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Cyberbullying: Labels, Behaviours and Definition in Three European Countries

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This study aims to examine students' perception of the term used to label cyberbullying, the perception of different forms and behaviours (written, verbal, visual, exclusion and impersonation) and the perception of the criteria used for its definition (imbalance of power, intention, repetition, anonymity and publicity) in three different European countries: Italy, Spain and Germany. Seventy adolescents took part in nine focus groups, using the same interview guide across countries. Thematic analysis focused on three main themes related to: (1) the term used to label cyberbullying, (2) the different behaviours representing cyberbullying, (3) the three traditional criteria of intentionality, imbalance of power and repetition and the two new criteria of anonymity and publicity. Results showed that the best word to label cyberbullying is 'cyber-mobbing' (in Germany), 'virtual' or 'cyber-bullying' (in Italy), and 'harassment' or 'harassment via Internet or mobile phone' (in Spain). Impersonation cannot be considered wholly as cyberbullying behaviour. In order to define a cyberbullying act, adolescents need to know whether the action was done intentionally to harm the victim, the effect on the victim and the repetition of the action (this latter criterion evaluated simultaneously with the publicity). Information about the anonymity and publicity contributes to better understand the nature and the severity of the act, the potential effects on the victim and the intentionality.

KEYWORDS: cyberbullying, cross-cultural, focus groups, Spain, Italy, Germany

Since the year 2000, a new form of aggression using modern information and communication technologies has attracted large attention in the media cross-nationally. Led by Anglophone countries (e.g., Australia, United Kingdom and the United

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States), cyberbullying research quickly spread to many countries, indicating the need for a common understanding of the phenomenon. However, cross-national studies require an investigation of terms and understanding in different countries and cultures; often the perspective of the subjects of this research field is lacking (cf. Spears, Slee, Owens, & Johnson, 2009). It may be that students do not use the same terms and definitions as experts and researchers do for what is happening to them (cf. Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liefooghe, 2002). Furthermore, each specific language might have different labels for this phenomenon (Smith et al., 2002; Slee, Ma, & Taki, 2003). Therefore, there needs to be a focus on the target groups' understanding of cyberbullying.

The Label 'Cyberbullying'

Problems related to the term used to label the phenomenon of cyberbullying in different languages can be derived from the literature of bullying. The word 'bullying' is not easy to translate into different languages, and different terms are used both in any one language and in different languages (Smith et al., 2002); for example, the term 'mobbing' is common in Scandinavian and Germanic languages. Words for bullying are less familiar in the Latin languages, although recently they have been used more often. In Italy and Spain a plurality of terms exists, all of them connoting a specific aspect of bullying (Fonzi, Genta, Menesini, Bacchini, Bonino, & Constabile, 1999; Ortega, Del Rey, & Mora-Merchán, 2001). Furthermore, the term 'cyber' can be affected by the same difficulties. For example, the English word 'cyber' is listed in the Italian dictionary, connoting the use of electronic means and virtual community (Garzanti, 2007). In Spain, the word 'ciber' is listed in the dictionary and refers to computer networks (RAE, 2010). In Germany, 'cyber' refers to computer-generated artificial virtual surroundings that may be perceived as real (Langenscheidt, 2010).

Starting from these considerations we might ask: which is the best term used by adolescents to label cyberbullying and is it the same across countries?

Different Cyberbullying Behaviours

The complexity and the accelerated evolution of new technologies create some difficulties in defining which are the specific cyberbullying behaviours. Different classifications have been proposed: for example covert and overt cyberbullying (Spears et al., 2009), cyberbullying by Phone or by PC (Smith et al., 2008), traditional bullying in a new context, relational cyberbullying and technically sophisticated cyberbullying (Schultze-Krumbholz & Scheithauer, 2009), cyberbullying through specific behaviours: flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing, trickery, exclusion and cyberstalking (Willard, 2007). Trying to summarise these eight last categories in typologies of behaviour, four main types can be identified: written-verbal behaviours behaviours (phone calls, text messages, e-mails, instant messaging, chats, blogs, social networking communities, websites), visual behaviours (posting, sending or sharing compromising pictures and videos through mobile phone or internet), exclusion (purposefully excluding someone from an online group) and impersonation (stealing and revealing personal information, using another person's name and account). According to these typologies, we might ask if adolescents perceived all these types of behaviours as cyberbullying and how severe they are.

The Definition of Cyberbullying

Early studies of cyberbullying used their own definition of this phenomenon, most of them developed in a top-down approach and based on the definition of traditional bullying proposed by Dan Olweus (1993). A small number of them have become widely accepted and are cited regularly in new publications (see Belsey, 2005; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell & Tippett, 2008; Willard, 2003). These definitions highlight some fundamental aspects of (cyber)bullying: (intentional) harm, repetition over time and a power imbalance between victim and perpetrator(s). Recently, these definitions have become subject of a controversy among experts and researchers: it is still unclear whether these criteria are applicable to cyberbullying. Furthermore, new criteria have been proposed, such as anonymity and publicity (e.g., Menesini & Nocentini, 2009a; Slonje & Smith, 2008).

Intention. It has been argued that due to the indirect nature of cyberbullying it is very difficult to identify the intention of this behaviour (Menesini & Nocentini, 2009b). The question also arises as to whether intention is truly necessary to cause harm, or whether unintentional acts — meaning the students are not aware of the harm caused — have the same effect on the victim, thus underlining that only the impact on or the perpetrator's intention perceived by the victim should be regarded as a criterion (COST Training School, personal communication, April 12, 2010).

Repetition. A common argument against the use of the criterion of repetition is the fact that posting contents online in itself constitutes repetition as they can be viewed and forwarded repeatedly (cf., Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008; Menesini & Nocentini, 2009a). Also, online contents are often still accessible years after the original incident. This way, a single act of cyberbullying can lead to countless incidents of victimisation (Dooley, Pyzalski, & Cross, 2009).

Power imbalance. The inability of a victim to force providers to delete harmful contents, higher levels of media literacy or a higher social status of the perpetrator within a virtual community might be interpreted as a power imbalance (e.g., Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Menesini & Nocentini, 2009a). Wolak and colleagues (2007) contradict this criterion and state that the victim is rather in a more powerful situation than it would be in traditional bullying because they have the possibility to terminate negative interactions easily. However, they allow that this might not be given concerning the posting of information or negative comments in 'public' virtual places (e.g., websites).

New cyber-specific criteria: anonymity and publicity. Anonymity that occurs when the victim does not know the identity of the bully may increase feelings of frustration and powerlessness (e.g., Dooley et al., 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008) and may reduce the need for power imbalance as a criterion (Fauman, 2008). Publicity — as opposed to private exchanges between two parties — characterises the acts where a large audience is involved (i.e., e-mails, SMSs, MMSs sent to a large audience, or offences occurring in a public forum, or videos and pictures distributed via social networking). In previous studies, students declared cyberbullying acts including a large and public audience as the most severe type of cyberbullying (Slonje & Smith,

2008). Incorporating these two criteria (anonymity and publicity) may represent cyberbullying more adequately than previous common definitions.

Aims of the Present Study

The present study examines students' perception of the term used to label cyberbullying, the perception of different forms (written–verbal, visual, exclusion and impersonation) and the perception of the criteria used for the definition (imbalance of power, intention, repetition, anonymity and publicity) in three different European countries: Italy, Spain and Germany. The first aim was to identify the most suitable term to describe cyberbullying behaviour, which can then be used by researchers and practitioners to assess cyberbullying who are in contact with adolescents (e.g., professors, educators, counsellors, and so on). Second, we wanted to examine if the four typologies of behaviours proposed all represent the cyberbullying construct. Finally, the adequacy of the different criteria of the cyberbullying definition was examined, including the three conventional criteria of traditional bullying and the new ones related to the specific cyber context.

Method

Participants

Overall, 70 adolescents in nine focus groups took part in the study. Twenty-seven adolescents were part of the Italian study, 23 participated in the study in Spain and 20 participants were recruited in Germany (for further sample details see Table 1). Schools were selected using convenience sampling.

Materials and Procedures

Youths were invited to participate in a group discussion. The school staff was instructed to select students who they thought would be comfortable in a group setting. For all the students, their parents' permission was requested. Nine focus groups were held using the same interview guide across countries and they were conducted in the native language of the participants. The groups were conducted at the students' schools or a youth club, respectively; the moderator and the recorder

TABLE 1

Sample Characteristics

	Italy	Spain	Germany
Total	27	23	20
Gender distribution	20 boys, 7 girls	9 boys, 14 girls	11 boys, 9 girls
Age	16–18	12–13, 16	11–12, 12–13, 13–16
Number of focus groups	4	2	3
Recruited from	School	School	Schools, youth club
City	Florence and Lucca	Cordoba	Berlin

were the only adults present during the group discussion, except in the oldest German focus group, which was assisted by the person in charge of the youth club. Moderators and recorders were active in the field of psychology as psychology researchers, young graduate psychologists or psychology students. In conducting the focus groups, the guidelines of Krueger (1994) and Morgan (1988) were followed. A moderator and a recorder greeted the adolescents as they arrived to participate (*Welcome*). The moderator informed the youths about the purpose of and procedure for conducting focus group (*Our topic is* ...). To facilitate the focus groups, the moderator followed an interview guide that considered the following sections: Opening Questions (participants presentations), Introductory Questions (general introduction of the topic without using the term Cyberbullying), Key Questions (see below), Ending Questions (leave students to discuss other topics if they want to), Summary (the moderator try to give a summary) and Thanks/ Dismissal (thank students for their help and participation).

The structure of the focus groups followed three key questions: (1) Which is the best term to label four scenarios describing different situations or behaviours that could be considered cyberbullying or not? (see Table 3 for the scenarios description). For this purpose, four posters were presented describing four scenarios. For each scenario we asked students to write or say the word considered as the best term to label the scenario. (2) Do all the four typologies of behaviours represent the cyberbullying construct? Referring to the four posters, we asked adolescents if any differences existed between the scenarios, if one behaviour is more severe as compared to the others, and if we can speak about different forms of cyberbullying. (3) Are the three criteria for defining bullying (intentionality, imbalance of power and repetition) relevant in order to define a cyberbullying act? Are the two additional specific criteria for cyberbullying (publicity and anonymity) relevant in order to define a cyberbullying act? This was investigated using one control scenario (where no criteria were present) and five experimental scenarios, one for each criterion (for the definition of criteria see Table 2). After the presentation of the two scenarios for each criterion (i.e., for the criterion of intentionality: 'Control: M. sent a nasty text message to C. as a joke'; 'Experimental: M. sent a nasty text message to C. intentionally to hurt C') we asked participants to discuss the difference between them. Some of the questions proposed were: 'Is there any difference between the two scenarios? If yes, what are the differences? Are both scenarios good examples of cyberbullying? Why?'

TABLE 2

Definition of the Criteria Used in the Control and Experimental Condition

Criterion	Control condition	Experimental condition
Intentionality	'As a joke'	'To hurt him/her'
Imbalance of power	The victim 'didn't care'	The victim 'was upset and didn't know how to defend himself/herself'
Repetition	'Last month'	'Every week for a month'
Publicity	Sending only to the victim	Sending the message 'to other people to see'
Anonymity	'A familiar boy/girl'	'Using an anonymous number' and 'who didn't know him/her personally'

All focus groups were audiotaped and lasted between 40 and 90 minutes, depending on age and participants' concentration. The audiotapes were transcribed verbatim and the content of the text was coded in relation to the key questions in the interview guide (Morgan, 1988). The report for each focus group was prepared in a question-by-question format using amplifying quotes and a descriptive summary. These coded statements were then compiled under general headings or themes (e.g., adolescents' term for each scenario): results by categories of individual focus groups were compared and contrasted. The main themes and quotes were edited and summarised, reducing the transcripts to a more manageable size. We selected the most descriptive quotes for each question, capturing the essence of the conversation.

Results

Theme 1: The Label

Results will be presented separately for the four different scenarios. The specific terms used in each country, including the words in the original language, can be found in Table 3. Excerpts from the transcripts translated in English are included to illustrate students' perceptions and reasoning in the adolescents' words.

Written-verbal behaviours. Some of the terms used for this behaviour in Italy referred to more general constructs, such as abuse, stalking and psychological violence, whereas others described more specific behaviours, such as offences, threat and blackmail. 'Abuse' was used to stress the repetition across time, while 'stalking' emphasised the persecuting nature of the behaviour. Psychological violence was used to underline the indirect nature of aggressive behaviour, particularly to exclude physical behaviour. In Spain, the majority of adolescents called this behaviour 'harassment'. However, there were age differences when for younger students the terms 'nuisance', and for older students 'psychological damage' or 'abuse', seemed to be more relevant. The difference between harassment and nuisance lies of the frequency of the behaviours: harassment is more frequent than nuisance. Students in all three countries mentioned the label 'bullying' for this behaviour. In Germany, it was the first word that came to mind, followed by harassment and 'knocking' someone. Spanish adolescents mentioned that they had received school sessions about bullying during the previous school year. They also referred to TV programs and newspapers about the topic, as did the German participants later on in the discussion. However, the Spanish participants could not agree on the exact meaning of the term 'bullying'. In contrast to the other countries, German participants emphasised the emotional level of the behaviour in friendships by proposing terms such as 'backstabbing', 'vicious', 'dishonest' and 'upsetting'.

> It is bullying when someone sends a message to another person to ruin him. (Italy)
>
> Bullying is a kind of harassment, like the abuse against women: the first is harassment between peers, the second one is harassment against women. (Spain)
>
> You probably hurt others with it. (Germany)

Visual behaviours. Apart from some of the previously used terms, Italian adolescents also mentioned privacy violation, stressing the relevance of using other people's pic-

TABLE 3

Examples of the Four Different Behaviours (Written–Verbal, Visual, Impersonation and Exclusion) and Terms Used for Each Scenario — English and Original Language Words

Scenarios	Italy	Spain	Germany
Sending nasty text messages' written–verbal)	Aggressive behaviour (*comportamento aggressivo*), psychological violence (*violenza psicologica*), offences (*offese*), Abuse (*abuso*), Bullying (*bullismo*) stalking (*stalking*), Threat (*minaccia*), blackmail (*ricatto/blackmail*)	Harassment (*acoso*), psychological damage (*daño psicológico*), psychological abuse (*maltrato psicológico*), Evil (*maldad*), Bullying (*bullying*), nuisance (*incómodo/fastidio*)	Bullying (*mobbing*), To knock someone (*runtermachen*), harassment (*Belästigung*), Back-stabbing (*hinterhältig*)
'Sending a compromising photo' (visual)	Blackmail (*ricatto/blackmail*), threat (*minaccia*), bullying (*bullismo*), psychological violence (*violenza psicologica*), abuse (*abuso*), Privacy violation (*violazione di privacy*), Virtual bullying (*bullismo virtuale*)	Violation of personal image/intimacy (*violaciòn de la imagen personal e intimidad*), harassment (*acoso*), harm (*hacer daño*), offense (*ofensa*), cruelty (*crueldad*)	'Photing', Bullying (*Mobbing*), harassment (*Belästigung*), Public humiliation (*öffentliche Demütigung*)
'Get access to password or personal information and use them' (impersonation)	Privacy violation (*violazione di privacy*), identity theft (*furto di identità*)	Privacy violation (*privacy/right violation*), crime (*delito*), betrayal (*traición*), lack of respect (*falta de respeto*)	Humiliation (*Demütigung*), Hacking (*Hacking*), revenge (*Rache*), psychological hurt (*seelische Verletzung*), theft (*klauen*)
'Take off from the online group' (exclusion)	Exclusion (*esclusione*), isolation (*isolamento*)	Exclusion (*exclusión*), contempt (*desprecio*), neglect (*marginación*), discrimination (*discriminación*), evil (*maldad*), teasing (*fastidiar*), anguish (*angustiar*), bullying (*bullying*)	Knock someone (*runtermachen*), Put someone down (*fertigmachen*), Bullying (*mobbing*), dissing (*dissen*), cyberbullying , (*cyber-mobbing*) Exclusion (*ausgeschlossenwerden*)

tures or images. The term 'virtual bullying' was spontaneously proposed in order to differentiate bullying across contexts. Spanish participants also stressed the violation of the personal image or intimacy, with both having the same meaning. The intention to harm the victim was a very important aspect for their definition. The younger Spanish students also proposed harassment, as did the German participants. Further, German students labelled the behaviour bullying and also public humiliation, putting their focus not on the intention, but rather on the effect, as compared to the Spanish participants. The German students even created a new word for this: 'photing', which represents a mixture of mobbing (the German term for bullying) and photos.

> Virtual because you don't show your own identity using these electronic means. (Italy).

Impersonation. In all three countries, impersonality behaviour was considered legally relevant or even a crime, such as theft when using someone's password to

steal money (Germany) or identity theft more generally (Italy). Both Italians and Spanish specifically labelled the behaviour as privacy violation. Further, Spanish and German adolescents pointed out the aspect of betrayal when the act was committed by friends. One German group also mentioned an overlap with the visual scenario as having access to someone's password also gives the person access to photos, videos and personal secrets.

> It is a betrayal: it is not a crime but hurt. (Spain)

Exclusion. All participants in all countries labelled this behaviour as exclusion or isolation. Additional terms referred to the victim's feelings such as neglect, contempt and discrimination in Spain, and knocking someone, putting someone down and 'dissing' in Germany. The Spanish participants also included intentionality in their description. In Germany this was the only scenario that specifically led to the term 'cyberbullying'. One German group made a concrete reference to an awareness-raising campaign sponsored by the online-initiative 'Klicksafe' (European Union) that regularly broadcasts a television advertisement against cyberbullying on German television.

Theme 2: Typologies of Behaviours

When asked directly whether all the four scenarios represent cyberbullying behaviours (written–verbal, visual, exclusion and impersonation), all the Italian adolescents considered the visual and the written–verbal behaviours as forms of cyberbullying, but there was more disagreement about impersonation and exclusion. Spanish students considered all behaviours as bullying. Although they didn't consider each scenario exactly the same, they used the same word to summarise all behaviours. German participants considered that impersonation does not actually constitute cyberbullying, but rather a criminal act like theft.

When participants were asked about the severity of each scenario in relation to the others, all adolescents in all countries declared the visual as the most serious behaviour. However, some cultural differences emerged, especially between Italy and the other two countries. Spain and Germany considered the visual and the impersonation scenarios as the most severe, whereas in Italy the visual and written–verbal behaviours were considered the most severe.

Theme 3: The Three Traditional Criteria of Bullying and the Two Additional Criteria for Cyberbullying

Imbalance of power. As became evident from the discussion in all three countries, the imbalance of power cannot be viewed independently of the intent to harm. However, all participants agreed that if the victim is affected by the behaviour then the behaviour constitutes bullying. The experimental condition may not be well chosen though, as Italian adolescents pointed out that there is always a way to defend oneself, such as asking for help. They suggested further aspects of power imbalance as the cyberbully can be characterised by higher levels of technological skills compared to the victim, but only in the case of more technological sophisticated behaviour such as impersonation, and not for others. One German group even went as far as to say that it is still bullying, even when independent of the victim's feelings, because they did not believe that the person in the scenario actually does not care, but rather interpret this as a protective function.

> It depends if it is a real joke or not. (Spain)
>
> When you don't care and the other one notices it eventually, then he will stop. (Germany)

Intention. In all countries, intention is a strongly relevant criterion to be used for the definition, but it is strictly related to the criterion of imbalance of power. For the Italian girls, this criterion is less important than the feelings and consequences for the victim. For the Spanish and German participants, the victim's interpretation of the intention is critical. If the act is perceived as a joke then it is not considered bullying. However, the question was raised (and remained unanswered) as to how the victim should know that the act was not meant seriously.

> If there is the intention to hurt someone it is bullying. (Italy)
>
> The aim of the bully is to hurt someone, but if the victim is not hurt this is not bullying because the bully did not gain his/her goal. (Italy)
>
> Yes, but you actually don't do this as a joke. So, this is a [bad] joke, so to say. (Germany)

Repetition. In all three countries the adolescents agreed that the criterion of repetition can differentiate between a joke and an intentional attack and it can characterise the severity of the action. One of the German groups stated explicitly that the behaviour cannot be unintentional if it is repeated. Thus, repetition and intention are perceived as related. One of the German focus groups disagreed and said that defining this behaviour as bullying does not depend on repetition, but rather on the content of the text messages. Also, when the Italian moderator asked the Italian participants to think about the visual scenario, where the behaviour is done once but is then spread to a large audience through the internet, females said that it can be damaging for the victim although it is a single act.

> Given that in this case the picture was sent also to other people, even if it is done once it can be very bad for the victim. (Italy)
>
> It is harassment if it is repeated and it is constant, but if it is done once it is not harassment. (Spain)
>
> Yes, then it is not a joke anymore. (Germany)

Publicity. For Italian males publicity can change the intention of the acts, connoting blackmail or defamation. Italian females paid more attention to the relation between anonymity, publicity and intentionality: for example, if the behaviour is done by an anonymous person to a large audience, they cannot perceive if the act is done intentionally or not. In all countries, students rated public cyberbullying as the most serious incident, because of the role of the bystanders. The victims might worry about what others think about them. However, this criterion is not necessary to define bullying. In the German focus groups, each person receiving the information about the victim seemed to be counted as an additional incident, manifested in the terms used for this behaviour such as 'mass bullying' or 'multiple bullying'.

> If it is private it is blackmail; if it is public it is defamation. (Italy)
>
> If it's a joke between two friends, does not care; if other people are involved maybe they can't understand if it's a joke or not. (Spain)

Anonymity. In Italy, the criterion of anonymity mainly relates to different reactions of the victims and connotes the intentionality and the nature of the act. In all countries, anonymity is important for the impact on the victim, but not as a definitional criterion to discriminate cyberbullying from non-bullying incidents. Not knowing who the contents are from can raise insecurity and fear, while if the perpetrator is someone the students know it could hurt more if it was someone they trusted or were friends with. On the level of personal relationships, however, coping is easier. The anonymous scenario was perceived as worse than the control scenario.

> If you know the person, you can have a talk, positively or negatively and you can better understand if it is a joke or not. (Italy)
>
> If you know a person, you can know how he/she could behave, but if you don't know ... (Spain)
>
> Yes, it's actually disappointing when it's someone you trust and so on. However, on the other side it's bad if you don't know who it is because then, in principle, it could be anyone. (Germany)

Discussion

The present study contributes significantly to our knowledge of adolescents' understanding of cyberbullying and provides suggestions about which are the best behaviours to represent the construct and the relevant criteria to define the phenomenon. Furthermore the cross-cultural comparison between the three non-English speaking countries — Italy, Spain and Germany — is the first attempt to disentangle some difficulties related to the use of English terms to label cyberbullying.

Overall, although the term 'bullying' emerged spontaneously through all the focus groups in each country, the term 'cyberbullying' was spontaneously proposed only by German adolescents ('cyber-mobbing'). This could be related to the effectiveness of an awareness-raising campaign in Germany, supported by the European Union. Apart from this, the subject of cyber-mobbing has been covered widely and regularly in the German media during the last year. In Italy, adolescents spontaneously proposed the term 'virtual bullying' and other terms involving electronic bullying, internet or on-line bullying. However, at the end the majority of them chose 'cyberbullying'. The best labels for cyberbullying in Spain were harassment and abuse. These are the two terms most often used to label bullying behaviour (Ortega et al., 2001) without any reference to the cyber or virtual network.

In line with the studies on bullying (Smith et al., 2002) cultural specificities for the translation of bullying are still present; for example, the use of specific words in each culture such as *bullismo* in Italy, *acoso* in Spain and *mobbing* in Germany. In relation to the word 'cyber', results from focus groups suggested that not all the adolescents need to differentiate bullying across contexts. Furthermore, the word 'cyber' is not widely used by adolescents, particularly in Latin languages, although it is present in each dictionary.

Thus, trying to answer to the key question which term best to use to label cyberbullying in each country we propose to use cyber-mobbing in Germany, virtual or cyber- bullying in Italy, and harassment or harassment via Internet or mobile phone in Spain.

Pertaining to the different behaviours representing or not representing the cyberbullying construct, we can see that Italy and Germany are in accord mentioning some doubts in relation to whether impersonation is a good example of cyberbullying acts, whereas Spanish adolescents declared that all the four types are cyberbullying. However, looking at Table 3, impersonation is the only behaviour where no label specifically related to bullying or harassment is present across countries. Furthermore, Italian and German adolescents agreed that this behaviour is more related to legally relevant matters, and in Spain this is the only case where the term crime is used. Thus, these results seem to be in contrast with the categorisation proposed by Willard (2007), suggesting that impersonation cannot be considered fully as a (cyber)bullying behaviour. Further studies need to explore this issue more thoroughly.

A final consideration related to the labels concerned the use and the relevance of privacy violation in Italy and Spain, but not in Germany. This result can be affected by the actual relevance of this issue in each country: for example, in Italy and in Spain the problem of privacy law is a big issue to be resolved, and media are very focused on this topic. In Germany, many of the legal areas touched by cyberbullying are already mentioned in the criminal code under several different offences, including an anti-stalking law, although none of them specifically refer to the cyber context.

In relation to the three bullying criteria, results showed that the imbalance of power cannot be viewed independently of the intent to harm. However, all participants agreed that if the victim is affected by the behaviour then the behaviour constitutes bullying. Results suggest that imbalance of power cannot be defined in terms of higher levels of media literacy of the perpetrator or in terms of the inability of the victim to defend him/herself. Thus, the issue related to the definition of power imbalance in cyberbullying is still open. For the majority of the students, the intention to harm is not the only important characteristic that defines bullying, because the effect on the victims and his/her perception of the acts can also be more relevant than the intention of the aggressor. Repetition is a very strong criterion to be used for the definition because it can differentiate between a joke and an intentional attack and it can characterise the severity of the action. However, participants in Italy and Germany paid attention to the relation between repetition and publicity: if the act is public and thus it is sent (or showed) to several people, although it is done only once this can be considered as done several times. The terms proposed by German adolescents well represent this meaning: 'mass bullying' or 'multiple bullying'. The other two additional criteria, anonymity and publicity, do not constitute a requisite for labelling an action as cyberbullying, but they are relevant because they connote the severity and the nature of the attack and the victim reaction. Overall, we think that the results associated with the criteria used for the definition of cyberbullying are particularly relevant. It seems that in order to define a cyberbullying act, adolescents need to know if the action is done intentionally to harm the victim, the effect on the victim, and the repetition of the action (this latter criterion evaluated simultaneously with the publicity). Our results partially confirm the necessity of the three traditional criteria used to define bullying. In particular, it seems that intention is needed, together with the effects on the victim. Repetition is needed, with the exception of public behaviours. Definitions

proposed by the literature for power imbalance in the cyber context (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Menesini & Nocentini, 2009a) were not supported by our results. Thus we may ask whether the problem is the definition of power imbalance or if this criterion is appropriate in order to define a cyberbullying act. In relation to the new criteria proposed by the literature, anonymity and publicity, our results suggest that they are not necessary to label an action as cyberbullying, but they can connote the context (the severity and nature of the attacks, the relationship between actor and victim, the victim's reactions).

In conclusion, the present study gives some relevant suggestions to researchers and practitioners working on cyberbullying with adolescents. Using the same words and the same defining aspects as adolescents do to call and to describe this phenomenon can help adults to better understand what is the meaning, the nature and the severity of the cyber attack, in order to suggest appropriate guidelines and intervention strategies. The use of the same qualitative methodology across countries resulted in a useful strategy to compare terms and definitions of cyberbullying across three non-English speaking countries. In spite of these strengths, the study also has some limitations. First, the small number of participants for each country and the convenience sampling limits the generalisability of the results. Second, differences in ages across countries can affect results; however, we found similarity across countries although different ages characterise the samples. Finally, cultural aspects related to the European regions can be present and they cannot be generalised; for instance, we might ask if results related to the impersonation typology can be the same for other non-European cultures.

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