What Do Adolescents Say about Bullying?

Silvia Postigo[1*], Konstanze Schoeps[2], Ana Ordóñez[2], **and** Inmaculada Montoya-Castilla[2]

1 Facultad de Ciencias de la Salud, Universidad Europea de Valencia (Spain)
2 Facultad de Psicología. Universitat de València (Spain)

Título: ¿Qué Dicen los Adolescentes sobre el Acoso Escolar?
Resumen: Todos los actos antisociales, incluidos la violencia y el acoso escolar, lo son dentro de la colectividad en la que se producen y son reflejo de esa colectividad. Este estudio se centra en el discurso espontáneo de 406 adolescentes entre 15 y 21 años sobre el acoso escolar. El análisis cualitativo de los datos permite inferir cuatro principios discursivos que se articulan desde la inicial negación de la violencia ("eso no pasa"), a la negación de la responsabilidad ("si pasa, no soy yo, somos todos"), la negación de la gravedad ("si es broma, no hace daño), y la atribución a la víctima (el acoso tiene más que ver con la víctima que con el agresor). El análisis del discurso espontáneo adolescente contribuye a definir su contexto interpretativo respecto a la violencia entre iguales. Incluir este conocimiento en el modelo científico es necesario para dar lugar a programas de intervención eficaces.
Palabras clave: teoría fundamentada; violencia entre iguales; acoso escolar; estudio cualitativo; adolescencia.

Abstract: All antisocial acts, including violence and bullying behavior, are such thing within the community where they occur; they are a reflection of that community. This study aims to analyze the spontaneous discourse about bullying at school of 406 adolescents aged between 15 and 21 years. Qualitative analysis of the data permitted to derive four discursive principles: denial of the existence of violence ("it doesn't happen"), denial of one's own responsibility ("if it happens, it isn't me, everybody does it"), denial of seriousness ("if it is a joke, it doesn't hurt"), and attribution to the victim (bullying behavior happens to the victim for a reason). The analysis of adolescent's spontaneous discourse contributes to the definition of interpretive context regarding peer violence. This knowledge should be included in the scientific model in order to help developing effective intervention programs.
Keywords: grounded theory; peer violence; bullying; qualitative study; adolescence.

Introduction

School violence and, specifically, bullying among peers are concerns for members of today's society, who have been made aware of the issue by media reports on the most serious cases of suicide or hospitalization. This issue has gained importance in the scientific community, with a large increase in research on this topic in recent years (Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Postigo, González, Montoya & Ordóñez, 2013; Smith, 2013). Currently, research focuses on the prevention of and intervention in this phenomenon, and therefore, it is necessary to define and delimit it. In that respect, previous research has agreed on an operative definition of bullying in terms of three distinctive characteristics: the intention to harm, the persistence of aggressions and the abuse of power (Olweus, 1978, 1999, 2001). This abuse of power creates a relationship of domination/submission, characterized by an imbalance of strengths between the bully and the victim, who has personal and/or social difficulties in defending himself or herself or stopping the aggressions (Carrera, DePalma & Lameiras, 2011; Postigo et al., 2013). Bullying is a type of antisocial, aggressive, unjustified and sometimes violent behaviour based on a persistent relationship of asymmetric power (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). In the literature, different types of aggression within bullying have been identified: they may be visible or covert, depending on the possibility of identifying the aggressor, and physical, verbal or emotional, depending on the form of aggression (Hymel & Swearer,

2015; Olweus, 2001; Postigo et al., 2013). Verbal aggressions include insults, threats, and other types of teasing, whereas emotional aggressions directly affect the victim's social position, including humiliation, social exclusion, or the spread of hateful rumours about the victim.

Recognizing peer violence when it occurs or may occur seems more complex than defining it. Antisocial behaviour implies the violation of social norms, which are defined differently depending on the context (del Barrio, Martín, Almeida & Barrios, 2003). Socio-moral norms set the limits between a natural, occasional aggression with an adaptive function and an unjustified aggression with the intention of demoralizing. Thus, some behaviours may be considered aggressions by some people and not by others, depending on their interpretation (Ortega, 2010). This distinction has been observed when comparing the perspectives of parents from different cultures (Hein, 2016; Smorti, Menesini & Smith, 2003), teachers and students (Compton, Campbell & Mergler, 2014; Naylor, Cowie, Cossin, de Bettencourt & Lemme, 2006; Veenstra, Lindenberg, Huitsing, Sainio & Salmivalli, 2014), researchers and adolescents (Hopkins, Taylor, Bowen & Wood, 2013; Vaillancourt et al., 2008), boys and girls (Frisén, Holmqvist & Oscarsson, 2008), or victims, bullies and bystanders (Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2012; Forsberg et al., 2016). These studies have observed that parents, teachers and, especially, students tend to underestimate the frequency of bullying behaviour because they do not recognize covert aggressive behaviour as such.

Qualitative studies have observed that children and adolescents consider bullying a non-serious, non-harmful, irrelevant and inevitable problem (Cheng, Chen, Ho & Cheng, 2011; Crowther, Goodson, McGuire & Dickson, 2013; Ryan & Morgan, 2011; Volk, Farrell, Franklin, Mularczyk & Provenzano, 2016). This perception of bullying casts doubts

* Correspondence address [Dirección para correspondencia]:
Silvia Postigo Zegarra. Departamento de Psicología, Facultad de ciencias de la Salud, Universidad Europea de Valencia, España. Paseo Alameda, 7. 46010 Valencia (Spain). Email: silvia.postigo@universidadeuropea.es

upon adolescents' motivation to act differently. This motivation is fundamental for intervention programmes, since "having different strategies does not guarantee that you will act in a certain way if you are not motivated to do so, (whereas) being motivated may lead to looking for alternative ways of behaving" (Alonso-Tapia & Rodríguez-Rey, 2012, pp. 204).

Hence, although the main motivators for a human being are ethics and values that are perceived as their own, personal values must be strong to go against the social order (Jara, Casas & Ortega, 2017). Qualitative research indicates that the reasons for aggression may include the fear of being a victim and/or the desire to belong to a socially valued group (Burns, Maycock, Cross & Brown, 2008; Lam & Liu, 2007; Martín, Martínez & García-Sánchez, 2017; Patton, Eschmann & Butler, 2013). One of the reasons for victimization is being labelled as different, for example, because somebody is new or comes from a different place (Guerra, Williams & Sadek, 2011; Hopkins et al., 2013). Two classical theories have explained these matters: the Theory of Social Dominance (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and the Theory of Social Identity (Tajfel, 1981). Both theories focus on the social power construct (Anderson, 2012; Willis & Rodríguez-Bailón, 2010) in which violence might be considered a social strategy in situations of conflict (Ortega, 2010; Rodkin, Espelage & Hanish, 2015; Postigo et al., 2013; Salmivalli, 2010; Volk et al., 2016). Thus, social power helps to organize the peer group in social hierarchies, to establish a social order and to protect it (Davies, 2011; Hymel, McClure, Miller, Shumka & Trach, 2015).

In summary, antisocial behaviours are considered as such within the collectivity in which they occur, and bullying is only a mirror of that collectivity (Patton, Hong, Patel & Kral, 2017; Volk et al., 2016). In terms of morality and values, adolescents seem to perceive the inconsistencies between what society preaches and what actually happens. The values of equality, respect and dialogue contradict what they experience in school (what they learn in the so-called hidden school curriculum) and what they see in society and in the media (Horton, 2011; Patton et al., 2013). The aim of this research was analysing the spontaneous discourse of adolescents in the Spanish context to understand how they perceive and identify bullying behaviour. Furthermore, we hope to more effectively identify the hidden curriculum on school violence.

Method

Participants

Participants included 406 adolescents between 15 and 21 years old ($M = 16.76$ years; $SD = 1.76$ years); 216 were girls (53.20%), and 190 were boys (46.80%). All participants came from families with a medium-low socio-economic level. They were students from five public schools in the urban area of Valencia, where they attended the 3rd ($n = 168$) and 4th ($n = $ 121) grades of Secondary Compulsory Education, the 1st grade of post-compulsory education ($n = 33$) and the 1st grade of professional education ($n = 84$). Regarding the ethnic composition of the sample, a minority of 75 adolescents (18.52%) were identified as having some type of migratory experience. The countries of origin of these young people were as follows: 13.58% Latin Americans, 2.72% Europeans, 1.23% Arabs and 0.98% Asians. All participants were selected through convenience sampling, although participating schools and classrooms were selected randomly, by clusters and with proportional allocation.

Instruments

Sociometric questionnaire of bullying and social acceptance. This questionnaire is based on the Test of School Violence Among Peers (BULL-S; Cerezo, 2001). This questionnaire provides two variables derived from the direct nominations of peers (maximum of three nominations). The first variable is popularity, which is derived from the nominations in acceptance (Who would you choose as a buddy?) and rejection (Who would you not choose as a buddy?). From these nominations, a single variable is extracted, popularity, which allows adolescents to be grouped into accepted or rejected peers. The second variable refers to being involved in bullying behaviour and allows adolescents to be assigned to the categories of bullies and victims. This assignment was performed following the procedure recommended by Cerezo (2001) for sociometric studies, which assigns a role to individuals who receive at least 25% of the nominations of their peer group in that role.

Spontaneous discourse. Two types of data were included from the same source, the adolescents themselves, and were produced in the same context, during the sociometric evaluation. The first data type relates to the invalid answers from the sociometric questionnaire. For example, when "all" or "no one" is answered, this answer cannot be used for sociometric analysis, but it can be used for qualitative analysis. The second type of data includes the spontaneous comments that the adolescents made while answering the sociometric questionnaire. During the assessment, the adolescents were asked to write down anything that came to their mind about bullying. In addition, they were asked to identify victims and bullies among their peers. Both data sets constitute spontaneous discourse (not requested by the evaluators) on school violence and bullying, which is considered a non-systematized or fortuitous observation.

Procedure

This study is part of a larger research project that was approved by the Ethics Commission of the University of Valencia and complies with the ethical and moral principles established by the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013). With the permission of the Department of Education, Culture and Sport of the Valencian Community,

schools that were interested in participating in the research were contacted. Prior to the evaluation, information meetings were held with school staff, and written informed consent was obtained from the parents of the participants who were minors and from the participants themselves if they were adults. Two expert psychologists collected the data during school hours. These experts explained the voluntary and anonymous nature of the study. The evaluation was carried out collectively in the classroom during one hour of class.

Data analyses

After the data collection, sociometric analyses were carried out to identify the variables of popularity and bullying in the classroom. In addition, the qualitative analysis of adolescent spontaneous discourse was carried out following the methodology of Grounded Theory (GT), created by Glaser & Strauss (1967). The main purpose of GT is to develop context-specific theories from the information that emerges from the collected data in a given context. This methodology was used because it conveys the reality of the studied phenomenon (descriptive objective) and, at the same time, tries to identify the cause of this phenomenon (explanatory objective) (Charmaz, 2005). Following the guidelines of Strauss & Corbin (1998), the first step of the GT approach was open coding, which was carried out during data collection. At this point, the research question that will guide the analysis process emerges. In the second step, called axial coding, the data are grouped into categories and subcategories that describe and attempt to explain the phenomenon. For this purpose, a conceptual map with the four emerging categories was elaborated, and a selective coding was carried out to refine the emerging theory. The four basic categories were validated with two indexes of inter-judge agreement: the Kappa index (Kappa = 0.976 ± 0.008; $p <.001$, 95%) and the Cohen Delta index ($\delta = 0.981 \pm 0.005$; $p <.001$, 95%), both showing a good reliability of the coding (Cohen, 1960; Femia, Martín, & Álvarez, 2012).

The textual analysis of the spontaneous discourse was first descriptive and phenomenological, with a low level of inference, and then hermeneutic, assuming a constructivist paradigm. Following the principles of Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), no hypotheses were established prior to the analyses, which was conducted inductively and guided by the data. Thus, in the first step of the analysis of the spontaneous discourse, we observed that a main idea emerged: "it does not happen here" (bullying does not exist). For this reason, the question that will guide the research is as follows: why would adolescents say bullying does not exist when the sociometric analyses prove that it does? Or, in other words, do adolescents recognize bullying when it occurs? The emerging theoretical hypotheses are presented as discursive principles, representing the conceptual nuclei of adolescents' spontaneous discourse on bullying.

As for the rigor and credibility criteria proposed for the qualitative studies, we used the triangulation of researchers (two researchers), of methods (sociometric and qualitative), of codification (two analysts), and theoretical triangulation (review and discussion of previous studies), which increases the reliability and validity of this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Twining, Heller, Nussbaum & Tsai, 2017). Throughout the process, independent analysts were consulted to ensure the best possible objectivity in both the selection and coding of units of textual analysis. The data collection was carried out in a natural context, which favours the ecological validity of the data. Finally, the description of the results also indicates conflicting information, negative evidence to the inferences made, and some significant examples that affirm structural and content coherence.

Results

Sociometric analysis indicates that bullying exists in 13.30% of the current sample, as 29 victims (7.14%) and 25 bullies (6.16%) were identified. Furthermore, four conceptual nuclei or discursive principles of adolescents' spontaneous discourse on bullying were observed. There were 265 spontaneous responses (65.27%) among the 406 participants in the study. Next, the four emerging discursive principles are described, together with the contradictory evidence and the conflicting information related to them.

Denial of Violence Principle: *"It doesn't happen"*

There were 196 references (48.28%) that indicate in different ways that bullying "does not happen" and/or that no one assaults anyone. All the answers to the sociometric questionnaire that include a "nobody" have been included in this principle, although it is necessary to point out that this answer is more representative for the bullies than for the victims. Thus, we observed cases where "nobody" bullies but where victims are nominated. S.B., a 15-year-old girl who arrived from Bolivia four years ago, represents an example of this type of discourse; her sociometric situation is peer rejection (she received four rejections and no acceptance from her 19 peers). S.B. responded to the question 'who are the victims?' thusly:

> *In this class no one... This would be the case when you have anyone to talk to outside of class or when you want to discuss something... And I think one of those people would be me, rejected... I don't know anyone with whom I could spend time like they do.*

Although she denies the existence of bullying, she perceives herself as excluded and a victim of social isolation, which is relational or social bullying but is difficult to identify as such even by herself. Other examples of this type of discourse include the following:

I don't think there is bullying, but there are insults or punches / Nobody, they insult each other and hit each other for fun / Nobody, in my class you don't experience that situation / Nobody hurts anybody, insults are friendly / Nobody, but if they do, they usually do it as a joke.

No evidence contrary to this principle was found in the spontaneous discourse. However, the sociometric analysis revealed the existence of aggressive behaviour, as it confirmed each time an aggressor or a victim was nominated. Thus, in the same class, some teenagers may name one or more peers as aggressors, while most argue that bullying simply does not occur.

Denial of Responsibility / Disclaimer Principle: *"We all do it"*

One hundred and twenty-two references (30.05%) were related to "we do it or everyone does it", creating this idea of aggressive behaviour as something generalized, making it difficult to clearly identify or name someone as responsible (probably because then "I" would also be responsible). Examples of such references include:

We all criticize a little / Sometimes the whole class in general / We all hesitate to get together with certain people / Almost all the kids in this class but me.

Just like before, no conflicting information arose from the spontaneous discourse, but sociometric nominations did reveal conflicting information. Every time someone is directly nominated, responsibility is made explicit. No self-nominations were observed in the case of the aggressors, only in the case of the victims, and these were rare (3 self-nominations).

As a special circumstance or nuance of this principle (although very infrequent, $n = 11$), a gender difference was observed:

Boys do it / Boys do it to boys / Boys do it to us (girls).

In contrast, a single boy referred to "*girls do it*", referring only to indirect aggressions.

Denial of Seriousness Principle: *"If it's meant as a joke, it doesn't hurt"*

We identified 34 references (8.37%) about aggressive behaviours such as jokes that were not considered serious. The elements of aggression and humor seem to be strongly related, almost justifying or causing each other; therefore, "if it's meant as a joke, it doesn't hurt" and "if it's not meant to hurt, it's not serious". Thus, adolescents perceive the intention of aggressive behaviour as the criterion for estimating its severity, and both for defining an aggression or series of aggressions as bullying. Thus, if there is no intention to harm, if

it is meant as a joke, there is no real harm, and that behaviour cannot be identified as bullying. One the one hand, some examples of behaviours "meant as a game/joke" include the following:

They don't do it with bad intentions, they just punch each other and insult each other for fun / L. and A. to J., but it's meant as a joke, they are actually friends / J. (but they do it for fun and everyone ends up laughing) / Nobody, we sometimes joke with each other, but towards everyone and we accept jokes in good taste.

On the other hand, some examples of behaviour do not count as bullying because it is not serious or does not cause harm or there is no intent to harm include the following:

It is not serious bullying, only games/ Punching, no serious punching though / They do mean it as a joke, without hurting and without very 'strong' insults / J.M. but he only insults / N. and S. are insulted, but in a friendly way / C.A. is excluded, but it's not meant as a offence.

No contrary evidence was observed for this principle in the adolescents' spontaneous discourse. In fact, adolescents seem to associate this amusing and inoffensive perception of violence with the other discursive principles, sticking together with the other principles despite their apparent contradiction:

Nobody does it (always joking, but no) / We all do it, but not to harm anybody / We all do it, but with love / All the boys do it to each other, but they don't do it with bad intentions, they just punch each other and insult each other for fun.

Causal Attribution Principle: *"If it happens to you, it's for a reason"*

This principle is less frequent in comparison with the others, since only 20 references were identified (4.93%). However, it is meaningful that there are references from adolescents' spontaneous discourse about the reasons for bullying behaviours, even when the existence of bullying has been denied. It is also meaningful that, of the 20 spontaneous causal attributions, 18 considered an individual causal attribution related to the victim, and only 2 situate the cause in the aggressor. Thus, the victims are described as follows:

Mostly immigrants / The quiet ones / The weak ones / The new ones / G. because they always are picked last in sports / The retarded, the freaks / Those who don't dress well or look like an idiot.

Whereas, the reasons for bullying are:

S.B. might be rejected, but because she is a very lonely girl / A., B., and C., but because they exclude themselves from the group.

These expressions tend to differentiate the victims and attribute aggressive behaviour to that difference. Discrimination becomes causal attribution in response to the meaninglessness of violence: if I know why violence occurs, I can not only predict it, I can be safe. Evidence contrary to this principle is the two explicit attributions to the aggressor:

> *Those who think they are popular and superior / Those who are dishonest and idiots.*

The Grounded Theory of Adolescent Discourse

If we merge the four conceptual cores by order of frequency, we can convey the discourse about adolescent bullying in the manner described in Figure 1. The first spontaneous response to the question of bullying (Who does the bullying? Who is bullied?) seems to be to deny its existence: "That doesn't happen" (discursive principle of denial of violence). However, if we continue listening and analysing their discourse, we observe conditional clauses that indicate that "if it happens, we all do it" (denial of personal responsibility), that "if it happens, it is not serious, because it is meant as a joke" (denial of seriousness) and that "if it happens to you, it is your fault". In other words, the adolescents perceive that if a student is bullied, it is because of his or her characteristics as a victim and vulnerability to aggression, not because of the characteristics of the bully being stronger and abusing his or her power (discursive principle of causal attribution).
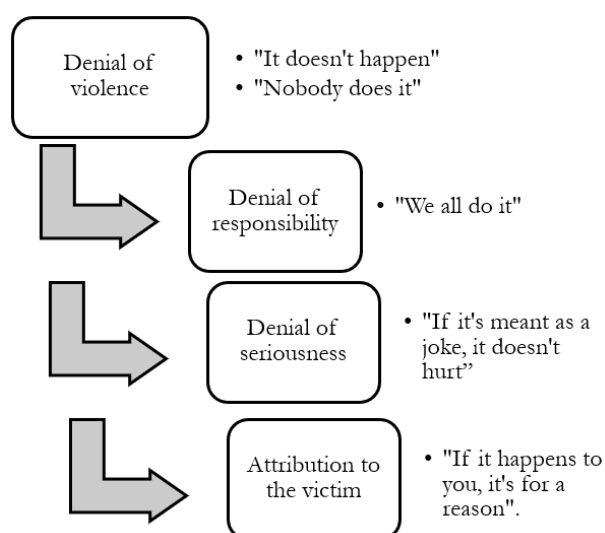

Figure 1. The emerging theory on adolescent recognition and perception of bullying.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to examine adolescents' perception and acknowledgement of bullying by analysing their spontaneous discourse. The theory emerging from the

textual data can be structured into four conceptual cores, presented in Figure 1. When we compare the adolescents' discourse with the operational definition of bullying from the literature (Carrera, DePalma & Lameiras, 2011; Olweus, 2001; Postigo et al., 2013), it appears that adolescents know of the phenomenon, but they do not know how to identify it. The first discursive principle that emerges from the analysis is the denial of school violence, which is also the most frequent principle and conveys adolescents' interpretative context of bullying. To our knowledge, previous research has not addressed adolescents' denial of bullying and school violence. The other principles are well documented and are structured as scaffolded upon the first one: "It doesn't happen. But, if it happens, we all do it and it's meant as a joke; therefore, it is not bullying". When adolescents deny that bullying exists, they refuse two of the three elements that define bullying according to the literature: the aggressor's personal responsibility (because the bullying behaviour is not attributed to the abuse of power) and the intention to harm (because the behaviour is meant as a joke). When adolescents define bullying, they deny the intention to harm because behaviours "are only meant as a joke", they fail to consider the persistence of aggressive behaviours, and they do not recognize all aspects that characterize abuse of power (Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2012). Research shows that adolescents perceive bullying as a non-serious, non-harmful and not particularly relevant issue (Cheng et al., 2011; Crowther et al., 2013; Ryan & Morgan, 2011; Volk et al., 2016). Thus, participants might know the definition of the phenomenon but fail to recognize it. The subsequent discursive principles explain why.

The second principle mitigates the first: "if it happens, we all do it". This statement can be interpreted in two ways. First, it may be considered as an expression of denying one's personal responsibility: "everybody does it, not just me". The second interpretation refers to bullying as collective aggressive behaviour or generalization of violence: "we all are involved". For example, in one of the classrooms, more than half of the students reported that everyone criticizes and/or rejects others in general. However, applying the sociometric criterion of 25% (Cerezo, 2001), only one bully and one victim were identified in this form of verbal and relational aggression. The results obtained from the sociometric questionnaire and from the analysis of adolescents' spontaneous discourse are contradictory: survey results indicated that bullying is a dyadic and minority issue, whereas results obtained from the discourse data suggested that bullying is a social habit in the classroom. These findings raise questions about this research because, from this interpretative context, when we ask adolescents about bullying, which reality are they referring to?

In line with previous research (Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2012; Ryan & Morgan, 2011; Volk et al., 2016), school violence is a part of normalized social interaction among adolescents, who claim that "it is normal, and we all do it for fun". We should ask ourselves whether or not young people's expectation that there will always be a certain degree of violence at school

and in their interpersonal relationships is legitimate. If that is true, then bullying is a matter of severity (of persistence, rather than intention or abuse of power). In that case, the focus should be on how the issue is approached and whether the approach adapts to that reality and offers practical applications in educating natural violence so that it does not exceed certain moral limits, as highlighted by Ortega (2010). However, if the expectation of always experiencing a certain degree of interpersonal violence is not legitimate, then this perception could be considered a cultural mistake. In this case, the issue of school violence and bullying cannot be addressed without first transforming the socio-cultural context that allows such behaviour (Davies, 2011; Postigo et al., 2013). The social order among peers is largely established by social status or popularity, a concept closely related to social power (Rodkin et al., 2015); however, it should be mentioned that both variables, status and social power, are structurally determined rather than a personal disposition or trait (Anderson, 2012; Willis & Rodríguez-Bailón, 2010).

Only the fourth principle, the causal attribution of bullying, reveals the way that adolescents perceive this abuse of power. On the one hand, participants tell us that victims have problems defending themselves from aggressions because they are "weak", isolated and/or labelled as different (for example, because of their migratory experience) (Guerra, Williams & Sadek, 2011; Hopkins et al., 2013). There were two exceptions, but these did not mention that the aggressors are strong and abuse their power. These exceptions partially acknowledge the asymmetric relationship between victim and bully: the victims are submissive, but the bullies do not unjustly dominate. Perhaps this perception has to do with children and adolescents perceiving bullying as a problem that is hard to change; if the individual or groups of individuals responsible for bullying cannot be identified, little can be done even by turning to an adult (Crowther et al., 2013; Frisén, Holmqvist & Oscarsson, 2008; Ryan & Morgan, 2011).

With regard to the intention to harm, the denial of seriousness principle includes this notion as a component for defining bullying, just as current research does. Teenagers seem to agree on this definition, but they take it to such an extreme that "if you're joking, you can't hurt anyone." Such a viewpoint might be considered a cognitive distortion that maintains the dynamics of bullying at school, since even an unintentional joke may cause harm to the victim. For the participants of this study, the only thing that counts is the intention, regardless of the persistence of the behaviour or the actual harm it causes.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the results suggest that teenagers might expect that someone in class will be bullied and that they should not get angry about it because the bullying is meant as a joke.

Additionally, the perception exists that if somebody is being bullied, it happens for a reason that has more to do with the victim than with the aggressor. This discourse seems to show that the theory of dominance and social identity influences not only the genesis of bullying (Davies, 2011; Ortega, 2010; Rodkin, Espelage & Hanish, 2015; Salmivalli, 2010; Volk et al., 2016) but also its recognition as such or, more specifically, its denial. Adding a definition of bullying to the assessment of bullying might not only increase the reported frequency of such behaviours but also decrease the likelihood of being victimized (Vaillancourt et al., 2008). The social context plays a significant role in school violence, encouraging its onset, allowing it to occur, and defining values and expectations of violence, or even whether violence should be considered as such (Martín et al., 2017).

This study is based on the analysis of adolescents' spontaneous discourse, which comprises comments and observations that participants made without being instructed to do so by the research protocol. This content is both the main limitation as well as the main contribution of this study. It poses a limitation because the analysed data include solely what the adolescents wanted to communicate, which does not necessarily represent the entirety of their discursive repertoire, nor do we know the biases that affect the information they want to give us. Other limitations of the study are the short length of the spontaneous comments and the intentional sampling on which the study is based (Patton et al., 2017); therefore, the results are not directly generalizable to all adolescents, not even to Valencian or Spanish teenagers.

Our findings contribute to approaching adolescents' subjectivity without previous hypotheses or theories. This study provides original evidence of the importance of qualitative research and even incidental observations. Thus, in line with previous studies (Carrera et al., 2011; Patton et al., 2017; Rodkin et al., 2015), our findings suggest that a broader research paradigm is necessary that considers the subjective reality of individuals and their interpretative context, not solely to attain a better understanding of reality as it is experienced but also to be able to change it. Otherwise, a part of the phenomenon will always be ignored. For instance, unless we explicitly ask for a form of generalized aggression ("we all do it" – denial of responsibility principle), which is only emphasized by research in collectivist societies (e.g., Cheng et al., 2011; Hymel & Swearer, 2015), we would not know what is happening or how to intervene.

Furthermore, this study provides valuable insights for practical applications. Specifically, our findings suggest that interventions with adolescents should include the concepts of social power and abuse of power, focusing on the recognition of the bullying phenomenon as well as on the motivations to act non-violently and not to get involved or to confront violence (e.g., personal values, which may go against the social order) (Jara, Casas & Ortega, 2017).

References

Alonso-Tapia, J., & Rodríguez-Rey, R. (2012). Situaciones de interacción y metas sociales en la adolescencia: Desarrollo y validación inicial del cuestionario de metas sociales (CMS) [Situations of interaction and social goals in adolescence: Development and initial validation of the social goals questionnaire]. *Estudios de Psicología, 33*(2), 191-206. doi:10.1174/021093912800676484

Anderson, C. (2012). The Personal Sense of Power. *Journal of Personality*, *80*(2), 313–344.

Burns, S., Maycock, B., Cross, D., & Brown, G. (2008). The power of peers: Why some students bully others to conform. *Qualitative Health Research, 18*(12), 1704-1716. doi:10.1177/1049732308325865

Carrera, M. V., de Palma, R., & Lameiras, M. (2011). Toward a more comprehensive understanding of bullying in School settings. *Educational Psychology Review, 23,* 479-499. doi:10.1007/s10648-011-9171-x

Cerezo, F. (2001). *La violencia en las aulas: Análisis y propuestas de intervención [Violence in the Classroom: Analysis and Proposals for Intervention]*. Madrid: Pirámide.

Charmaz, K. (2005). Grounded theory in the 21st century. En N. K. Denzin y Y. S. Lincoln. (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3ª ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cheng, Y. Y., Chen, L. M., Ho, H. C., & Cheng, C. L. (2011). Definitions of school bullying in Taiwan: A comparison of multiple perspectives. *School Psychology International, 32,* 227-243. doi:10.1177/0143034311404130

Cohen, J. (1960). A Coefficient of Agreement for Nominal Scales. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 20*, 37–46.

Compton, L., Campbell, M. A., & Mergler, A. (2014). Teacher, parent and student perceptions of the motives of cyberbullies. *Social Psychology of Education, 17*(3), 383–400. doi:10.1007/s11218-014-9254-x

Crowther, S., Goodson, C., McGuire, J., & Dickson, J. M. (2013). Having to fight. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 28(1),* 62-79. doi:10.1177/0886260512448846

Cuadrado-Gordillo, I. (2012). Repetition, power imbalance, and intentionality: Do these criteria conform to teenagers' perception of bullying? A role-based analysis. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 27,* 1889-1910. doi:10.1177/0886260511431436

Davies, B. (2011). Bullies as guardians of the moral order or an ethic of truths? *Children & Society, 25,* 278-286. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2011.00380.x

del Barrio, C.; Martín, E., Almeida, A., & Barrios, A. (2003). Del maltrato y otros conceptos relacionados con la agresión entre escolares, y su estudio psicológico [About harrassment and other concepts related to aggression among schoolchildren, and their psychological study]. *Infancia y Aprendizaje, 26*(1), 9-24.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. (3ª ed.). London,: Sage Publications Ltd.

Femia, P., Martín, A., & Álvarez, M. (2012). El Modelo Delta para evaluar el grado de acuerdo entre dos observadores [The Delta Model to evaluate the degree of agreement between two observers]. En García, Bouza, & Covarrubias (Eds.), *Modelación de fenómenos del Medio Ambiente, Salud y Desarrollo Humano: estudios medio ambientales*. (pp. 125–144). Universidades de Guerrero (Mex) y de La Habana (Cuba).

Frisén, A., Holmqvist, K., & Oscarsson, D. (2008). 13-year-olds' perception of bullying: Definitions, reasons for victimization and experience of adults' response. *Educational Studies, 34*(2), 105-117. doi:10.1080/03055690701811149

Forsberg, C., Wood, L., Smith, J., Varjas, K., Meyers, J., Jungert, T., & Thornberg, R. (2016). Students' views of factors affecting their bystander behaviors in response to school bullying: a cross-collaborative conceptual qualitative analysis. *Research Papers in Education*, 1–16. doi:10.1080/02671522.2016.1271001

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York: Aldine Publishing Company.

Guerra, N. G., Williams, K. R., & Sadek, S. (2011). Understanding bullying and victimization during childhood and adolescence: A mixed methods study. *Child Development, 82*(1), 295–310. doi:10.1111%2Fj.1467-8624.2010.01556.x

Hein, N. (2016). New perspectives on the positioning of parents in children's bullying at school. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 1–14. doi:10.1080/01425692.2016.1251305

Hopkins, L., Taylor, L., Bowen, E., & Wood, C. (2013). A qualitative study investigating adolescents' understanding of aggression, bullying and violence. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35*(4), 685–693. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2013.01.012

Horton, P. (2011). School bullying and social and moral orders. *Children & Society, 25,* 268-277. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2011.00377.x

Hymel, S., McClure, R., Miller, M., Shumka, E., & Trach, J. (2015). Addressing school bullying: Insights from theories of group processes. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *37*(1), 16–24. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2014.11.008

Hymel, S., & Swearer, S. M. (2015). Four decades of research on school bullying: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, *70*(4), 293–299. doi:10.1037/a0038928

Jara, N., Casas, J. A., & Ortega, R. (2017). Proactive and reactive aggressive behavior in bullying: The role of values. *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, *6*(1), 1–24. doi:10.17583/IJEP.2017.2515

Lam, D. B., & Liu, A. W. H. (2007). The path through bullying –A process model from the inside story of bullies in Hong Kong secondary schools. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 24*(1), 53-75. doi:10.1007/s10560-006-0058-5

Martín, M., Martínez, J., & García-sánchez, R. (2017). Young people belonging to violent groups in the Region of Madrid. Psychosocial process model on the onset and evolution of violent identity behaviour. *Annals of Psychology*, *33*(1), 120–132.

Naylor, P., Cowie, H., Cossins, F., Bettencourt, R., & Lemme, F. (2006). Teachers' and pupils' definitions of bullying. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 76,* 553-576. doi:10.1348/000709905X52229

Olweus, D. (1978). *Aggression in the schools: Bullies and whipping boys*. London, UK: Hemisphere.

Olweus, D. (1999). Sweden. In P. K. Smith, Y. Morita, J. Junger-Tas, D. Olweus, R. Catalano, & P. Slee (Eds.), *The nature of school bullying: A cross-national perspective* (pp. 7–27). New York: Routledge.

Olweus, D. (2001). Peer harassment: A critical analysis and some important questions. In J. Juvonen & S. Graham (Eds.), *Peer harassment in school* (pp. 3–20). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Ortega, R. (2010). *Agresividad Injustificada, Bullying y Violencia Escolar [Unjustified Aggression, Bullying and School Violence]*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

Patton, D. U., Eschmann, R. D., & Butler, D. A. (2013). Internet banging: New trends in social media, gang violence, masculinity and hip hop. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *29*, A54–A59. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2012.12.035

Patton, D. U., Hong, J. S., Patel, S., & Kral, M. J. (2017). A Systematic Review of Research Strategies Used in Qualitative Studies on School Bullying and Victimization. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, *18*(1), 3–16. doi:10.1177/1524838015588502

Postigo, S., González, R., Montoya, I., & Ordóñez, A. (2013). Propuestas teóricas en la investigación del acoso escolar: Una revisión [Theoretical proposals of bullying: A review]. *Annals of Psychology, 29(2),* 413-425. doi:10.6018/analesps.29.2.148251

Rodkin, P. C., Espelage, D. L., & Hanish, L. D. (2015). A relational framework for understanding bullying: Developmental antecedents and outcomes. *American Psychologist*, *70*(4), 311–321. doi:10.1037/a0038658

Ryan, A., & Morgan, M. (2011). Bullying in secondary schools: An analysis of discursive positioning. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 46(1),* 23-34.

Salmivalli, C. (2010). Bullying and the peer group: A review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 15,* 112-120. doi: 10.1016%2Fj.avb.2009.08.007

Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (1999). *Social dominance*. Nueva York: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, P. K. (2013). School bullying. *Sociologia, Problemas e Praticas, 71*, 81–98. doi:10.7458/SPP2012702332

Smorti, A., Menesini, E., & Smith, P. (2003). Parents' definitions of children's bullying in a five-country comparison. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 34,* 417-432. doi:10.1177%2F0022022103034004003

Strauss, A., and Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tajfel, H. (1984). *Grupos Humanos y Categorías Sociales [Human Groups and Social Categories].* Barcelona: Herder. http://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2013.857345

Twining, P., Heller, R. S., Nussbaum, M., & Tsai, C. C. (2017). Some guidance on conducting and reporting qualitative studies. *Computers & Education*, *106*, A1–A9. doi:10.1016/j.compedu.2016.12.002

Vaillancourt, T., McDougall, P., Hymel, S., Krygsman, A., Miller, J., Stiver, K., & Davis, C. (2008). Bullying: Are researchers and children/youth talking about the same thing? *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 32,* 486-495. doi:10.1177/0165025408095553

Veenstra, R., Lindenberg, S., Huitsing, G., Sainio, M., & Salmivalli, C. (2014). The role of teachers in bullying: The relation between antibullying attitudes, efficacy, and efforts to reduce bullying. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *106*(4), 1135–1143. http://doi.org/10.1037/a0036110

Volk, A. A., Farrell, A. H., Franklin, P., Mularczyk, K. P., & Provenzano, D. A. (2016). Adolescent Bullying in Schools: An Evolutionary Perspective. In D. C. Geary & D. B. Berch (Eds.), *Evolutionary Perspectives on Child Development and Education, Evolutionary Psychology* (pp. 167–191). Cham: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-29986-0

Willis, G. B., & Rodríguez-Bailón, R. (2010). El estudio experimental del poder social: Consecuencias cognitivas, afectivas y comportamentales [The experimental study of social power: cognitive, affective and behavioural consequences.]. *Estudios de Psicología, 31(3),* 279-295. doi:10.1174/021093910793154402

World Medical Association. (2013). World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki: ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects. *Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA)*, *310*(20), 2191–2194.