

Differences of causal attribution in bullying among participants

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Abstract

Introduction. *Our aim is to investigate differences of causal attribution among participants in bullying, as they judge the facts from their particular place of participation in the abuse at any given moment, as well as their habitual profile in bullying situations.*

Method. *Using a sample of students between 10 and 18 years of age, and the CIMEI questionnaire (Avilés, 1999), children are classified into sub-groups for analysis: bullies, victims, bully-victims and onlookers.*

Results. *We find differences of attribution depending on the situation of the subjects' participation, their individual profiles and, in some attributions, as a function of gender. Explanatory consistency in the profiles is shown in the aggressors' tendency toward minimization and their use of provocation as a justification for bullying; the victims' idea of asymmetry and in their ignorance of why this happens to them; reactivity in bully-victims and onlookers' identification of amoral intentionality in those who attack.*

Discussion. *Aspects like social competence and cognition, differences in assigning value, handling of emotions, motivation, power relations and use of them in the peer group, have all been identified as interactively important in the attributions made in bullying. Thus, intervention is oriented towards working on empathy, internalizing mechanisms for preventing conflicts, training in emotional self-control, individual and group learning of tasks involving helping and protecting others, and towards prevention of abuse through universal moral education.*

Keywords: *causal attribution, bullying, aggressor, bully-victim, victim, onlookers*

Introduction

Different studies have highlighted the diversity of causes behind bully-victim dynamics and the factors that would act as protection/risk (Farrington, 1993; Morin & Janosz, 2006; Smith, 2005; Olweus, 1998; Ortega & Mora-Merchán, 2000; Rigby, 2002) in diverse areas such as cultural, social, school-related, group-related, family and personal. However, the arguments of subjects involved in bullying have also been investigated--what was their intention in their acts and what feelings these acts would produce in them, as well as the tools that they put into play, how many of them, their direction and quality (Besag, 1989; Dodge, 1991; Smith et al., 1993; Sutton et to. 1999).

Elsewhere, it has been considered highly important to assess the meaning that participants in bullying assign to these acts; the degree of ambiguity with which they are perceived and its role in forming the attribution (Smorti, 1999); how they understand and integrate the emotions that induce them (Menesini, 1999), such emotions perhaps playing an important role in directing and thinking through their actions (Smorti & Ciucci, 2000; Del Barrio et al., 2003). In addition, others have noted the need to take into account differences in the profiles of subjects participating in bullying in order to orient possible interventions (Toblin et al., 2005).

Cognitive aspects would be involved in understanding group bullying phenomena; evaluation of acts based on the precise situation-position from which individuals participate in bullying, their degree of independence and moral autonomy; and, finally, the influence of one's own social-emotional history of bullying experiences and the profile which the subject ends up occupying in the group dynamic, may all contribute to the construction of one's own explanation about why things happen.

Objectives

The present research seeks to evaluate differences of perception of bullying based on the causal attribution being made, according to the participation situation (exercise-reception-observation), and the usual profile being occupied in that scenario: bully (a), victim (b), bully-victim (c) or onlooker (d) (Avilés, 2006), as well as the sex variable.

Method

Subjects

The initial sample is composed of 2181 subjects from 10 to 18 years of age (79 fifth- and sixth-graders, 989 seventh- and eighth-graders, and 1001 ninth- and tenth-graders, drawn from twenty schools. Participating schools are largely public (only one is private) and from urban areas (only five schools are rural), selected from the provinces of Álava, Valladolid and Vizcaya. Selection of subjects was conditioned by the particular school's participation in a training project on bullying. The classrooms selected for the sample were taken just as they were with their pre-existing membership, and schools were requested to have one classroom participate from each educational level present at each school. There were no criteria used in the selection regarding existing disputes or intellectual ability. The protocol used for collecting information was sufficiently controlled, explained and supplied with uniform instructions for prior to the test, during the test and during data gathering and processing.

For the statistical analysis we worked with a more reduced sample out of the initial sample: subjects that fit into each analysis profile according to answers given on the evaluation instrument: victims, bullies, bully-victims and onlookers, as appears in Table 1:

Table 1. Distribution of the analysis group by sex and profile in bullying

Profile	Boys (51.4%)	Girls (48.6%)	Total (100%)
Bullies	99 (13.4%)	27 (3.9%)	126 (8.8%)
Víctims	62 (8.4%)	54 (7.8%)	116 (8.1%)
Bully-victims	12 (1.6%)	5 (0.7%)	17 (1.2%)
Onlookers	564 (76.5%)	610 (87.6%)	1174 (81.9%)
Total	737 (100%)	696 (100%)	1433 (100%)

Instrument

The evaluation tool we used to measure bullying situations was the CIMEI (Avilés, 2003) *Cuestionario sobre Intimidación y Maltrato Entre Iguales* [Questionnaire on Intimidation and Bullying], validated with the author's thesis (Avilés, 2002). The 2003 version is a self-report derived from the initial CIMEI (Avilés, 1999), constructed using some items from other questionnaires¹ and introducing new items. The CIMEI (Avilés,

¹ Specifically, questionnaires developed by Ortega, Mora and Mora-Merchán (1995) and by Fernandez and Ortega (Fernandez García, 1998), which in turn are inspired by the Olweus questionnaire (1983).

2003) is made up of 36 multiple-choice items.

In order to assign subjects to profiles, we selecting as *victims* those who answered item 11 (recurrence of victimization) either "Several times" or "Almost every day, almost always"; as *bullies* those who answered item 22 (number of aggressions they made in the last term) "Between five and ten times", "Between ten and twenty times" or "More than twenty times"; as bully-victims those responded at these levels for both of the two previous categories (victims and bullies); and as *onlookers* those who for the penultimate item of the CIMEI perceived themselves as "Mainly an onlooker".

Statistical analysis

The attributions made by participants in bullying, as well as their differences, have been assessed from the three *participation situations* in the bullying dynamic: perpetration, victimization and observation, as exercised at a given time². In the three cases we assessed common differences of causal attribution made by the four usual *participation profiles*: victims, bullies, bully-victims and onlookers, in other words, the analysis sub-groups.

The SPSS program was used for all statistical data processing, with contingency analysis between variables. As the objective was to evaluate differences in the perception of causal attribution of the sub-groups, we performed a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to determine the differences between profiles for the set of variables. The result was a Wilks Lambda of .605, $F(11,182) = 66$, $p < .001$. We also assured the non-influence of distribution by sex; their separate analyses concurred with those made for the whole group. We then identified causal attribution differences between the profiles (sub-groups) by analysing variance of one factor (ANOVA) for every dependent variable and between the sub-groups, from every *participation situation* in bullying (perpetration, victimization and observation), as can be seen in Tables^{3,4} 2, 3 and 4, obtaining significant differences for twenty of the twenty-two dependent variables.

Results

² All subjects have been in each of the situations and have information from that standpoint.

³ Significant differences between subgrupos are indicated with subscript letters as follows: *a*: bullies, *b*: victims, *c*: bully-victims and *d*: onlookers

⁴ Asterisks indicate the following: *** ($p \leq 0.001$), ** ($p \leq 0.01$) and * ($p \leq 0.05$).

The results show significant differences⁵ in the attribution depending on the participation situation of each case and on the profile that subjects usually occupy in the bully-victim dynamic, as well as on gender in certain attributions. Those who are bullied give a different meaning to the reasons for such treatment according to the position they usually occupy in bullying (see Table 2).

In order to learn these causes, the questionnaire asks participants: "If you have been bullied at some time, why do you think they did it?"

Table 2. Causal attribution of those who are bullied

DECLARED CAUSAL ATTRIBUTION WHEN BEING BULLIED					
Habitual ...	(F)	Bullies (a)	Víctims (b)	Bully/victims (c)	Onlookers (d)
Nobody has ever bullied me ***	97.48	43.1 _{bd}	2.6 _{ad}	11.8 _d	70.5 _{abc}
I don't know ***	10.195	17.9	30.4 _d	23.5	12.1 _b
Because I provoked them ***	20.412	15.4 _{bd}	6.1 _a	17.6 _d	2.4 _{ac}
Because I am different from them ***	47.891	8.1 _b	30.4 _{ad}	23.5 _d	3.7 _{bd}
Because I am weaker ***	60.231	12.9 _{bd}	36.5 _{ad}	23.5 _d	4.2 _{adc}
To bother me ***	22.167	12.2 _b	34.8 _{ad}	23.5	9.7 _b
To play a joke on me **	4.400	20.3 _d	9.6	11.8	9.8 _a
Because I deserve it	1.076	2.5	1.8	-	0.9
Other ***	18.937	8.1 _{bc}	19 _{ad}	29.4 _{ad}	4.4 _{bc}

In order to know the causes of bullying, the question is: "If you have participated in bullying situations towards your classmates, why did you do it?"

Table 3. Causal attribution of those who are bullying

DECLARED CAUSAL ATTRIBUTION WHEN BULLYING					
Habitual ...	(F)	Aggressors (a)	Victims (b)	Bully/victims (c)	Onlookers (d)
I have not bullied anybody ***	40.262	6.4 _{bd}	42.6 _{ad}	11.8 _d	65.4 _{abc}
Because they provoked me ***	22.081	64 _{bd}	38.3 _a	35.3	30.1 _a
Because others do this to me ***	28.366	12.8 _{cd}	12.2 _{cd}	35.3 _{abd}	2.6 _{abc}
Because they are different (gypsies, disabled,	7.311	4 _d	3.5 _d	5.9	0.5 _{ab}

foreigners, from other places)***					
Because they were weaker ***	10.076	4.8 _d	2.6 _c	11.8 _{bd}	0.7 _{ac}
To bother [them] ***	14.890	15.2 _d	7.8	17.6	3.2 _a
To play a joke ***	15.318	33.6 _{bd}	12.2 _a	29.4	12.4 _a
Other	8.232	10.4 _d	7.9	17.6 _d	3.3 _{ac}

In order to know the causes as attributed by the onlookers, we asked them: "Why do you think some kids bully others?"

Table 4. Causal attribution of those who observe bullying

DECLARED CAUSAL ATTRIBUTION WHEN OBSERVING BULLYING					
Habitual ...	(F)	Aggressors (a)	Victims (b)	Bully/victims (c)	Onlookers (d)
To bother [them] ***	12.666	39.5 _d	48.2 _d	23.5 _d	61.7 _{abc}
Because they are intimidated **	5.751	34.7 _d	31.6	35.3	21.3 _a
Because they are stronger *	4.887	24 _b	41.2 _{ad}	35.3	30.6 _b
To play a joke ***	4.091	39.5 _{bd}	21.9 _a	23.5	25.1 _a
Other reasons **	2.75	13.7 _b	31.3 _a	29.4	21

According to one's usual profile in the bullying dynamic, there are noticeable differences of attribution in the different positions from which a person takes a part in bullying. In Table 5 the most significant constant for each profile and situation can be observed.

Table 5. Predominant causal attribution according to profile and position of participation in bullying

POSSIBLE POSITION OF PARTICIPATION	HABITUAL PROFILE IN BULLY-VICTIM DYNAMICS			
	Usual bullies	Usual victims	Usual bully-victims	Usual witnesses
When bullied	Minimizing *b***d Provocation***bd	Ignorance***d Asymmetries ***ad Intentionality***ad	Provocation***d Other reasons ***ad	Not to be victims ***abc
When bullying	Provocation***bd Minimizing ***bd Intentionality**a***d		Others do this to me ***abd Asymmetry of strength ***bd	Not to be bullies***abc
When observing bullying	Minimizing b**d*** Provocation***d	Asymmetry of force*ad		Intentionality***abc

The habitual bully minimizes the actions, regardless of the position occupied in bullying, significantly more than onlookers, and than victims, whether he or she is bullying or observing bullying. In addition, when attacking, he or she justifies it because of provocation more than do victims and onlookers in that situation. When bullying, he or she expresses differences in causal attribution for intentionality from the onlookers. For the latter, there is also a difference in attributed provocation when he or she witnesses bullying.

The victim profile shows differences of attribution from the onlookers, in attribution of *ignorance*, *power differences* and *intentionality* when being bullied, and in the argument for the imbalance of power when watching others being bullied. With bullies, there are differences in the attribution of imbalance of power and intentionality when being bullied and in the idea of power differences when observing bullying.

Bully-victims rationalize the causes of bullying differently from others when they are the perpetrators, mentioning their having been bullied themselves and the power differences; and in mentioning provocation when being bullied, as compared to the onlookers.

Onlookers logically seem more distant than the other profiles in the bullying situations and when they observe bullying they attribute its cause to intentionality significantly more than do the other profiles.

Analysis of the causal attributions common to the profiles in questionnaire items:

Provocation

To attribute episodes of bullying to previous conflicted situations is a common argument, used with different intensity by each *stable bullying profile* and in each *participation situation* (see Table 6), as gathered from questionnaire items (see Tables 2, 3 and 4) that use expressions with provocation elements: "because I provoked them", "because others do this to me", "because they pick on them"...

Table 6. Differences in the causal attribution *provocation* of bullying by others' acts

Causal attribution: the provocation											
Profile of bully	If he is bullied	15.4(***)(b,d)	Profile of victim	If he is bullied	6.1	Profile of bully-victim	If he is bullied	17.6(**)(d)	Profile of onlooker	If he is bullied	2.4
	If he bullies	64(***)(b,d)		If he bullies	38.8		If he bullies	35.3		If he bullies	30.1
	If he observes bullying	34.7(***)(d)		If he observes bullying	31.6		If he observes bullying	35.3		If he observes bullying	21.3

Among *those who are bullied* there are significant differences (* *) in favour of boys using provocation as an explanatory argument for bullying. It is significantly more stressed (***) as a cause in bullies as compared to victims and onlookers, and in bully-victims (* *) as compared to onlookers.

From the position of *having bullied others*, provocation also leans in favour of boys (***). It is significantly more frequent in the habitual bully (***) than in victims or onlookers.

When *bullying is observed*, this attribution is made significantly more (***) by bullies than by onlookers. Although there are no significant differences for gender between profiles when bullying is observed, between habitual bullies there are such differences in favour of boys (***), and among habitual onlookers in favour of girls (***)

Asymmetries

Personal differences in strength and power between peers and within the group are also generally mentioned as reasons for bullies to mistreat their victims. Nevertheless, these argumentations vary significantly according to the situation and profile of the one who makes them (see Tables 7a and 7b), via expressions drawn from the CIMEI: "because I am different from them", "because they were weaker", "because they are stronger"...

Tables 7a and 7b. Causal attributions of asymmetries in profiles and bullying situations

Causal attribution: differences											
Profile of bully	If he is bullied	8.1	Profile of victim	If he is bullied	30.4(***)(a, d)	Profile of bully-victim	If he is bullied	23.5	Profile of onlooker	If he is bullied	3.7
	If he bullies	4(**d)		If he bullies	3.5(**d)		If he bullies	5.9(*d)		If he bullies	0.5
	If he observes bullying	-		If he observes bullying	-		If he observes bullying	-		If he observes bullying	-
Causal attribution: asymmetries											
Profile of bully	If he is bullied	12.9	Profile of victim	If he is bullied	36.5(***)(a, d)	Profile of bully-victim	If he is bullied	23.5	Profile of onlooker	If he is bullied	4.2
	If he bullies	4.8		If he bullies	2.6		If he bullies	11.8(a*, b**, d***)		If he bullies	0.7
	If he observes bullying	2.4		If he observes bullying	41.2(***(a, **d))		If he observes bullying	35.3		If he observes bullying	30.6

Among *those who are bullied*, asymmetric attributions are recognized much more (***) by victims than by the others, especially more than bullies and onlookers.

Among *those who bully*, reasons of asymmetry referring to an imbalance of power are more frequent in bully-victims than in any other profile: onlookers (***), victims (***) and bullies (*). Reasons referring to personal differences are used significantly more by any active profile--bullies(**), victims (***) and bully-victims (*)—than by onlookers.

If we consider *those who observe bullying*, habitual victims are those who use the asymmetric argument to justify the bullying they observe, significantly more often than do bullies (***) or onlookers (**).

On the other hand, reasons of asymmetry are not among the arguments that differentiate boys and girls in justifying bullying. Only female victims and female bully-victims, when being bullied, present significant differences (***) from their classmates with this explanatory argument for bullying.

Intentionality

Bullying is considered to be an aggressive behaviour that seeks to harm, involving planning and procedures, rooted in intentionality. Intentionality is indicated by expressions like "*in order to bother me*" or "*to bother [them]*" (see Table 8). *When being bullied*, habitual victims are the ones who significantly (***) make use of this argument, more than bullies or onlookers.

When *practicing bullying*, habitual bullies are the ones who recognize this cause as a propelling force behind the intimidation significantly more than do onlookers (***) or victims (* *) like. And victims (*) and bully-victims (*) do so more than onlookers.

When *bullying is observed*, those who are not directly involved resort to this argument significantly (***) more than do the rest of profiles.

Table 8. Causal attribution "to bother [them]"

Causal attribution: the intentionality "to bother[them]"											
Profile of bully	If he is bullied	12.2	Profile of victim	If he is bullied	34.8(***a, d)	Profile of bully-victim	If he is bullied	23.2	Profile of onlooker	If he is bullied	9.7
	If he bullies	15.2(***d** b)		If he bullies	7.8 (*d)		If he bullies	17.6 (*d)		If he bullies	3.2
	If he observes bullying	39.5		If he observes bullying	48.2		If he observes bullying	23.5		If he observes bullying	61.7(* **a,b,c)

By sexes, the causal attribution "to bother [them]" does not present significant differences between boys and girls, neither when bullying nor when being bullied, but there is a significant difference when observing, in favour of girls (**).

Minimizing the importance

Often found in many social, family and school conceptions, giving slight importance to the events, attributing them to causes like a joke, relational dynamics or situational contingencies become examples of trivialization and justification for bullying. The expression "to play a joke" tries to play down the seriousness of the situation and is not found to the same extent either among the different bullying situations nor among the bullying profiles (see Table 9).

When *being bullied*, the habitual bully prefers this attribution to explain bullying more than do victims (*) or onlookers (***). In addition, this tendency is more frequent among male habitual bullies than among female bullies.

When *practicing bullying*, minimization is used more by boys (***) than by girls and the argument is justification for bullies (***) more than for victims or onlookers.

When *observing the acts*, habitual bullies are still the ones who make use of this reason significantly more than victims (* *) and onlookers (***)

Table 9. Differences of attribution when bullying is minimized

Causal attribution: the minimization “to play a joke”											
Profile of bully	If he is bullied	20.3(*a***d)	Profile of victim	If he is bullied	9.6	Profile of bully-victim	If he is bullied	11.8	Profile of onlooker	If he is bullied	9.8
	If he bullies	33.6(**bd)		If he bullies	12.2		If he bullies	29.4		If he bullies	12.4
	If he observes bullying	39.5(b**d***)		If he observes bullying	21.9		If he observes bullying	23.5		If he observes bullying	25.1

These situations are played down more significantly by boys (***) when they are bullying. As victims, differences appear more often among habitual boy bullies (***) than among their girl counterparts. When observing, differences do not appear. We can summarize in Table 10 the significant relations which are most relevant.

Table 10. Significant differences of causal attribution between bullying profiles and by sex⁶

		Usual bullies		Usual victims		Usual bully-victims		Usual onlookers		Boys	Girls
		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls		
When bullied	PROVOCATION					***				**	
	DIFFERENCES			*** ₂			***				
	INTENTIONALITY			***							
	MINIMIZING	***									
When bullying	PROVOCATION	***								***	
	DIFFERENCES					***					
	INTENTIONALITY	***									
	MINIMIZING	*** ₁								***	
When observing bullying	PROVOCATION	***				***			***		
	DIFFERENCES			***							
	INTENTIONALITY							*** ₂			
	MINIMIZING	***									

⁶ The sub-index [*** 1] indicates significant differences in favour of boys. The sub-index [* * * 2] in favour of girls.

Discussion

Our research results highlight some contrasts that were revealed in other studies (Olweus, 1998; Ortega, 1992; Ortega & Mora-Merchán, 2000; Whitney & Smith, 1993) about differences in how the participants of bullying live and interpret bullying from the perspective of momentary situations and from the habitual profiles that they occupy in bullying. In addition, these results delve deeper into the diversity of argumentations and causal attributions made by subjects who a part of this dynamic.

These differences may be at the root of a lack of agreement when it comes to evaluating acts of bullying. Thus we see the need to reach agreements about what pupils perceive as bullying (Lee, 2004) and what they do not. It even seems necessary to address this work among other members of the educational community (Avilés, 2005). Other differences have been explained from subjects' social competence, as a result of a personal deficit, error or confusion in any of the processes for obtaining social information and for interpreting it (Dodge, et al., 1986), or, from the idea of personal resources and ability (Sutton, et al., 1999). Likewise, explanations have been given based on differences in subjects' motivation and instrumentalization in social situations made by the subjects, especially bullies, in order to attain some profit (Diaz-Aguado, 1996; Tedeschi, 1994). Even the idea of a need to get control over a weaker person has been brought out, in which case the dominion-submission scheme can be imposed. (Smith & Sharp, 1994)

A first important aspect that the research emphasizes is that different causal attributions take place depending on the habitual profile that pupils occupy in bullying dynamics (Smith, et al., 1993; Toblin, et al., 2005).

In addition, the data show *argumentation preferences* of causal attribution according to the habitual profile that subjects occupy in bully-victim dynamics, and *explanatory consistency in their causal attribution* throughout the different situations in which they find themselves (Del Barrio, et al., 2003).

Thus, *minimizing reasons* are often found in bully profiles, especially in boys. Habitual bullies tend to explain what happens by playing it down in all participation situations, this way maintaining explanatory consistency of the acts. This is Slee's explanation (1993), when he considers them accustomed to this type of aggressive behaviour, or lacking other ways of establishing social ties (Hoover, Oliver & Hazler, 1992).

This predisposition in processes for collecting social information (Toblin et al., 2005) would justify them in assigning positive value to aggressive acts (Olweus, 1998) and would make it difficult for them to consider aggression negatively, especially social aggression (Ortega & Mora-Merchán, 2000), and more so if it meets their objectives or if they lack alternative responses (Avilés, 2002), and it would differentiate them from the rest of profiles in this respect. In addition, resorting to minimizing reasons to explain bullying concurs with their difficulty in recognizing others' emotions (Caprara & Pastoreli, 1989) or their refusal and/or difficulty in recognizing their victims' unhappiness (Smith, et al., 1993) or doing it for their own benefit (Menesini, 1999), with female bullies being able to better understand mental states in others (Smorti, 1999).

Reasons to justify bullying are found in provocation and aggressive reaction in the aggressive profiles, although preferably not from a participation situation. The prototype of exoneration (Olweus, 1998), a bully argues provocation more than the rest of profiles when bullying and when observing bullying. This is explained from interpretative models of deficits in social cognition processes (Crick & Dodge, 1996) and of erroneous (Dodge, 1991) or hostile attributions to relationships with others (Hubbard, et al., 2001). When being bullied, bully-victims are those who resort to victimization already experienced ("others do this to me") as a causal attribution more than do other profiles, thus explaining their double participation in bullying, connecting their bullying action with that of being bullied. They show an awareness and certainty about what their aggression produces, and an explanation of its bully-victim dynamic.

Intentionality reasons for explaining bullying are recognized in all participation situations, with differences between profiles. It seems to be a shared and accepted reason--quite logical, if we are talking about bullying (Besag, 1989; Olweus, 1999). To obtain some benefit or to meet some objective (Thompson, Arora & Sharp, 2001) is at the root of instrumental (Díaz-Aguado, 1996) or proactive aggression (Dodge & Crick, 1990). This intentionality, recognized by *habitual victims* more than by other profiles, is also recognized by *bullies* and *bully-victims* when attacking, thus reflecting a sense of guilt which they usually do not admit socially (Olweus, 1998). In addition, this intentionality that *habitual onlookers* also argue when observing bullying, puts them in a more objective position for constructing moral judgments and for socially assessing the harm to the victims, or even the enjoyment of bullies (Del Barrio, 1999). This supports the suitability of their moral understanding of the phenomenon and a certain independence of intentions and

emotions directed towards them, although it implicates them in group dynamics which they seldom know how to break (Avilés, 2006), and underscores the diversity of causes that keep them defenceless when facing aggression (fear of being the next victim, ignorance, doubts, not knowing how to step in, etc.).

Finally, *reasons of asymmetry in strength* or *differences* take root in victims when they are the object of or are witnesses of bullying, and make them aware of their personal and strength differences in the group as an explanation for what happens to them. This awareness of inequality and differences supports the idea of accumulation of responsibility for what happens to them with bullies (Graham & Juvonen, 1998), an acceptance of their inability to level the playing field, and in some cases, of self-blame.

Implications for intervention

If we focus on the four areas of causal attribution we have analyzed, we can indicate some ways to compensate for each of them using educational intervention.

Addressing *minimization of the problem* with bullies implies working on assigning value to the acts, with them personally and with the group. For this purpose it seems necessary for them to do their reasoning in a climate of objectivity, avoiding blame for prior situations. Adopting the right intervention model (Avilés, 2006) may be helpful here. Additionally, this requires having previously agreed on a definition of bullying (Lee, 2004) with the majority of pupils (delimiting what bullying is, what it is not, and what can turn into bullying).

Actions aimed at coming to understand victims' feelings (Sullivan, 2001), i.e. working with them on empathy, can shed light to help bullies value their acts in a different way. Working with dramatization of situations and role play, viewing videos or using narrations, all allow one to assess the facts objectively and to identify them as being performed with a certain moral value, independently of the individuality of those on the receiving end (how the victims receive, integrate, manage and resist). This can also help increase awareness of the effects of one's own actions on others and on the group, it allows for a certain distance between assessment of the bullies themselves and of their actions (Maines & Robinson, 2003), making it possible to redirect situations, give other interpretations of the facts and offer second chances.

On the other hand, including in our study those subjects who are not directly

involved in the situations—the onlookers—gives rise to two other issues. One issue is socialization and group support for the right to not be abused by anybody, breaking with the "tattle-tale culture" and so safeguarding the individual and the group from defencelessness when faced with bullying. A second issue is the social manifestation of the value and meaning that onlookers assign--intentionality (see Table 8)--to the actions of bullies toward their victims, taking an active moral position (social verbalization of rejection toward those who bully) and adoption of group agreements (anti-bullying group rules).

Work on reactive and *provocation* attributions demands general preventive tasks on processes of social and school coexistence, making conflict-resolution instruments (Torrego, 2000) and mediating mechanisms (Ortega & del Rey, 2003) a matter of everyday resources for interpersonal understanding, also using balanced disciplinary models within the educational community to regulate micro and macro coexistence. At the group level, tasks are needed to define and assign value to bullying (Lee, 2004), as well as tasks related to aspects of group coexistence norms (anti-bullying rules). Individually, with bullies, it is necessary to take on strategies of cognitive restructuring and emotional integration of their social experiences through narrative analysis (Del Barrio et al., 2003) as well as self-control and anger-control programs for cases of attributional error and aggressive reactivity. With bully-victims, their disruptive, unregulated and contradictory behaviour requires implementing two-fold actions: behavioural self-regulation, and help and protection.

Knowledge, more or less explicitly shared by everyone, of the intentionality of bullying, encourages institutional and contextual actions concerning both rejection and help (campaigns, forums, celebrations, slogans, declarations, etc.) in the school culture. These actions take place both at the group level, including analysis, moral awareness and adoption of common agreements (case analysis, anti-bullying rules, etc); and at the individual level, encouraging an active role of bullying onlookers that would reinforce their moral judgment of acts, promoting awareness of the group's defencelessness against bullying and favouring their social involvement in support structures for their classmates, like those of the peer helper (Fernandez et al., 2002), circle of friends (Sullivan, 2001) or counselling peers (Cowie & Sharp, 1996).

In order to work on *asymmetric attributions*, it is necessary to involve everyone, but especially onlookers and victims. The group must break with its "tattle-tale" culture by taking on the valiant idea of defence of human rights and defence of the weakest, over and above the cowardice of abusing those who have less strength or intolerance of those who

are different. For victims we require a social task which compensates for their deficits, from the place of school authority figures, from guided, individual work in self-affirmation and assertiveness (Morganet, 1995), and from peer support through help, protection and advice networks (Thompson, et al., 2002).

Other causal attributions that have not been analyzed explicitly also deserve some mention. Victims' differential attribution of *ignorance* about what happens to them must be dealt with in utmost confidentiality and reciprocal coordination on the part of adults when varying conditions where bullying would take place, compensated with consciousness-raising tasks and with continued support from peers and adults, as well as concrete messages and signs of the school community's institutional commitment. *Distance* that onlookers keep between themselves and the experiences of victims and bullies requires involving them through participation in new curriculum activities, and dissemination of teacher-programmed activities against bullying, all of which provides knowledge; also by giving them an active role in the school's organizational activity and in support structures that are generated in the peer group; and by visualizing themselves within the educational community's institutional commitment in its fight against abuse.

Conclusions

These research results show attributional differences among participants in bullying; this knowledge should allow us to intervene more efficiently and with more focus. In order to achieve this, there must be places where the players can share their opinions, beliefs, feelings and emotions—bullies' explanations, victims' feelings and onlookers' involvement in resolution. All must become conscious of bullying situations, delimiting, identifying and defining them, revealing prejudices and contradictory attitudes of those involved.

Explanatory consistency in the attributions of the profiles demands stable, global and shared programs, where common actions can be integrated with individualized ones, and joint measures of the entire educational community can take shape. This is key for any intervention to be coherent across school and group contexts, in the micro-context of bullying and in the perception that subjects accumulate about their own social-emotional experiences with the peer group and the emotions they have in these situations. Future research should explore the effectiveness of these interventions for attributional change in the subjects.

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