., post personal information and material online, interact with strangers) are at risk of being victimized.

### Psychopathic Traits

Psychopathic traits are among the personality characteristics that adolescent cyber-bullies share with traditional bullies (e.g., Antoniadou & Kokkinos, 2013). In general, individuals with psychopathic traits are attracted to the Internet since it provides them with constant display to an infinite audience and immediate feedback, crucial for their narcissism (Baldasare, Bauman, Goldman, & Robie, 2012), while at the same time it furnishes them with ample opportunities for indirect aggression in which they are especially apt due to their manipulative tendencies. Finally, as the Internet provides reduced verbal signals, it is likely to accentuate their aggressive behavior, given that they are already characterized by low emotional empathy (Ang & Goh, 2010). It has been suggested that

<sup>3</sup> The term "participants" is inclusive and refers to all victims and perpetrators (i.e., bullies, bully-victims).

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