

PARENT IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A STUDY OF CYBERBULLYING MYTHS OF PARENTS OF ADOLESCENT STUDENTS

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Abstract: This research explored cyberbullying myths of parents of adolescent students. It aimed to examine the level of cyberbullying myth acceptance (low vs. high) and its relation to variables such as gender, age, time spent online daily and self-estimation about their level of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) knowledge. It also aimed to investigate possible effects of the level of cyberbullying myth acceptance on the assessment of the severity of various cyberbullying forms. Participants were 460 Greek parents of adolescent students, males = 216 (47%) and females = 244 (53%). They completed the Cyber Bullying Myths Scale (CBM Scale - Lampridis, 2015), a self-report scale assessing Willard's (2007) CB forms in terms of severity (from the most to the less severe one) and a form of demographic and other information regarding variables mentioned above. The fathers of the sample, the less educated and the older ones were found to accept more cyberbullying myths. Also, the more a parent spends time online daily and the more he thinks that he is aware of the whereabouts of the Internet, the more he accepts such myths.

Key words: Cyberbullying, Cyberbullying myths, Cyberbullying stereotypes

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INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades a considerable body of research (for a review, see Elsaesser, Russell, McCauley-Ohannesian, & Patton, 2017) examined parental style in relation to cyber victimization and cyber perpetration yielding rather inconclusive results as far as cyberbullying prevention is concerned. Also, many studies investigated parents' beliefs and perceptions about traditional bullying (Waarsdop, Pas, O'Brennan, & Bradshaw, 2011) and cyberbullying (Compton, Campbell, & Mergler, 2014). In both cases parents were found to hold rather incorrect, general and simplified beliefs (Dehue, Bolman, & Vollnik, 2008), tended to view cyberbullying as less serious than traditional bullying and distinguished violence and its correlates in both the school and the Internet in terms of gender stereotypes (Cassidy, Brown, & Jackson, 2012). A third line of research focused on the role that variables such as the quality of parent – adolescent communication (Mesch, 2009) and the quality of parent – adolescent relationship (Makri-Botsari & Karagianni, 2014), as well as parents' attitudes towards the use of the digital media by their children (Valkenburg, Piotrowski, Hermanns, & de Leeuw, 2013), play in the prevention of cyberbullying. Many of these studies point out in their conclusions that cyberbullying prevention programs should seriously consider the crucial role of parents on this matter. Yet, what is interesting in this remark is that while in these research articles parents' beliefs about cyberbullying are characterized as stereotypical, steadfast and inaccurate, only few studies addressed this issue under the light of a social psychological approach, namely stereotypes.

Cyberbullying constitutes aggressive behavior and research on aggression has well documented that people in general tend to stereotypically perceive and justify aggressive behavior using “myths” (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009). Myths in this context are conceptualized as stereotypical beliefs that are often widely spread and varying in the extent they are accepted (Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Myth acceptance has been found to shape different attitudes regarding the blaming of the victim or the perpetrator as well as people's standpoint towards aggressive behavior and its components (Süssenbach, Eyssel, Rees, & Bohner, 2015). The present study aimed to investigate the stereotypical beliefs about cyberbullying that parents of adolescent students hold and the degree to which parents accept them. Also, it aimed to examine how different levels of cyberbullying myth acceptance can affect the assessment of cyberbullying forms in terms of their severity.

Furthermore, the present study aimed to investigate individual differences in cyberbullying myths acceptance depending on parents' gender, level of education, time spent online daily and estimated knowledge of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), since previous studies (Lampridis, 2015, 2017) have reported

that males and the less educated as well as those who access every day the internet more and those who feel more confident to their ICT knowledge tend to accept cyberbullying myths higher.

Cyberbullying

Research on cyberbullying can be considered as relatively recent since most of relative publications were released in the last two decades. Thus, up to now scholars studying cyberbullying have not come to a consensus regarding key issues of its conceptualization and the methodology through which cyberbullying should be studied (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014). Specifically, there is no commonly accepted definition of cyberbullying and the definitions that are popular among scholars tend to be rather general and descriptive, instead of clarifying its conceptual content (Ovejero, Yubero, Larranaga, & de la V. Moral, 2016). In this article two of the most cited definitions of cyberbullying are presented. One comes from Smith et al. (2008) who defined cyberbullying as “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly or over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (p. 376). The other definition comes from Tokunaga (2010) and in this case cyberbullying is defined as “any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others” (p. 278).

Another issue debated concerns the relation between traditional and cyber bullying. Undoubtedly, traditional bullying and cyberbullying are related phenomena since both refer to intentional aggressive behaviors aiming to harm the victim (Thomas, Connor, & Scott, 2015). Also, in both cases there are victims, perpetrators and bystanders. Even so, bullying takes place mainly in school, the victim is one at a time, the perpetrator outweighs in physical strength or social power, and both the victim and the perpetrator are physically present (Berger, 2007). On the contrary, cyberbullying could occur at any time of the day or the night, the perpetrator does not have to be physically stronger and could remain unknown behind the safety of a screen and create a fake identity, whereas their victims might be simultaneously multiple. Finally, bystanders can maintain their anonymity and hide their cyber presence (Notar, Padgett, & Roden, 2013).

Cyberbullying is performed in various ways. Willard (2007) identified distinct types of cyberbullying such as flaming (i.e., an online fight), harassment (i.e., repetitive, offensive messages sent to a target), outing and trickery (i.e., soliciting personal information from someone and then electronically sharing that information with

others without the individual's consent), exclusion (i.e., blocking an individual from buddy lists), impersonation (i.e., posing as the victim and electronically communicating negative or inappropriate information with others as if it were coming from the victim), cyber-stalking (i.e., using electronic communication to stalk another person by sending repetitive threatening communications), and denigration (slander with text messages or emails, posting defamatory comments or false rumors). It should be mentioned though, that recent publications (e.g., Pyczalski, 2013; Thorvaldsen, Stenseth, Egeberg, Pettersen, & Ponning, 2016) refer to two additional cyberbullying types: Sexting (i.e., sending and receiving sexually explicit messages primarily via mobile phones) and happy slapping (i.e., one or more perpetrators attack a victim and perform minor acts of violence against her/him for the purpose of recording the assault, usually with a camera phone or smart phone, and then post the video on the Internet). Cyberbullying can occur via instant messaging, e-mail, text messages, web pages, chat rooms, social networking sites, digital images, and online games (Tokunaga, 2010).

Gender and age effects on cyberbullying

In terms of gender differences, the existing data seem rather inconclusive. Although the main trend in relative findings is that boys are more prone to becoming perpetrators (Dehue et al., 2008; Olweus, 2010), while girls are more often victims (Adams, 2010; Smith et al., 2008), many studies have reported no significant differences (Dilmac, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Mishna, Cook, Gadalla, Dacink, & Solomon, 2010; Slonje & Smith, 2008) and others have found girls to be more involved in cyberbullying than boys (Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

In terms of age many studies agree that cyberbullying concerns students aged between 10 to 18 years and that cyberbullying reaches its highest point at the age of 13- 14 years of age (Wright, 2016). Also, many researchers (Brochado, Soares, Fraga, 2016; Selkie, Fales, & Moreno, 2016) suggested that the year by year exponential expansion of ICT globally consequently increases cyber bullying rates. Findings regarding Greece on this matter point that our country follows the tendency of other, more technologically advanced, countries of the West (Antoniadou & Kokkinos, 2013; Athanasiades, Kamariotis, Psalti, Baldry, & Sorrentino, 2015).

Cyberbullying-related myths

The construct of "myths" was introduced in the field of social psychology in the mid-1970s by scholars who strived to offer an explanation about the justification of male sexual violence against women (Burt, 1980). Myths served researchers' effort to

describe by an operational definition the process by which large social groups tend to explain in a stereotypical way this specific behavior (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Since the early 1980s the concept of myths has been exhaustively studied in the context of sexual aggression against women, mainly sexual assault and rape. It can be defined as “wrong descriptive or prescriptive beliefs about rape (i.e., about its causes, context, consequences, perpetrators, victims and their interaction) that serve to deny, downplay, or justify sexual violence that men commit against women” (Bohner, 1998, p. 14). Common rape myths tend to blame the victim, exonerate the perpetrator and deny the violence inherent in rape (Bohner, Pina, Viki, & Siebler, 2010).

Not all people accept rape myths. Specifically, some people tend to highly accept myths, while others moderately or not at all (Bohner et al., 2010). Those who accept rape myths highly tend to believe that rape is something that will never happen to them or their immediate others since they think they are able to protect themselves from any danger of that kind (Bohner, Siebler, & Schmelcher, 2006). They tend to think that they are careful, prudent and nonprovocative, they believe that the victim of sexual assault is also responsible and that the perpetrator has a lot of good excuses for his actions (Eyssel & Bohner, 2011; Hammond, Berry, & Rodriguez, 2011). Also, they tend to doubt victims’ honesty and question whether the reported incident is actual rape (Banon, Brosi, & Foubert, 2013). On the other hand, those who accept low or not at all rape myths have been found to believe that they have equal probabilities with any other to become victims and that the perpetrator is the sole responsible for his crime (Aronowitz, Lambert, & Davidoff, 2012). Moreover, they tend to think of the victim’s allegations as sincere and do not challenge the honesty of a rape accusation (Bohner, Siebler, & Raaijmakers, 1999). A common research finding is that in general men accept rape myths more than women (Edwards, Turchik, Dardis, Reynolds, & Gidycz, 2011). Nevertheless, a considerable body of research has clarified that in the cases of both men and women there are some who accept myths highly and some who accept myths moderately or not at all (Hockett, Smith, Klausing, & Saucier, 2016). Also, it is interesting that younger people have been found to accept rape myths less than older ones (Davies, Gilston, & Rogers, 2012) and that the same pattern appears in the case of the comparison between people of high and low education level with the latter accepting myths higher than the former ones (Heath, Lynch, Fritch, & Wong, 2013).

Parents, bullying and the digital age

Reviewing the literature regarding parents’ beliefs and perceptions about traditional bullying and cyberbullying shows that the studies concerning the former are many

more than the studies concerning the latter. In the case of traditional bullying the findings can be summarized as follows: First, parents tend to consider as aggressive behavior the physical form of violence rather than the verbal one (Mishna, Pepler, & Wiener, 2006). Also, they seem to think that boys have higher probability to become bullies (Eslea & Smith, 2000) than girls. Nevertheless, the research findings concerning traditional bullying point to the opposite direction. That is, students tend to exhibit both forms (physical and verbal) of aggressive behavior in school almost equally (Baldry, 2003), but girls seem to prefer verbal aggression while boys the physical one (Scheithauer, Hayer, Petermann, & Jugert, 2006). Second, fathers have been found to accept and justify more easily the aggressive behavior performed in school (Erdogdu, 2016). A common finding of the violence against women research is that men tend to justify more often the perpetrator. Third, in many studies (Houndoumadi & Pateraki, 2001; Smorti, Menesini, & Smith, 2003) parents appeared to be sensitive about violence in school while at the same time claim that they do not know how to advise and protect their children. Moreover, many parents seem to believe that their child will not become a bully; they also think –probably wishfully that their child will not become a victim (Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Duong, 2011).

In the case of cyberbullying a similar summary of relative empirical evidence would be as such: Parents have been found to declare very sensitive about cyber bullying and very worried because they lack knowledge about practices that can protect their children (Tokunaga, 2010). Although they state that they are aware of cyberbullying as a social phenomenon research has clearly indicated that they hold a rather general, vague and inaccurate view about the concept of it (Perren et al., 2012). A few years ago, Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, and Lattanner (2014) in their meta-analysis of 131 cyberbullying studies highlighted this fact as a serious methodological shortcoming in the relevant research and suggested that in order for crucial validity risks to be avoided an introductory paragraph defining cyberbullying should be written in all questionnaires aiming at assessing beliefs and perceptions of it. Also, parents tend to view cyber bullying as a lighter or harmless form of bullying (Wadian, Jones, Sonnentag, & Barnett, 2016). Nevertheless, evidence reported by Campbell, Spears, Slee, Butler, and Kift (2012) directly suggest that the pain experienced by the victim of cyberbullying is equally painful in comparison to the pain and suffering experienced in a traditional bullying incident. As in the case of traditional bullying, parents have been found to seriously believe that their child will not be cyberbullied and that she/he will not cyberbully others (Ybarra & Mitchel, 2004). The relative evidence does not support this viewpoint (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). Finally, similarly to what is mentioned above for traditional bullying, women have been found to be more sensitive about cyberbullying (Larranaga, Yubero, & Ovejero, 2016). Still, it is

interesting that some mothers have also been found to attribute part of the responsibility for cyberbullying to victims (Buelga, Martinez-Ferrer, & Musitu, 2016). This specific tendency has also been noted in studies (Bohner et al., 2009) regarding the justification of violence against women.

It is of note that parents tend to use ICT daily and extensively (Dworkin, Connell, & Doty, 2013). Both, Livingstone and Bober (2004) and Doty, Dworkin, and Connell (2012) note that in Western societies adults who also are parents use daily ICT approximately 2.3 hours. Moreover, many parents state that they hold a high level of awareness and knowledge about the use of ICT and the risks stemming from them (Ktoridou, Eteokleous, & Zahariadou, 2012).

The present study

The aim of the present study was to investigate the beliefs parents of adolescent students hold about cyberbullying in terms of myths and the degree to which they accept them. In a recently published article Sabella, Patchin, and Hinduja (2013) underline the existence of stereotypically constructed beliefs about cyberbullying. The authors use the term myths to describe these stereotypical beliefs because they consider them as widely accepted by individuals. More recently, Lampridis (2015) attempted to explore stereotypical beliefs about cyberbullying through the lens of the concept of myths. In the main, he attempted to assess their level of acceptance and the degree to which cyberbullying myths acceptance is related to a number of variables regarding demographic characteristics of the participants or their knowledge and kind of use of ICT. Specifically, drawing on the rationale of widely accepted self-report questionnaires that assessed rape myth acceptance (The R Scale, Costin, 1985; The IRMA Scale, Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999) and having in mind both students' perception of and beliefs about cyberbullying and the psychological features of cyberbullying victims, bullies and bystanders, he constructed a self-report questionnaire for the assessment of cyberbullying myths. In Lampridis's initial study (2015) participants were Greek undergraduate students and the findings of this attempt proved to be enlightening. He found that participants tended to hold stereotypical beliefs especially about bystanders, victims and perpetrators, while they did not tend to think stereotypically about the victim's honesty and integrity in the case of a cyberbullying incident report. Males were found to accept cyberbullying myths more than females although this finding does not mean that a part of female participants did not hold strong stereotypical views about cyber bullying as well. Field of studies and time spent online daily were found to affect the level of cyberbullying myths acceptance. Humanities and social sciences students and those who spent less time online daily were found to accept cyberbullying myths less strongly.

A second aim of the present study was to highlight how the acceptance of cyberbullying myths (highly vs. moderately) might shape different mentalities regarding this specific form of aggressive behavior. To do so an interesting way would be to ask participants to rank from the most to the least severe the forms of cyberbullying as proposed by Willard (2007). In two recent studies (Lampridis, 2015, 2017) remarkable differences in the ranking of cyberbullying forms according to the degree of cyberbullying myth acceptance were found. Specifically, in the first study university students who highly accepted cyberbullying myths rated flaming (i.e., an online fight) as the most severe form of cyberbullying, and trickery (i.e., soliciting personal information from someone and then electronically sharing that information with others without the individual's consent) as the least severe one. On the contrary, university students who moderately accepted cyberbullying myths rated outing (i.e., electronically sharing of personal information without the person's consent) as the most severe form of cyberbullying and flaming as the least one. In the second study, in-service educators who highly accepted cyberbullying myths rated flaming as the most severe form of cyberbullying and impersonation (i.e., posing as the victim and electronically communicating negative or inappropriate information with others as if it were coming from the victim) as the least severe one; in-service educators who moderately accepted bullying myths rated trickery as the most severe form of cyberbullying and exclusion (i.e., blocking an individual from buddy lists) as the least severe one.

A third aim of the study was to explore the relation between the acceptance of cyberbullying myths and a number of variables such as gender, age, level of education, time spent online daily and self-estimated knowledge of ICT. Specifically, Lampridis (2015, 2017) found that males and the less educated accept cyberbullying myths more than females and more educated people. Also, it was found that the more someone uses the Internet daily and the more confident they feel about their knowledge of ICT the higher they accept cyberbullying myths.

Having in mind the theoretical discussion and the review of the relevant empirical evidence the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. Parents will accept cyberbullying myths moderately to high (Hypothesis 1).
2. Fathers, the less educated, those who use ICT highly and those who estimate their knowledge of ICT use and the potential risks stemming from it as high, would accept cyberbullying myths more (Hypothesis 2).
3. The older a parent would be, the more they would use ICT daily and the more they would feel confident about their knowledge of ICT use and risks from it, the more they will tend to accept cyberbullying myths (Hypothesis 3).

METHOD

Participants

Sample consisted of 460 parents of adolescent students. Participants originated from various parts of the country, both urban and rural, such as Athens, Thessaloniki, Komotini, Ioannina, Volos and Patras. Out of them 216 were men ($M_{\text{age}} = 47.3$ years, $SD = 4.1$ years) and 244 were women ($M_{\text{age}} = 43.8$ years, $SD = 5.7$ years). In terms of education 209 had university degree, 228 had secondary education (Lycium) and 23 finished junior high school (Gymnasion). Almost 97% of the sample stated that they use ICT and have an internet connection either on their homes, work or mobile devices. Also, 88% of the participants stated that they are online at least for half an hour daily and 32% stated that they estimate their level of ICT knowledge as high, while 48% estimated their level of ICT knowledge as medium. The method of sampling was stratified in terms of gender (similar participation of males and females) and place of living (almost 50% from Athens and Thessaloniki, and the other half from the four smaller cities). Having in mind these two conditions participants were then randomly selected. They participated voluntarily and they recruited by the author or research associates. They completed the questionnaires in their leisure time. A period of seven days was given for the completion of the questionnaires and research material was either collected by the author or research associates or it was mailed to the author. Data were collected during October and November 2015. The return rate of the questionnaires initially administered was approximately 80%. That is, from the 560 questionnaires originally administered only 460 were returned to the author.

Measures

Cyber bullying myths

Participants completed the Cyber Bullying Myths Scale (CBM Scale; Lampridis, 2015). This instrument assesses the acceptance of myths regarding cyberbullying. It is a 32-item self-report questionnaire composed of six subscales: *Myth acceptance* (5 items, Cronbach's alpha = .84, sample item: "Cyberbullying is something that will never happen to me"); *Victim* (6 items, Cronbach's alpha = .82, sample item: "Cyberbullying victims are usually lonely persons without many friends"); *Perpetrator* (8 items, Cronbach's alpha = .81, sample item: "Cyberbullying perpetrators are usually boys"); *Bystander* (4 items, Cronbach's alpha = .72, sample item: "If someone witnesses a cyberbullying incident she/he becomes a cyberbullying

victim as well"); *It wasn't really cyberbullying* (5 items, Cronbach's alpha = .75, sample item: "If someone's life is not threatened, you cannot say that it is cyberbullying"); *The victim lied* (4 items, Cronbach's alpha = .73, sample item: "Some people claim to be cyberbullied in order to become lovable to others"). Participants were asked to state the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The mean across the 32 items was defined as a participant's Cyber Bullying Myths Scale score.

Confirmatory factor analysis: The factor structure of the CBM Scale was investigated via a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Prior to that all items of the scale were subjected to principal component analysis with Varimax rotation using SPSS 21.0. This analysis yielded a KMO value of .798 and a statistically significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < .001$). By using Kaiser's criterion six factors with eigen values larger than one emerged which explained 59.03% of the total variance. Factor 1 contained items assessing cyberbullying myth acceptance in general (Myth Acceptance – MA). Factor 2 consisted of items regarding the victim (VIC). Factor 3 contained items concerning the perpetrator (PER). Factor 4 contained items concerning bystander's attitude towards cyberbullying (BYS). Factor 5 consisted of items doubting the act of cyberbullying (WR CB) and Factor 6 was formed by items questioning a victim's honesty (VL). Table 1 presents factor loadings for each factor, eigen values, percentages of variance explained by each factor and Cronbach's alphas for each subscale.

Further, the fitting of the proposed model was tested by CFA using maximum likelihood estimation. The following fit indices were used: The Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Standardized Root Mean squared Residual (SRMR), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and the chi square/degree of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) index. Having in mind the recommendation by Hu and Bentler (1998) all indices of the tested model can be considered as indicative of good fit of the model. Specifically, CFI = .96, SRMR = .07, RMSEA = .05 and $\chi^2/df = 2.41$.

Severity of cyberbullying forms

Participants were presented with a catalogue of cyberbullying forms according to those proposed by Willard (2007). They were asked to rank the following eight forms of cyberbullying: flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing, trickery, exclusion, cyber stalking in a hierarchical order from the most to the least severe according to their own opinion.

Table 1. Cyber Bullying Myths Scale factorial structure

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
	MA	VIC	PER	BYS	WR CB	VL
Cyber bullying is something that will not happened to me (1). R	.831					
I have the same chances with everyone else to become cyber bullied (7)	.802					
I will not become cyber bullied because I am aware of the possible dangers and take precautions (13) R	.742					
Even if you are using the internet carefully there is always a chance to become cyber bullied (18)	.698					
My behavior in general, in both real life and the internet is not a provocative one, thus I will not become cyber bullied (23) R	.613					
Cyber bullying victims are usually over-protected from their families and over-sensitive individuals (2)		.804				
Cyber bullying victims are usually women (8)		.776				
Cyber bullying victims are usually individuals with limited physical strength (14)		.689				
Cyber bullying victims are usually individuals with low self-esteem (19)		.621				
Cyber bullying victims are usually lonely individuals, without many friends (24)		.594				
Homosexuals (men and women) have more chances to become cyber bullied (27)		.580				
Cyber bullies are usually individuals who come from problematic families (3)			.822			
In most cases cyber bullies are disturbed individuals with a pathological tendency towards bullying (9)			.775			
Cyber bullies are usually men (15)			.685			
Cyber bullies are usually lonely individuals, without many friends (20)			.642			
In most cases cyber bullies are individuals who had not love and affection from others (25)			.608			
Cyber bullies are usually well built, with great physical strength (28)			.551			
Cyber bullies are usually foreigners (not Greeks) (30)			.522			
Cyber bullies are usually young individuals, adolescents or early adults (31)			.479			
When someone while he/she is online witness cyber bullying has no responsibility for that (4)				.704		
When someone witness cyber bullying while he/she is online there is nothing to do in order to stop it (10)				.641		
From the moment someone witness cyber bullying and does nothing to stop it, he/she becomes complicit (16)				.572		
When someone witness cyber bullying he/she instantly becomes victim as well (21)				.506		

to be continued

Table 1. Cyber Bullying Myths Scale factorial structure (continued)

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
	MA	VIC	PER	BYS	WR CB	VL
If the one who is being cyber bullied will not denounce it to the authorities you cannot tell with certainty that he/she had being cyber bullied (5) R					.633	
When men persistently court a woman with repeated mails and/or comments of sexual nature on social media, they do not cyber bullying her. They just flirt with her (11)					.600	
You cannot say for sure that cyber bullying has happened, unless the person who is complaining has sustained a proven psychological shock (26)					.537	
If someone's life is not threatened, you cannot say that it is cyber bullying (29) R					.484	
We should not take seriously anyone who claims that he/she was cyber bullied (6) R					.460	
We should not take seriously anyone who claims that he/she was cyber bullied (6) R						.670
Some people say that they were cyber bullied to cover their own mistakes on an e mail they sent or a post they uploaded on social media (17)						.591
Some people do not take any precautionary measures while surfing the Internet and then tend to complain that they were cyber bullied (22)						.518
In many cases those who claim to be victims of cyber bullying are just people with psychological problems (32)						.467
Eigen values	4.41	2.19	1.90	1.41	1.17	1.08
% of explained variance	15.2	12.6	11.2	8	6.3	6
Cronbach's alpha	.82	.84	.75	.79	.70	.71

Note: R indicates reverse scoring. Numbers in parentheses indicate the place of the item in the scale. MA = Myth acceptance, VIC = Victim, PER = Perpetrator, BYS = Bystander, WNR-CB = Wasn't Really Cyberbullying, VL = Victim Lied. Factor loadings cut off point = .400.

Demographics

Participants completed demographic information regarding age, gender and education. Also, they were asked to give information about how much time they use ICT daily. Furthermore, they were asked to indicate the degree to which they believe that they are familiar with ICT according to their self-estimated level of ICT knowledge on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all familiar / confident with ICT) to 5 (highly familiar / confident with ICT).

Procedure

As noted above participants were approached and recruited by the author or a research associate. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a sheet of paper informing participants about the nature and the subject of the study. All necessary information concerning ethical, confidentiality and anonymity issues were given along with the name of the researcher and contact information in case of questions or comments. Participants were free to decide whether they wished to participate in the study or not in a voluntary manner without any reward or any kind of compensation for their participation. After they had agreed to participate they received the questionnaire containing the materials presented above. Each scale or form was accompanied by detailed instructions about its completion. Due to the fact that in many studies regarding cyberbullying participants were found to hold different views about cyber bullying and its correlates (for a review, see: Kowalski et al., 2014) specific instructions were given. In the case of Cyber Bullying Myths Scale participants firstly read a description of cyberbullying based on the most referred to definitions / descriptions in the relative literature and then they were asked to complete the scale. In the case of the Severity of Cyberbullying, participants again read detailed descriptions of all the cyberbullying forms presented in the scale and then proceeded to complete it.

RESULTS

Overall, participants were found to accept cyberbullying myths moderately to high ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.17$). Table 2 presents means and standard deviations of the six subscales of the CBM Scale. Also, Table 2 presents paired samples t tests applied to test for significant differences between the means of the six subscales.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and paired sample t tests for the six subscales of the CBM Scale

			BYS-MA		BYS-PER		MA-PER		PER VIC		VIC-WNR- CB		WNR CB- VL	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
BYS	5.27	.98	1.32	.001	2.44	.001	1.01	.178	1.83	.01	1.19	.01	.88	.85
MA	4.65	1.19												
PER	4.40	1.32												
VIC	3.52	.78												
WNR CB	3.02	.97												
VL	2.67	.71												

Note: MA = Myth Acceptance, VIC = Victim, PER = Perpetrator, BYS = Bystander, WNR CB = Wasn't Really Cyberbullying, VL = Victim Lied. For all t tests $df = 459$.

Participants accepted highly myths regarding the bystander in a cyberbullying situation. Interestingly, the bystander's items justify a passive attitude towards cyberbullying. Also, participants highly accepted myths about cyberbullying (myth acceptance) that tend to blame the victim and somehow exonerate the perpetrator. Thus, it is not surprising that no significant differences were obtained regarding the mean scores on the subscales of myth acceptance and perpetrator. Another interesting remark at this point is that participants strongly held stereotypical beliefs about the perpetrator of a cyber assault. On the other hand, participants accepted less myths doubting a report of a cyber assault or a victim's honesty when claiming that he/she was cyber bullied. Finally, participants accepted myths about the cyber victim at a moderate level.

To test for statistically significant mean differences in the cases of age, time spent daily online and self-estimated level of familiarity with, and knowledge of, ICT a series of one-way ANOVAs with post hoc Bonferroni test of differences was applied. An independent samples *t* test was applied in the case of gender and level of education. Specifically, to facilitate the treatment of data with respect to age participants were divided into four age groups as follows: 31 – 37 years, 38 – 44 years, 45 – 51 years, and 52+. In the case of time spent online daily four groups were formed: Those who are online daily up to 30 minutes, those who stay online everyday up to 1 hour, those who use ICT daily for at least two hours, and those who stay online each day for more than three hours. Moreover, based on participants' assessment of their self-estimated familiarity with and knowledge of ICT three groups were formed: Low, Medium and High (self-estimated knowledge and confidence with ICT). Then, two categories were formed with respect to parents' level of education: On the one hand, those who attended university formed the University group, whereas those who finished high school (either Gymnasium or Lyceum) formed the High School group. Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations for the variables of age, time spent online daily and self-estimated knowledge of ICT

In the case of age to test for normality the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test yielded a *p* value = .179 and Levene's test for homogeneity of variance was not significant, $F(3, 457) = .67$, $p = .649$ indicating that the assumption underlying the application of one-way ANOVA was met. ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of age on cyberbullying myths acceptance, $F(3, 456) = 6.91$, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .23$. Post hoc comparisons indicated that the mean score for younger parents (31 – 37 years) was statistically different from parents at the group of 45 – 51 ($p = .001$) years and the group of 52+ years ($p = .001$). Also, there was significant difference between the age groups of 45-51 years and 52+ years ($p = .001$). There was no statistically significant difference in mean scores between parents in the age groups of 31 – 37 years and 38 – 44 years ($p = .07$).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics (M and SD) for age, time spent online daily and self-estimated knowledge of ICT with respect to Cyberbullying myths

	M	SD
Age		
31 – 37 years	2.63	.81
38 – 44 years	3.20	.82
45 – 51 years	4.17	.96
52+ years	5.08	.77
Time spent online daily		
Up to 30 minutes	2.89	.83
Up to 1 hour	3.41	.85
At least 2 hours	4.27	.76
More than 3 hours	5.12	.68
ICT knowledge		
Low	3.02	.70
Medium	3.68	.82
High	4.39	.74

Also, ANOVA (Kolmogorov- Smirnov test $p = .224$ and Levene's $F(3, 456) = .83, p = .782$) indicated a significant main effect of time spent online daily, $F(3, 456) = 9.04, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .19$, on the acceptance of cyber bullying myths. Post hoc comparisons pointed that the mean scores were not statistically different for parents who spent up to 30 to 1 hour every day online (up to 30 minutes – up to 1 hour, $p = .082$). On the contrary, post hoc comparisons yielded significant differences in the mean scores of those who use the internet moderately (up to 1 hour) and those who use the internet at least 2 hours ($p = .001$), and between those who use the internet a lot (at least 2 hours) with those who spend online more than 3 hours ($p = .01$). Finally, there was a significant main effect of levels of ICT self-estimated knowledge, $F(2, 457) = 4.89, p = .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .15$, on acceptance of cyberbullying myths (Kolmogorov- Smirnov test $p = .224$ and Levene's $F(3, 456) = .83, p = .782$). Post hoc comparisons yielded statistically significant differences in the mean scores of the three levels of the variable (low, medium and high) all at the $p = .01$ level.

Independent samples t test regarding gender differences in the acceptance of cyberbullying myths revealed that fathers accept myths more than mothers ($M_{\text{fathers}} = 4.27, SD = 1.19$, and $M_{\text{mothers}} = 3.04, SD = .90$), $t(1, 459) = 3.47, p = .001$, Cohen's $d = .20$. Furthermore, independent samples t test revealed statistically significant differences in the mean scores of those who had a university degree in comparison to those who had finished high school with the former accepting cyberbullying myths less than the latter ($M_{\text{university}} = 3.08 (SD = 1.02)$ and $M_{\text{high school}} = 4.89 (SD = 1.15)$, $t(1, 459) = 5.12, p = .001$, Cohen's $d = .16$).

To test the possible interactions of gender with age, time spent online and self-estimated knowledge of ICT with respect to cyberbullying myths acceptance three separate two-way between-subject ANOVAs were applied. In all three analyses no significant interaction effect was found.

Also, the present study was interested in highlighting differences in the perceived severity of cyber bullying forms. In doing so, participants were divided into two groups: those who accept cyberbullying myths highly (high) and those who accept cyberbullying myths less (low) via the application of median split. This is a well-used technique in studies assessing rape myth acceptance (e.g., Bohner & Lampridis, 2004; Megias, Romero-Sánchez, Durán, Moya, & Bohner, 2011). The median split showed that 253 participants (55%) were high in cyberbullying myths acceptance ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.79$), while 207 participants (45%) were low in cyberbullying myths acceptance ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 1.61$). Then, paired samples t test was applied to test for significant differences in the mean scores of the cyberbullying severity rankings between the two groups. Table 4 provides means, standard deviations and t tests for the two groups.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics (M and SD) of severity of cyberbullying forms by parents low and high in cyberbullying myth acceptance along with paired sample t tests within each group

Low acceptance				High acceptance			
Forms	M	SD	t test	Forms	M	SD	t test
Impersonation	6.67	.80	I – T = 1.54 <i>ns</i>	Flaming	7.03	1.17	F – C = 3.97***
Trickery	6.31	.85	T – O = 4.12***	Cyber stalking	6.10	1.02	C – E = 1.25 <i>ns</i>
Outing	5.19	.89	O – D = 1.30**	Exclusion	5.90	.84	E – D = 1.78**
Denigration	4.35	.76	D – H = 1.10 <i>ns</i>	Denigration	5.13	.90	D – H = 2.02 <i>ns</i>
Harassment	4.07	.93	H – F = 3.94***	Harassment	5.05	.92	H – T = 3.55***
Flaming	3.02	.82	F – C = 1.29 <i>ns</i>	Trickery	4.01	.81	T – O = 2.89***
Cyber stalking	2.77	.73	C – E = 1.21*	Outing	3.21	.87	O – I = 1.90**
Exclusion	2.05	.70		Impersonation	2.34	.90	

Note: I = Impersonation, T = Trickery, O = Outing, D = Denigration, H = Harassment, F = Flaming, C = Cyber stalking, E = Exclusion.

ns = nonsignificant, *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Participants low in cyberbullying myths acceptance ranked trickery and impersonation as the most severe forms of cyberbullying. On the other hand, participants high in cyberbullying myths acceptance were found to think of these two forms as less severe and ranked them as sixth and eighth, respectively. In turn, parents high in acceptance of cyberbullying myths thought of flaming as the most severe form of cyberbullying followed by cyber stalking and exclusion. It is interesting that the cyberbullying forms that were assessed as the most severe by the high in acceptance of cyber bullying myths were assessed as the least severe by the low in acceptance of cyberbullying myths group.

DISCUSSION

The evidence of the present study confirmed Hypothesis 1 since parents were found to accept cyberbullying myths moderately to a high degree. Also, the results supported Hypothesis 2 indicating that the fathers, the less educated, those who use ICT highly and those who estimate their knowledge of ICT and the potential risks stemming from it as high, accept cyberbullying myths more. Then, analyses of variance provided us with findings in favor of Hypothesis 3. That is, the older a parent is, the more they use ICT daily and the more they feel confident about their knowledge of ICT use and risks from it, the more they tend to accept cyberbullying myths. As mentioned above, the level of parental cyberbullying myths acceptance was moderate to high. Interestingly, two related studies in university students (Lampridis, 2015) and in-service educators (Lampridis, 2017) yielded similar findings.

Taking a closer look at the results regarding the acceptance of cyberbullying myths for each subscale of the CBM Scale the following can be suggested: Firstly, participants had high mean score on the subscale regarding the bystander and the attitude towards a cyberbullying incident. Specifically, the items of this subscale offer justification to a passive attitude in case of a cyberbullying incident. This finding suggests that parents tend to prefer this attitude instead of an active one by which they would support or at least comfort the victim. Thus, it seems reasonable for one to consider the extent to which a parent's preference towards a passive rather than an active attitude in a cyber bullying incident might affect their children's reaction in a similar occasion. Relevant studies (Holfeld, 2014; Van Cleemput, Vandebosch, & Pabian, 2014) have shown that cyberbullying bystanders tend to seek in their close environment for excuses justifying their unwillingness to stand up for a cyberbullying victim. Also, parents were found to accept moderately to highly myths about the victim and the perpetrator while they held relatively low stereotypical beliefs that question a victim's honesty. Previous research (Mesch, 2009) pointed out that parents seem to have a general awareness of cyberbullying as a form of violent behavior via the use of ICT. Still, they do not have sufficient information and tend to accept stereotypical beliefs about the victim and the perpetrator that according to relative empirical findings is false, wrong or simplified (Sabella, Patchin, & Hinduja, 2013). On the other hand, recent data (Waasdorp, Mehari, & Bradshaw, 2017) have highlighted a general tendency among parents to declare sensitive about cyberbullying and worried about its rapid expansion among youth. This tendency might be a plausible explanation about the low acceptance of myths doubting the victim's honesty in reporting a cyberbullying incident. In other words, it could be suggested that parents tend to think of cyberbullying as a serious problem that their children are

often facing, they are not sure about its conceptualization, but they tend to believe that is really happening and that a victim will not lie.

Findings regarding gender differences in cyberbullying myths acceptance are not surprising. In fact, previous studies both on rape myths (Edwards et al., 2011) and cyberbullying myths (Lampridis, 2015, 2017) indicated similar results. Males tend to accept more than females do myths about aggression and violence. Likewise, the differences obtained with respect to parents' level of education seem to be reasonable. In their extensive review of relative literature Hogg and Vaughan (2002) point out that the more educated one is, the less possible it is to hold stereotypical beliefs about social phenomena.

Moving on to variables related to daily time spent online and self-estimated knowledge of ICT, the results revealed an interesting pattern. That is, the more one spends time online every day and the more confident one feels about their level of familiarity and knowledge of the whereabouts of ICT, the more they tend to accept cyberbullying myths. Recent findings (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009) showed a positive relation between ICT use, self-estimated level of ICT knowledge and perceptions towards vulnerability in the cyber space. More specifically, these findings imply that people who use ICT a lot daily tend to form an untenable perception of insusceptibility with respect to dangers stemming from ICT use. They seem to believe that since they know what to do when online, nothing bad can happen to them and that cyberbullying victims are either technologically ignorant or exaggerating things and in any case their ICT ignorance and naivety should be considered as the sole responsible for their bad experiences in using ICT. As far as the results of the two-way ANOVAs are concerned the following could be suggested: Gender and age seem to play an important role in cyber bullying myths acceptance. It should be mentioned that research on both rape myths (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010) and the effect of age on the degree to which older ones accept such stereotypes (Adolfsson & Stromwall, 2017) has well documented the significant role of these two variables in the acceptance of myths. What seems interesting, though, is the finding regarding the effect that self-estimated knowledge of ICT seems to have on cyber bullying myths acceptance. Based on their empirical findings Calvete, Onue, Estevez, Villandon, and Padilla (2010) suggested that those who use ICT more than others are those who also tend to believe that they are highly familiar with ICT and tend to think that cyber bullying victims are responsible for any assault they might receive. In the same study Calvete et al. (2010) found a positive association between high ICT users and a tendency to remain passive when come up with a cyber bullying incident or, even worse, become bullies themselves in support of the bully in first place.

Differences obtained in the ranking of severity of cyberbullying forms are

noteworthy. The obtained hierarchies of cyberbullying forms by those high and low in acceptance of such myths is a new finding in cyber bullying research. The only relevant existing data come from two recent studies by Lampridis (2015, 2017). Remarkably, the pattern of cyberbullying forms assessment in the two previous studies is similar to the present one giving space to the following –with many reservations of course –implication: The level of acceptance of stereotypical beliefs about cyberbullying seem to serve as a means for the comprehension and justification of this behavior. Thus, the difference on the extent to which one accepts these myths serves eventually different mentalities in dealing with this issue. Research on stereotypes (e.g., Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998) has shown that people who endorse stereotypes in different degrees do tend to hold different perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards it. Undoubtedly, further research is needed to investigate for direct associations between stereotype acceptance and the formation of different mentalities accordingly.

The present study yielded interesting findings that can contribute to the ongoing research on cyberbullying. Nevertheless, it has limitations that should be pointed out: Firstly, this study focused on describing rather than explaining the cyberbullying phenomenon. Moreover, the list of cyberbullying forms did not include the newest forms of cyber bullying, (i.e., happy slapping and sexting). It opted to employ Willard's taxonomy that seemed to be more accepted at the time in which the present study was designed (Kowalski et al., 2014). Further research would take into account the newest forms as well. Furthermore, the study did not thoroughly investigate for possible differences in the ranking of cyber bullying forms in terms of severity with respect to other variables studied here such as gender, age, self-estimated knowledge of ICT and time spent online daily. Perhaps, a qualitative approach investigating such variables would provide findings that would highlight the factors underlying the differences found in the present study. Nevertheless, despite its limitations the present study offered substantial information regarding parents' beliefs and attitudes towards cyberbullying myths and by doing so set a basis for challenging future research endeavors in a field of in which many questions remain without an answer.

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