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TRADITIONAL BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING: A COMPARISON OF PARENTING STYLES IN FRANCE

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Abstract

As the use of information and communications technology evolves, bullying has also evolved into a form of online aggression called cyberbullying. The link between adolescents' perception of parenting style (i.e. permissive, authoritarian, authoritative), traditional bullying and cyberbullying remains unclear in the literature. We assumed that cyberbullying and traditional bullying would be associated with inefficient parenting styles (i.e. authoritarian and permissive parenting styles).

A total of 601 French adolescents aged 10 to 14 years participated in this study. Participants completed questionnaires assessing cyberbullying and cyber-victimization, traditional school bullying and traditional victimization and parenting styles.

We found that only a permissive parenting style was correlated with traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Permissive parents have few rules, reduced supervision, and few expectations and demands. Hence, their children tend to struggle with self-regulation, which may subsequently lead to bullying and cyberbullying. It is therefore important to focus on parenting practices to prevent bullying (traditional bullying and cyberbullying) by teaching children proper ways to use the internet.

Keywords: *traditional bullying, cyberbullying, parenting styles, adolescents*

Introduction

A growing body of research demonstrates that bullying is associated with negative consequences for both bullies and their victims (Farrington, Lösel, Ttofi, & Theodorakis, 2012; Olweus, 1993). Traditional bullying is usually defined as follows: *'a student is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself'* (Olweus, 1999, p.13). Such school violence is based on an imbalance of power and strength, and it is considered to be peer abuse when it happens intentionally and repeatably (Rigby, 2002; Smith & Sharp, 1994).

The internet has unleashed cruelty to a degree unseen before. Because of internet accessibility and the affordability of new technology, bullies now have multiple ways to harass their victims (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). This phenomenon is called cyberbullying, and it can be defined 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, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, & Tippett, 2008, p. 376). From this perspective, cyberbullying is a systematic abuse of power which occurs when using information and communications technologies (ICTs), like cell phones, computers, the internet, social networks and websites. (Antoniadou & Kokkinos, 2015). While the definitions of cyberbullying and traditional bullying share certain characteristics (e.g. repetitiveness, intentionality, power imbalance, negative consequences), they also differ (e.g. anonymity, infinite audience, limited adult supervision) (Chesney, Coyne, Logan, & Madden, 2009). Contrary to traditional bullying, cyberbullying can be done at anytime and anywhere, and the potential audience is wider and can be completely anonymous (Smith *et al.*, 2008). In the case of cyberbullying, a victim can be attacked at any time.

Moreover, cyberbullies often create a false identity to hide from their victims (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009).

According to a meta-analysis (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2007), 15% of school-aged youth are involved in traditional school bullying (i.e. they are bullies, victims, or both). The same prevalence has been found in a recent meta-analysis of youths who are involved in cyberbullying as cyberbullies, cyber-victims or both (Modecki et al., 2014). In France, the prevalence of traditional bullying was around 10% (Debarbieux, 2016), and 6–15% of children and young people have been cyberbullied (Blaya, 2013). The two phenomena lead to deleterious physical, academic and mental health issues (Olweus, 1999; Twyman, Saylor, Taylor, & Comeaux, 2010). Several individuals, peers and environmental factors (e.g. lower levels of empathy, having been a victim of bullying, antisocial peers, family attachment) have been found to explain why adolescents are more likely to engage in traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Antoniadou & Kokkinos, 2015; Blaya, 2006; Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014). However, to our knowledge, only one study (Dehue, Bolman, Vollink, & Pouwelse, 2012) was conducted to examine the relation between cyberbullying, traditional bullying and parenting styles to ensure a better understanding of these two phenomena of school violence. Using a sample of 1232 students Low, Espelage, Rao, Hong and Little (2013) explored the link between family violence, bullying perpetration, fighting perpetration and adolescent substance use. Their results show that fighting and bullying perpetration correlate with family violence and substance use for male adolescents.

In fact, little is known about the role of parenting in cyberbullying (Dehue et al., 2012). In this regard, parents are often excluded from the activities of their children, especially their internet activities (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Indeed, parents often lack knowledge of new communication technologies and feel less confident using the internet than the youth (Aslan, 2011). Moreover, they do not fully understand the risks (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Wong, Cheng, Ngan, & Ma, 2011). The present study examines the link between bullying (i.e. traditional bullying and cyber-bullying) and adolescents' perception of parenting styles according to Buri (1991) and Baumrind (1967, 1971) (i.e. permissive, authoritarian and authoritative styles (Baumrind, 1967, 1971)) in a French context.

Parenting styles and bullying

Parenting styles and practices are associated with adolescent behaviour (Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994; Simons-Morton, Chen, Hand, & Haynie, 2008). In particular, some studies have revealed the important role of the parenting context for understanding the development of bullying (Aslan, 2011; Efobi & Nwokolo, 2014; Georgiou, 2012; Ok & Aslan, 2010; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011), and little is known about the role of parenting styles in cyberbullying (Dehue et al., 2012; Fousiani, Dimitropoulou, Michaelides, & Van Petegem, 2016). In her first study, Baumrind (1967) identified three main types of parenting styles (i.e. permissive, authoritarian, authoritative), suggesting that differences in styles account for the way children function socially, emotionally and cognitively. Parental characteristics can be ranked in a responsiveness dimension (i.e. warmth, support, acceptance and affection) and a demandingness dimension (i.e. supervision, control and monitoring, Baumrind, 1991, 2005; Spera, 2006). The permissive-indulgent parental style is low on demandingness and high on responsiveness. This kind of parent may be openly affectionate and loving, but sets few or no limits, even when the child's safety may be at risk. The authoritarian parenting style is characterized by high demandingness with low responsiveness. The authoritarian parent gives rigid rules, demands obedience and uses strategies such as the withdrawal of love or approval to force a child to conform (and abusive measures sometimes). Children of such parents rank lower in happiness, social competence and self-esteem. The authoritative style is characterized by high demandingness and high responsiveness. Authoritative parents are firm but not rigid, and they adopt supportive disciplinary methods (i.e. fair and consistent discipline). The authoritative style is considered the '*ideal*' parenting style and seems to produce children with high levels of psychosocial competences (e.g.

self-reliance and self-esteem), who are socially responsible, independent, capable and happy (Maccoby, 1992). Children who perceived their parents as authoritative have been found to be less likely to engage in traditional bullying and victimization behaviour (Georgiou, 2016; Rican, Klicperova, & Koucka, 1993). In our study, we expected the authoritative parenting style to be linked to less traditional bullying and cyberbullying. The other two parental styles (i.e. authoritarian and permissive) could have a detrimental effect on the psychosocial competence of children (Duman & Margolin, 2007). Indeed, the authoritative parenting style is often associated with the highest psychosocial competence (e.g. higher adaptability, empathy and self-esteem) while permissive and authoritarian parenting styles are often associated with lower psychosocial competence (Baumrind, 1996).

Our study

The link between adolescents' perception of parenting style, traditional bullying and cyberbullying remains unclear in the literature, and past studies have produced contradictory results (Baumrind, 2005; Fousiani et al., 2016). Concerning traditional bullying, studies suggest that parents who interact with their children in an authoritarian way (e.g. in an aggressive and low empathic way) could encourage them to interact with their peers in the same manner, thus increasing the possibility that their children adopt bullying behaviour in school (Pontzer, 2010). Nevertheless, other studies suggest that authoritarian parenting is also positively associated with victimization experiences, whereas authoritative parenting was negatively associated with those behaviours (Dehue et al., 2012; Georgiou, 2016). In addition, some studies have shown that a permissive parenting style (e.g. parents who set few limits, demands or controls) predicts the child's experience of victimization by traditional bullying (Baldry & Farrington, 2000, 2005; Georgiou, 2008). One study (Dehue et al., 2012), though, revealed that permissive parenting was unrelated to bullying victimization. Other studies have found that children raised in a permissive manner could tend to have difficulties in curtailing their impulsive aggression and bullying because they were not taught how their actions affect others (Baumrind, 1966; Miller, DiIorio, & Dudley, 2002). Indeed, it would seem that permissive parents, who do not supervise or control their children, permit them to behave in unsuitable and vulnerable ways, such as bullying. These children have not been taught how their behaviours affect others (Georgiou, 2007).

Concerning cyberbullying, the literature is less developed concerning this relationship between cyber-victims and parenting styles. Only one study has highlighted the relation between cyberbullying and parenting styles (Dehue et al., 2012). That research gap is why we wanted to study this relationship in our study and in a French context. Dehue et al. (2012) found that youths with authoritarian parents are cyber-victimized more than youths with authoritative and permissive parents, but the differences were not significant in their study. Thus, the relationship between parenting styles and cyberbullying remains unclear.

Parents are often excluded from the internet activities of their children because they value their own privacy; thus, cyberbullying is less visible than traditional bullying (Bhat, 2008). In this way, we predicted that permissive parents supervise less and exert less control over their children's activities online. However, the role of parents is critical to safe internet usage (Bhat, 2008), and this can be a frequent home activity (Dehue et al., 2008). Without supervision and control, parents cannot explain to their children the good practices and the consequences of their online actions for themselves and for their peers. We expected that permissive or authoritarian parenting styles could lead children to adopt more aggressive behaviour at school (i.e. traditional bullying) and online (i.e. cyberbullying) and to be more victimized (i.e. traditional and cyber-victimization). Authoritative style was expected to be negatively associated with traditional bullying, cyberbullying and victimization. To sum up, this study explored the differences between parenting styles and the two types of bullying. In so doing, we expected unsuitable parenting styles to be linked to bullying offline and online and suitable parenting style to protect children from involvement in school violence but not necessarily for the same reasons.

Method

Participants. The sample consisted of 601 French youths of 10 to 14 years old ($M = 12.56$ years old, $SD = 1.54$) from seven public French high schools. Of the sample, 327 (54.4%) were female, and 274 (45.6 %) were male. Consent was obtained from all of the adolescents and their parents as well as from the institutions.

Procedure. All the participants were asked to complete a questionnaire in the presence of a female experimenter during a one-and-a-half-hour time period. The order of the measures was randomized to minimize bias. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Students were asked to report their gender and grade level at the end of the questionnaire. The students completed the questionnaire in their regular classrooms. Participants completed the survey in small groups of 10 people to limit discussions with other students. Finally, a thorough debriefing was conducted in order to gather feedback from participants and to answer any questions.

Measures. Research has found that many cyber-bullies are simultaneously school bullies (Twyman, Saylor, Taylor, & Comeaux, 2010) and that students experiencing school victimization are more likely to be victims online (Kowalski, Limber, Limber, & Agatston, 2012; Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, & Tippett, 2008). Some studies have recommended using a measurement containing specific cyberbullying acts and comparing direct and indirect bullying separately from cyberbullying (Dehue et al., 2012; Beran & Li, 2008). We administered the survey of traditional bullying and cyberbullying separately but under the same experimental conditions. All the participants were in the same school context. Three hundred and forty-five students completed the questionnaire to assess their traditional bullying and victimization behaviours, and 259 students completed the questionnaire to evaluate their cyberbullying and cyber-victimization behaviours. All the participants completed the questionnaire to evaluate their perception of parenting styles.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying behaviour was assessed using the Electronic Bullying Questionnaire, created by Kowalski and Limber (2007). The questionnaire begins with a definition of cyberbullying: *'bullying through e-mail, instant messaging, in a chat room, on a website, or through a text message sent to a cell phone'*. The scale was composed of seven items relating to cyberbullying and eight items relating to cyber-victimization. The students had to rate the frequency with which they had perpetrated different behaviours of cyberbullying and/or had been bullied via websites or a cell phone (e.g. *'I was bullied through an e-mail message'*). Responses ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (more than one a week). The internal consistency was acceptable for the scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$).

Traditional school-bullying

The Illinois Bullying Scale (Espelage & Holt, 2001) was used to measure traditional school bullying and victimization. The scale consists of 18 items which measure three factors including moral bullying (nine items; e.g. *'I annoyed other students'*), physical bullying (five items; e.g. *'If someone beats me first, I will beat him/her'*) and victimization (four items, e.g. *'Other students beat and pushed me.'*). Responses ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (more than one a week). The internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$) was acceptable for the scale.

Parenting styles

In order to assess participants' perception of parenting styles, we used the Revised Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ, Leman, 2005), taken from Buri's version with 30 items (1991). This revised version is simplified to make it more comprehensible for children and to ensure its reliability and validity. According to Baumrind's taxonomy (1991), the Revised PAQ has three factors that represent the permissive parental style (e.g. *'My mother/father has always encouraged verbal give-and-take whenever I have felt that family rules and restrictions were unreasonable'*),

the authoritative parental style (e.g. ‘As I was growing up, my mother/father did not allow me to question any decision she/he had made’) and the authoritarian parental style (‘Whenever my mother/father told me to do something as I was growing up, she/he expected me to do it immediately without asking any questions’). Each of these items was stated from the point of view of adolescents regarding the patterns of authority exercised by their parents. The scale comprised eight items for the authoritative style, eight items for the authoritarian style and five items for the permissive style. Responses ranged from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*A lot*). The internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = .70) was acceptable for the scale.

Results

This study found that 18.8% of all students reported having been bullied ‘sometimes’ or more often (i.e. traditional victimization), 11.3% reported being bullies (i.e. traditional bullying), 4.6% reported having been bullied ‘sometimes’ or more often online (i.e. cyber-victimization) and 1.2% reported being cyber-bullies (i.e. cyberbullying). This set of results is similar to those obtained with national surveys in France (Blaya, 2013; DEPP, 2014).

Sex differences

A t-test analysis showed sex differences for traditional bullying and cyberbullying (see Table 1): compared to the girls, the boys bullied more often ($t(343) = 3.26, p < .001$). We obtained marginally significant results for cyber-bullies, with boys being more often implicated as cyber-bullies ($t(253) = 1.87, p = .06$) and less often as cyber-victims. Girls, in contrast, seemed to be cyber-victims more often ($t(243) = -1.83, p = .06$). There was no difference between girls and boys for traditional victimization ($p = .21, ns$). In addition, regarding parenting styles, there was no sex difference (for the authoritarian style, $p = .25, ns$ and for the permissive style, $p = .28, ns$) except for the authoritative parenting style: the girls seemed to receive more authoritative parenting than the boys ($t(599) = -2.15, p = .03$).

Table 1. Mean and standard deviations as a function of the students’ sex.

	Girls		Boys	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>
Traditional bullying	164	.41a (0.37)	181	.58b (0.59)
Physical bullying	164	.22a (.41)	181	.51a (.76)
Moral bullying	164	.41a (.43)	181	.54b (.63)
Traditional victimisation	164	0.64a (0.81)	181	0.75a (0.99)
Cyberbullying	146	0.12a (0.20)	109	0.17b (0.25)
Cybervictimisation	146	0.26a (0.50)	109	0.16b (0.26)
Authoritative style	327	2.16a (.63)	274	2.05b (.67)
Authoritarian style	327	2.34a (0.74)	274	2.26a (0.81)
Permissive style	327	1.10a (.67)	274	1.59a (0.74)

Note. Within a column, means without a common subscript differ at a significance level of at least $p < .05$.

Correlations

The Pearson's correlation analysis (see Table 2) indicated a significant negative correlation between an authoritative parenting style and traditional bullying ($r = -.16, p = .003$), in particular for physical bullying ($r = -.18, p = .003$) and for moral bullying ($r = -.18, p < .001$), but no significant relationship was found with cyberbullying ($p > .78, ns$) or victimization ($p > .62, ns$ for traditional victimization and $p > .78, ns$ for cyber-victimization). Our results partially confirmed our predictions. In addition, and as expected, a significant positive relationship was found between a permissive parenting style and cyberbullying ($r = .14, p = .02$) and with bullying ($r = .10, p < .05$), in particular for physical bullying ($r = .14, p = .01$) and for moral bullying ($r = .11, p = .03$). No significant relationship was found with victimization ($p > .76, ns$ for traditional victimization and $p > .55, ns$ for cyber-victimization). On the other hand, a significant positive relationship was found between an authoritarian parenting style and traditional victimization ($r = .12, p = .02$). Surprisingly, no significant relationships were found between an authoritarian parenting style and traditional bullying ($p > .86, ns$) and cyberbullying ($p > .55, ns$).

Table 2. Correlations among measures.

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Traditional bullying	—						
2. Traditional victimisation	.67***	—					
3. Cyberbullying	—	—	—				
4. Cybervictimisation	—	—	.44***	—			
5. Authoritative style	-.16**	-.03	.02	.01	—		
6. Authoritarian style	.01	.12*	.04	-.02	.26***	—	
7. Permissive style	.10*	-.2	.14*	.04	.18***	-.13**	—

Note. $N = 601$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

Early adolescence is a period of transition in social influence, during which parenting influences behaviour (Simons-Morton & Haynie, 2002). Numerous studies have revealed the important role of the parenting context for understanding traditional bullying and victimization (Baldry & Farrington, 2000; Georgiou, 2008, 2016). Few empirical studies have been conducted to examine the link between youths' perception of parenting styles involved in cyberbullying and cyber-victimization (Dehue et al., 2012; Fousiani et al., 2016). This study examined the relation between adolescents' perception of parental styles (i.e. permissive, authoritarian and authoritative styles), bullying (traditional and cyberbullying) and victimization (traditional and cyber-victimization) among French students aged 10–14 years old. We assumed that cyberbullying and traditional bullying would be associated with inefficient parenting styles (i.e. authoritarian and permissive parenting styles). Conversely, we expected authoritative style to lead to less bullying behaviour and victimization both at school and online. Our hypothesis was partially supported. As expected, the results indicate significant correlations between the permissive style and bullying (traditional and cyberbullying), but not with victimization. This result is interesting and confirms previous studies (Dehue et al., 2012). Parents are often less than expert in new communication

technologies, and they can feel less confident using the internet than children (Aslan, 2011). Moreover, sometimes parents do not fully understand the risks (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Wong, Cheng, Ngan, & Ma, 2011). Moreover, e-mail, text messages and social networking profiles are difficult to monitor, and many young people have their own computer and cell phone, enabling them to hide their behaviour from their parents (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Indeed, in cyberbullying, the bully is often hidden behind a false identity, notably by means of a false email account and social networking profile (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). This behaviour may be due to a lack of parental supervision and a permissive manner that allows children to explore the internet without online security and also to bully.

The results also show that an authoritative style was negatively associated with traditional bullying, but no significant relationship was found with cyberbullying or victimization. These results are partially consistent with the literature showing that an authoritative style is linked negatively to delinquent and antisocial behaviours as well as bullying behaviour (Georgiou, 2008, 2016; Miller et al., 2002). Many studies have found that children with authoritative parents exhibit fewer problem behaviours and have greater psychosocial competence (Georgiou, 2008, 2016; Miller et al., 2012; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991). Indeed, in one study, children who perceived their parents as authoritative (i.e. setting limits but respecting their children's independence and being responsive to their needs) were less likely to engage in bullying experiences (Rican et al., 1993). However, unexpectedly, no significant association was found between authoritative parenting and cyberbullying. In this regard, it may be more difficult for parents to adopt an authoritative style with their children using the internet because parents can feel less confident using the internet than their children (Bath, 2008; Wong, 2010). For example, they cannot engage in dialogue with their children regarding online risks because they are not aware of their children's online activities and difficulties (e.g. cyber-victimization).

Finally, an authoritarian parenting style was significantly positively associated with traditional victimization. Surprisingly, no significant relationships were found between an authoritarian parenting style and traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Bullies often describe their families as authoritarian (Baldry & Farrington 2000), but some studies have found that authoritarian parenting was positively associated with victimization experiences (Georgiou, 2016). Indeed, children who are exposed to negative parenting (e.g. an authoritarian style) may have lower self-esteem and become less able to assert their needs and feelings (Duncan, 2004). Thus, they may generalize such dysfunctional behaviour beyond their family, and their peers may regard them as easy targets to be harassed (Lereya, Samara, & Wolke, 2013). In addition, we found that permissive parenting was positively related to bullying but not to victimization. These findings are consistent with the previous literature on the relation between cyberbullying, cyber-victimization and parenting styles (Lereya et al., 2013; Georgiou, 2016). The permissive parenting style is characterized by a responsive and less demanding approach; these parents have few rules, expectations and demands. Hence, their children tend to struggle with self-regulation and self-control (Baumrind, 1967, 1991), potentially leading to delinquent behaviours, such as traditional bullying and cyberbullying.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations to the current study. First, parenting styles were not explicitly manipulated in the present study or measured from the point of view of the parents. We focused on the youths' perception of parenting styles. Future studies should manipulate parenting styles or measure them in an explicit manner in order to study the link between this variable and bullying. Moreover, the present sample of students lacked ethnic and cultural diversity. We focused on French students in a public junior high school, and the number of participants involved in cyberbullying was low. Future studies should extend the present results and examine a more heterogeneous sample of students, despite the difficulties of including factors such as ethnicity in research within French schools.

Conclusion

Little is known about the role of parenting in cyberbullying (Dehue et al., 2012). Our findings are consistent with the previous literature on the relation between cyberbullying, cyber-victimization and parenting styles (Lereya et al., 2013; Georgiou, 2016). A permissive parenting style seems to be the only style linked to higher traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Such a parenting style is low on demandingness and high on responsiveness; permissive parents have few rules, expectations and demands. Hence, their children tend to struggle with self-regulation and self-control (Baumrind, 1967, 1991), potentially leading to delinquent behaviours, such as traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Future studies on bullying and cyberbullying need to consider parenting styles when investigating these phenomena. Indeed, parents need to be vigilant and informed regarding the negative aspects of internet usage and the association of the internet with involvement in bullying. It is therefore important to focus on parenting practices to prevent bullying (traditional bullying and cyberbullying). In this regard, parents should be better trained regarding proper use of the internet so that they can teach their children in turn. Finally, it is important to identify which parent-child relationships are related to bullying (traditional bullying and cyberbullying) so that specific intervention programs can be developed to prevent school violence in childhood and adolescence.

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Tables: 2

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