BULLYING´S MYTHOLOGIES: FALSE PROFILES OF VICTIMS AND AGRESSORS

MITOLOGÍAS DEL BULLYING: FALSOS PERFILES DE VÍCTIMAS Y AGRESORES

MITOLOGÍAS NO BULLYING: FALSOS PERFIS DE VITIMAS E AGRESSORES

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ABSTRACT: Bullying is a complex social problem. Most of the studies use measuring instruments based on self-reports analyzed from the area of psychology. It is necessary to conduct research from other disciplinary and methodological perspectives. The sociology of education, in the tradition represented by Pierre Bourdieu, connects from the epistemological point of view with the Freirian perspective aimed at fostering a pedagogy of autonomy that traces *Spontaneous Educational Practice*. As an example, this paper analyzes the discourses that weaves public opinion at the level of *spontaneous sociology* about the nature of victims and bullies of bullying. Just as poverty should not be offered as a cause of violence, neither can a past of violent experiences, school failure, or belonging to certain especially vulnerable social groups –such as immigrants or gypsies– be used as explanations of abuse. But even if beliefs are manifestly erroneous from an empirical point of view, they can have real consequences: they reinforce the problem by preventing understanding and solving it. And it is the case that, almost half a century of bullying research, this does not seem to yield.

RESUMEN: El acoso escolar es un problema social complejo. La mayor parte de los estudios utilizan instrumentos de medición basados en autoinformes analizados desde el área de psicología. Es necesario concitar investigaciones desde otras perspectivas disciplinarias y metodológicas. La sociología de la educación, en la tradición representada por Pierre Bourdieu, conecta desde el punto de vista epistemológico con la perspectiva freiriana dirigida a fomentar una pedagogía de la autonomía que remonte la *práctica educativa espontánea*. Como ejemplo, en este trabajo se analizan los discursos que teje la opinión pública a nivel de *sociología espontánea* acerca de la naturaleza de las víctimas y los agresores del acoso escolar. Así como la pobreza no debe ofrecerse como causa de la violencia, así tampoco un

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	pasado de experiencias violentas, el fracaso escolar o la pertenencia a ciertos grupos sociales especialmente vulnerables, como inmigrantes o gitanos, pueden esgrimirse como explicaciones del maltrato. Pero aunque las creencias sean manifiestamente erróneas desde el punto de vista empírico, pueden tener consecuencias reales: realimentan el problema al impedir comprenderlo y solucionarlo. Y es el caso que, casi medio siglo de investigación del bullying, este no parece ceder.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: bullying mitos epistemologia sociologia da educaçao pedagogia da autonomia	**RESUMO:** O bullying é um problema social complexo. Normalmente, os estudos usam questionários autoadministrados e analisados na área da psicologia. É necessário realizar pesquisas de outras perspectivas disciplinares e metodológicas. A sociologia da educação, na tradição representada por Pierre Bourdieu, liga-se, do ponto de vista epistemológico, à perspectiva freiriana, com o objetivo de promover uma pedagogia da autonomia que supere a *prática educacional espontânea*. Nesse sentido, o artigo analisa os discursos que tecem a opinião pública no nível da *sociologia espontânea* ao redor da natureza das vítimas e agressores do bullying. Assim como a pobreza não deve ser vista como causa de violência, um passado de experiências violentas, o fracasso escolar ou mesmo o fato de pertencer a certos grupos sociais especialmente vulneráveis, como imigrantes ou ciganos, não se deveria propor como explicação para o abuso. Mais mesmo que as crenças sejam manifestamente errôneas do ponto de vista empírico, elas podem ter consequências reais: elas reforçam o problema impedindo o entendimento e a resolução. Isso poderia explicar em parte a persistência do fenómeno do bullying depois de meio século de pesquisas.

1. Introduction

bullying is a type of sustained harassment over time by one or more students of others who are viewed as especially vulnerable and who, in principle, have difficulty defending themselves. It can take physical or psychological forms and have negative consequences on the victims to varying degrees, leading to suicide – bullycide –.

The pioneers in this study, at the beginning of the 1980s in Norway, have been able to verify the persistence of the same at an international level (Olweus, 1998, 2006). In 2017, the PISA 2015 report, published by the OECD, finds 18.7% of students surveyed – 14% of Spaniards – who declare themselves victims of bullying several times a month. Specifically, physical violence, in the most typical form of pushing and hitting, would affect a percentage of students that would vary between 4% and 10% among those surveyed - 4% for Spain. Verbal and psychological variants are more common. 11% declared themselves the object of mockery, 8% the object of negative rumours, and 7% felt marginalised (2017: 45).

The NCVS (National Crime Victimization Survey) conducted in the United States in 2015, offers an overall bullying figure of 20%[1]. In Latin America, victims would range from 11% in Chile to 47% in Peru, according to Román and Murillo (2011:40). In their review study, Garaigordobil and Oñederra mention 42 Spanish samples and 41 studies in other countries, with an average percentage of serious victims between 3 and 10%, and of students who suffer violent behavior in general between 20 and 30% (2008: 27). By Autonomous Communities, the same authors offer a range of victims ranging from 19.1% in the Canary Islands to 27.7% in Andalusia (162).

Most studies offer diagnostic figures based on different self-report questionnaires. Garaigordobil and Oñederra recognize the difficulty of establishing comparisons both in the samples of different territorial levels because of the diversity of instruments and methods (2008: 26). Others, such as Serrano, allude to the disparity of theoretical constructs (2006: 36). It is therefore logical that a CIDE report on the prevention of violence in schools encourages studies "not only from Educational Psychology but from the rest of the Social Sciences" (2009:153).

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In this sense, contributions from disciplines such as the sociology of education or social pedagogy could fill this gap by focusing on the less studied parts of the object of study, such as cultural or ethnic bullying, not only from a methodological perspective but also from an epistemological one. In the first case making use of methodologies such as observation – in its different ethnographic versions –. In the second, with reflections that analyse the discourses on bullying admitted by public opinion. It is in this section where this article fits in, analyzing the prejudices surrounding the phenomenon, establishing simplistic or unproven explanations empirically or logically about the nature of victims and abusers. What requirements

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must someone fulfil in order to be harassed? How does he become a harasser? Spontaneous sociology constructs answers based on partial data on violence in general and on traditionally and ideologically associated variables such as school failure, contexts of social exclusion or the characterological imprint of the family past.

The relationship between the figures of the victim and the abuser can be observed at various spatial and temporal levels. We can establish a first general distribution of the observation in two large groups of relationships, those that occur in the school, and those that occur later, in adulthood, as a repercussion of the situations of violence experienced in childhood or adolescence. Subsequently, the observation will focus on immigrant and gypsy students. Both are usually blamed for the problems of general and school coexistence in the collective imaginary, supposedly concentrating the general conditions that cause such problems.

2. Abuse in schooling

A bullying victim could reverse roles and become an abuser for two reasons: as a revenge or as a psychological complement. In the first case, there are explanations that have sustained the role of school failure in the formation of gangs or gangs that use violence. In these cases, the peer group not only increases self-esteem but can also target the most successful students in class who are seen as archetypes of school culture. However, other authors have nuanced the importance of school failure in youth violence, emphasizing it's an erratic and sporadic character (Matza, 2017). In recent years there has been a debate about the possible change in the profile of young people who practice the most common types of violence. More and more of them are middle-class people who do not act out of economic necessity (Fernández Molina and others, 2009, Giménez-Salinas and Graupera, 2006, Orts, 2006). This trend draws attention to other circumstantial factors that explain violence against a partner, beyond the feeling of revenge. The latter is usually framed in a rather organized and abstract mental elaboration, tending to personify revenge against the system, more typical of the dynamics of gangs or gangs. This type of group exhibits it is own traits that make it an independent phenomenon of bullying. The conflict is established on a horizontal rather than vertical plane. The object of the violence is in the group, rather than in the individual. The individual becomes a victim because he belongs to a rival gang. For its part, bullying belongs to the type of vertical conflicts, such as other mistreatments,

where the strong exert their dominion over a subject that plays an inferior role throughout a cycle of accentuation. Collins even points out that in cases in which the gang exerts violence against a boy who does not belong to any group that protects him, he usually sees the action not so much as derived from school social relations as from group social relations (2008: 172). That is to say, that it could also occur when having entered into a conflictive relationship with this gang without going to school, in the neighbourhood itself. On the other hand, in structures where bullying traditionally emerges stronger, as in boarding schools, there is generally no culture of violence based on revenge against the school system, with which the more or less organised actions of groups of students can be associated. Boarding schoolchildren form groups of friends that are more or less fixed but differentiated from gangs that compete for resources in a neighbourhood. In the boarding school, rather than hierarchical groups, what occurs is an alpha group with one or several leaders, and around them, a set of unstructured friendship relationships that pay active or passive homage to that dominant group.

Bullying is therefore different from other forms of school violence, such as violence against teachers or against school facilities. This aspect is clearly observed in a Portuguese barometer carried out during 2007 – with a sample of 15,759 – and 2012 – sample of 2,999 –. The violence perceived by the same actors in relation to teachers (from 10.5% to 8.9%), in relation to non-teaching personnel (from 12% to 11.1%) drops around the school (from 48.9% to 32.8%) and on the way to school (from 15.7% to 9.8%). However, in the violence perceived among peers, not only are the percentages strikingly higher, but they also rise, from 81.8% to 93.6%[2].

It is not easy to invoke revenge as a force that motivates harassing actions in a deferred sense, so to speak, since the abuser should feel the victim of a generalized mistreatment of a system that would exercise its actions mainly through the school authority, and more indirectly through the advantaged students. But these students are not the propitiatory victims of bullying. Their vulnerability, in this context, is too general. In fact, school success usually has, if the subject does not show other striking differences, a popular value that gives them a certain power or strength. On the other hand, it is compensated by the fact of being well seen by teachers and establishing alliances with that authority formally or informally.

Revenge can be studied from the perspective of status frustration or tension theories – Strain Theories –. From this last perspective, parental

rejection, excessive and erratic discipline, abuse, or negative experiences in secondary education – especially in relationships with teachers –, are experiences that can be perceived by those who suffer them as highly unjust, a condition empirically tested by some criminologists who try to predict criminal behavior (Agnew, 2001: 343-244). However, for predictive capacity to work, there must be, as conditions, in addition to the perception of social pressure or tension on the part of individuals as unjust, constant and strong, low self-control and certain pressure or incentives to form part of groups related to crime. Studies are needed in this regard, but it does not seem easy to find profiles of students whose objective and subjective conditions in relation to stressful factors may explain bullying in schools, neighbourhoods and medium-sized cities, and with low rates of delinquency and indicators of social protest as well as school failure.

Finally, if we focus on the revenge exercised by a victim of harassment against her abuser, it is possible to establish, within her minority character, different degrees. The most striking is that of mass murders committed by pupils who are usually teenagers in schools. Harris and Petrie allude to a certain report by the US secret services that, it seems, would observe that in two thirds of the murders in American schools, those who perpetrated them would have suffered mistreatment for long periods (2006: 12). Next, the authors try to iron out the issue by pointing out that not all cases go to these extremes. However, they add, it seems evident that nowadays bullying can push, in the worst case, to commit crimes, and in the best case, to establish a climate of fear and inferiority.

However, associating mass murder and bullying is quite risky. In the first place because, as Collins reminds us, in the countries where the former occur most, such as the United States, 99% of the centres are free (2008: 173). But above all, and secondly, multiple murder cannot be compared to bullying, thus preventing us from drawing the conclusion that the victim of a certain type of school violence became a revenge abuser. These are different types. Indiscriminate killings, committed in a single act, have nothing to do with the selective individual action of bullying.

There are other phenomena of violence, physical or symbolic, visible in the school environment, of which it is also possible to think of a vengeful reaction of the abused person. Such is the case of hazing. There are cases of students who have suffered them and then have looked for the leaders who instigated them to take revenge. But once again, these are exceptional cases. Here again we come up against another misunderstanding,

another free association – that is, not supported from an empirical point of view – between two phenomena of school violence between equals that are very different. It should be remembered that nowadays hazing has ceased to fulfil the main social function that gave it its raison d'être, that of becoming part of a privileged social group. With the democratization of education, its supplementary or secondary function can be explained as an outlet in an education system that continues to function under strong pressure – stressful –. Norberto Elias' interpretation of ritualized violent explosions as an escape valve from a capitalist social system centered on performance and with an effective monopoly on the exercise of force by the State, has sometimes been extrapolated to the functioning of the educational system. Hazing could have a social function similar to carnival (Elias, 1993, Felouzis, 1993).

A victim may at the same time be an abuser, but not as a reaction but as a psychological complement. This fact explains the small percentage of bullying victims. However, this category does not differ from the others only in the number but in the characteristics. Pure abusers exhibit a different profile, with no problems for social skills. Moreover, in many cases they are popular students who know how to use manipulation techniques among their colleagues. On the contrary, someone who suffers harassment and at the same time exerts it, not on his abusers but on other people, may show, in addition to relationship problems, certain instability and tendency to depression and anxiety. In fact, works that try to observe the relationship between bullying and self-esteem, see results both in the direction of the victim and in that of the abuser. Thus, in an American study carried out by Patchin and Hinduja on a sample of 1963 students between the ages of 11 and 15 from 30 secondary schools, who had experienced cyberbullying in the previous thirty days and in new different forms of online aggression, either as victims or as aggressors, showed a moderate self-esteem but statistically lower than those who did not (2010: 618).

The next question is to imagine a complement of roles but not simultaneous but deferred in time, although within the period of schooling. This possibility can be thought of as a consequence of a change of status. A pupil who begins as a victim and ends up as an abuser in his passage through compulsory education. If this happens, it is debatable that such a situation fits more in the idea of revenge than in that of the psychological trait itself. In any case, studies of mobility between hierarchical groups according to their status in schools suggest that this phenomenon is unlikely.

Apparently, observes Collins, very few descend and very few ascend, with those in intermediate categories moving somewhat more (2008:173).

3. Abuse in adulthood

Let us now analyze the inversion of the figures of victim and abuser in adulthood. In the quoted text by Harris and Petrie we read that "adults who were aggressive at school tend to have children who are also aggressive" and that, moreover, "they have a greater tendency to be involved in violent crime and abuse with their spouse, and very often resort to physical punishment with their own children and so dysfunction would continue" (2006:173). In support of this explanation they refer to testimonies from third parties, where some aggressors describe their relatives as having little interest in the values of honesty or freedom of expression, as well as little concern for them, for their children.

The argumentative reply here follows the line indicated above in the school context. The pattern is not confirmed by field work. Most victims of abuse do not abuse children. In Collins's review of studies on this subject, children who have suffered mistreatment or have been ignored – which would add a non-violent condition to the phenomenon – are arrested as young people or adults in a proportion almost equal to the control group -18% vs. 14% (2006:145). It is also not necessary to have suffered bullying in order to inflict some kind of physical punishment on the children. The data show that up to 85% of American parents of 2 and 3 year olds, and 95% of 4 and 5 year olds, beat their children during the last year, in a good part of the cases with a frequency of 2 or 3 times per week, including those who do not agree with these practices (143). Virtually the entire American population would have been harassed according to these figures. It is interesting to add that within this overwhelming proportion would come parents with different political ideologies, fathers and mothers, and even those people who, theoretically, are against this type of practices.

We therefore constantly come up against a kind of stubborn misunderstanding, a kind of prejudice that can be summed up in a kind of curse that would surround the victim of harassment and would fatally chain him or her to the phenomenon. Bullying reproduces itself on the basis of this belief, making its solution difficult. Deep down, under these kinds of explanations, which are not very much covered by observation, beats the presumption of the propensity to relapse of any act of deviation, and therefore, of the scarce faith in the capacity for change that the social actor has

in the construction of his destiny. A child who observes how his father mistreats his mother may react in the future, either by reproducing that pattern, or by exhibiting opposite behaviors, which even scratch inhibition, as an opposite reaction. Whether one or the other model is chosen will depend on multiple factors, as well as circumstances. Therefore, whether we previously risk predicting one or another line of coherent behaviour will depend on underlying assumptions, on beliefs that go unnoticed in interpretation and that may be nourished by deeply rooted religious or ideological sources. If we tried to keep them at bay as much as possible, limiting ourselves to functional comments, we would be more inclined towards a behavioural conclusion that does not reproduce the pattern, since otherwise the protagonist not only increases the suffering of the other but also his own suffering and that of his loved ones.

But we can use the expression the curse of the victim to account not only for the long shadow of the figure of the abuser, which apparently takes various forms over time. By this we can also refer, on a deeper level, to the enchainment that this same victim would suffer with respect to violent and poor contexts. Thus, if someone has suffered some kind of violence, he could propagate it in the future. On the other hand, in poor contexts this phenomenon would be more likely. Now, from a sociological point of view, anthological works on violence such as Collins' insist on breaking this type of prejudicial causal chains. First, there are many kinds of violence not confined to poor environments, such as terrorism, marital violence, alcohol brawls, violence derived from sporting events or social movements, or bullying itself. Secondly, if we consider the poorest and most violent places, we will confer that the majority of the poor are not violent. And third, the violent poor are not violent all the time (2008: 135-136).

In the case of school bullying studies, notes Ramírez Fernández, the false association between poverty and violence can be seen, as victims are no longer concentrated in certain socio-economic or cultural settings (2009: 322). This aspect is of special interest perhaps in areas especially affected by social inequality, such as Latin America - between 2013 and 2014, for example, is where it grew the most, with 38%. One of the most ambitious samples, worked by Cepeda-Cuervo's team and applied in 3,226 students from 80 grades 6 to 11 of Bogotá's public schools, with an average age between 12 and 16 years, belonging to the low and medium socioeconomic strata, finds the same frequency in the four socioeconomic strata surveyed (2008: 521). In the discussion section, these authors conclude, after alluding to other studies

carried out in Brazil and the United States, that this is a global phenomenon that affects diverse cultures and different social sectors.

We can highlight two aspects or variables that are particularly interesting, that of the vulnerability of children in general, and that of vulnerability due to cultural or ethnic reasons. The latter, due to its concretion, will allow us a more detailed observation in order to detect simplistic explanations that mitigate harassment.

As for the former, in recent years, international and national reports insist on pointing out the special vulnerability of children and adolescents. Spanish children, for example, are more likely to be poor than adults – 21% of households with minors are in a situation of social exclusion, according to the 8th FOESSA Report – (UNICEF, 2104, UNDP, 2015, FOESSA, 2019).

But this fact cannot be interpreted as the main cause of the increase in bullying. Vulnerability, thus defined, is too general a trait that must then be carefully observed in order to understand the effects it has on violent behaviour. It depends on factors such as social position. And at the same time, within this, of the economic conjunctures. Thus, within the middle classes, certain strata of the same are more vulnerable in times of recession than in times of expansion. The child or adolescent in a middle-class family affected by an economic crisis will face a certain degree of tension that could increase, for example, if a family crisis with separation is added to it. But in turn, in this case there are different types of reaction that channel the tension in a more or less violent way. Having younger siblings could even influence a possible mistreatment transferred to the school context, having been able to learn in the family the mastery of techniques of manipulation and control. In any case, in general terms, the only obvious conclusion is that vulnerabilities add up and that a single one does not guarantee bullying. A longitudinal study in the United States and Great Britain, launched in the early 1990s and published in 2015, showed how those who had suffered domestic abuse did not subsequently suffer psychic sequelae - anxiety, depression, self-harm or suicide attempt. However, if they had also suffered abuse at school, they were more likely (Lereya *et al.*, 2015).

The same conclusion is reached if we examine the relationship between the abusers and the status of the schoolchild as an immigrant. In principle, following the line of demystifying reasoning, bullying is not an issue that flourishes more in public schools with a strong presence of minority ethnic groups located on the outskirts of large cities. The black legend surrounding certain neighbourhoods,

within the social image that each city builds over time, makes its inhabitants take for granted all sorts of social problems in them, such as unemployment, delinquency or, in the case of education, school violence.

However, violence between schoolchildren is more likely in middle-class cities, classic boarding schools – like the traditional English, obviously not the anti-authoritarian pedagogical experiments like Summerhill – or public school systems like the Japanese, highly hierarchical and groupized. In Spain, we continue to observe examples of studies that detect bullying in medium-sized cities, regardless of the location of the neighbourhood and the ownership of the centre, as suggested by Muñoz Prieto (2009:209). From a microsociological approach to violence, such as that masterfully offered by the aforementioned work by Randall Collins (2008), more importance should be given to other types of factors, such as the degree of openness of the school organisation – to which we have already alluded – or the apparently innocuous transition from one stage of compulsory education to another when it entails a change of centre that coincides with a biological change, with puberty. That would explain why bullying is more likely in the early years of compulsory schooling and less likely at the end of it. Between the ages of 15 and 17, the average student increases and diversifies his or her activities outside the school. By decreasing the time and emotional energy he invests around him, his vulnerability decreases and his identity as a victim becomes blurred. The perspective is very different at 11 or 13 years of age, when he enters not only adolescence but also a new educational stage and, on many occasions, a new educational centre. It must then rearrange its status of agreement, to a large extent, with its perceived value in the new sex market of which it is compulsorily part (2008:172). Hence, with the transition from primary to secondary school, bullying concentrates on fewer victims and more verbal and psychological aggressions than physical aggressions. Some research done in our country seems to support some of these ideas. Thus, in the Ceutí study by Ramírez Fernández, there was an increase in severe abuse in the first cycle of OSE, while in Primary there was a greater volume of moderate abuse (2009: 191).

4. The complexity of the ethnic variable

This would also explain the relative lack of preponderance of the ethnic variable in bullying in countries such as the United States. Indeed, the US supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey, Student Reports of Bullying 2015,

offered by the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), does not see significant differences according to the ethnic diversity of students between the ages of 12 and 18. However, it is difficult to extrapolate this case and this conclusion. It is necessary to take into account the different culture of multi-ethnic coexistence, as well as the specific circumstances that make it more or less tense, depending on demographic and economic aspects. In our country, the entry of massive school immigrants is a relatively recent phenomenon, which occurs with the entry into the current century. This explains the result of the 2007 Ombudsman's report on mistreatment among equals, where immigrants assumed the exclusion in a proportion that doubled the rest of the sample (2007: 143). In the same vein, the OCEDE report cited at the beginning, Student's Well-Being, again states that the risk increases "substantially" for immigrant students who arrived in the country where they study with a certain age – 13 to 16 years – (2017: 45).

If the ethnicity variable is one of the variables that most potentiates difference in the school context, it could predispose to bullying. A clear case is that of Chinese girls adopted in our country en masse between 1995 and 2015, studied by Fernández Cáceres (2016: 409). In general, this trait predisposes to a greater degree if it is surrounded by certain circumstances such as the percentage of children who share it, their degree of group cohesion, or the networks established by adults. These, in turn, are marked by variables such as the solidity of local or neighbourhood community ties – marked by circumstantial circumstances and by other structural ones, of a cultural or religious type –, or the type of balance of power that is established with the rest of the population that shares space with the passage of time. Rodríguez Hidalgo, in one of the few works carried out in Spain that distinguish harassment due to ethnic causes, concludes that "the victims of aggressions or personal bullying attribute being the object of the same, in a considerable proportion, to being different (different appearance, I am different, I am from another country or I am from another race/culture)" (2010: 160).

The greater probability of vulnerable immigrant students being victims of bullying is, however, reversed in the discourse of spontaneous sociology, that is, in the set of non-contrasted beliefs that circulate among public opinion. On the contrary, the belief that the over-representation of immigrants and gypsies in Spanish prisons – as blacks in the United States – proves their antisocial and conflictive character, is extrapolated to the student-children. In this way, the latter would

also be responsible for the backwardness of the natives as well as for the problems of coexistence that could arise around the school. This explains why at times of maximum influx of immigrants, such as in 2000, there was a certain transfer of enrolments of indigenous students from public to private schools (Madruga 2002, Fernández Enguita, 2003). Something similar had happened in the United States in the 1960s with white students in certain cities where racial integration measures had been implemented. This is a clear example of the exit option proposed by Hirschman in reference to the consumer who fears in the massification of public services an indication of the decrease in quality (1977).

Research that has tried to empirically prove these beliefs has not only refuted them but also reversed their meaning. Thus, in an investigation conducted by Gil Villa (2012: 108) in public centres in Castilla y León during the academic year 2007-2008, it is observed that, on the one hand, they are more likely to be victims – in proportions similar to those observed by the report of the Ombudsman cited –, and on the other, they reach lower values in the sections of more common infractions, such as vandalism or fights. Mitigating immigrants as problematic and potentially violent students is false, except in the specific case of the minority who belong to Latin gangs and who offer high rates of school failure, as Robles Gavira has been able to state (2017:171). In most cases, however, foreign students exhibit more discipline and pro-regulatory behaviour than nationals, given their temporary and unstable situation, which gives them a probative character, while at the same time thanking the host society for having welcomed them.

5. Considerations on the gypsy ethnic group

Within ethnic bullying not all conclusions are extrapolable to all groups. There are important differences in the case of Spain, for example, between the gypsy ethnic group and the rest of the immigrants. The presence of gypsies in clown schools is usually muffled by a strong rootedness in the neighbourhood, which does not happen with immigrant families, even those who saw their children born there. The long tradition of living with non-Gypsies does not mean that there is no tension, but that it takes different forms. Paradoxically, however, the cultural clash is greater between these two populations than between natives and immigrants, even when they come from non-Western cultures. This is reflected in the school. Resistance to middle-class school culture

is greater among gypsies, is nurtured by strong out-of-school community ties, and displaces conflict and the potential for violence, outside the school.

Spain is one of the countries in which the gypsy ethnic group constitutes one of the most important minorities around which the central debates on educational equality and on social exclusion in general have traditionally revolved. Their specific consideration is justified. The reflection could be based on two fundamental points. If at the most popular level the stereotyped attribute of violence attributed to the gypsy is well known – as in the case of immigrants –, at the level of the speeches of public managers we can detect a second type of mythification consisting of overestimating the social inclusion of the gypsies, an objective that is taken for granted.

In the report of the Fundación Secretariado Gitano, Evaluación de la normalización educativa de las alumnos gitanos y las alumnos gitanos en Educación Primaria, with data referring to the academic year 2008-09 as the last reference, a positive view is given of the evolution of the integration indicators which is debatable, above all because it may lead to a mistaken reading of a happy state, in the near future, of full equality. The latter term is valued as integration, and therefore as cultural assimilation. But there is a roof over the top of equality. In recent decades, teachers' knowledge of Romany culture has hardly improved. Apparently, the communicative relationship is correct, but it is due to the fact that it is not very deep. This is why the teachers surveyed in the report just mentioned observe more aggressiveness in Romany children – 55.9% would be little or nothing, compared to 73% of payos – less tolerance and solidarity – the proportion of Romany children in this case would be equivalent to half of that of payos – and that, moreover, they explain it according to "racial" factors, such as impulsivity or the family context (2010: 62). These aspects abound in the legend of wild and primitive people. Ten years before this publication, Fernández Enguita's work had observed the functioning of prejudices in non-Gypsy parents and teachers. The former complain about the alleged abuse by the Gypsies of the support received by public administrations. The latter feel uncomfortable with students who do not fit into the school culture – in terms of discipline, hygiene, punctuality, respect for the female figure of authority, etc. – a complaint that they express in private rather than in public and that would put in a difficult situation the minority of teachers who "try to do something" (1999: 114-145).

The perception of aggressiveness is a cultural issue. In this case, the teaching staff represents the outpost of a middle-class culture, of which clown parents and students are part, which over time increases its sensitivity to different forms of violence.

The absence of this true form of communication necessarily leads to problematic solutions. On the one hand, a minimisation, if not concealment, of conflicts. On the other hand, the unfolding of the general cultural circuit in another parallel of which the relative segregation of the gypsy schoolchildren is only one more indicator. The first is observed in the lack of communication between Roma parents and teachers. The general pattern of behaviour is mistrust. If the teacher summons the family, they think, from the outset, that it will not be good at all. In this way, it indirectly reinforces the lack of motivation that gypsy students have to go to school, or the probability that it is the whole family that does not see school as a pleasant space. It is not uncommon even for families to confront teachers, due to discrepancies in the interpretation of their children's behavior and academic progress. The main general allegation, in such cases is the victimism that would result from the negative label: "if the student were not a Gypsy, he would not have been punished".

The second solution involves the resolution of coexistence conflicts between Romany children and between Romany children and gypsies, outside the official channels, that is, without the activation of anti-bullying protocols, the use of specialist mediators or the use of the judicial apparatus. The counsellor of an educational centre located in a neighbourhood with an important group of gypsy residents in Salamanca, relates the case of a gypsy boy who insulted a gypsy. The next day, several gypsies at the school physically assaulted this child. In the same research work by Caamaño, the teachers interviewed answer the question of bullying Gypsy children at school:

> There are but few of them because the gypsies among them have a great feeling of belonging, they are very united so there is almost never any case in which the gypsy is isolated; he is always going to have his reference group. The community supports him" (2018: 23).

Similar conclusions have been reached by some observations carried out in Portugal. The paternalistic condescension or benign multiculturalism that assimilationism seeks fits with a sophisticated neo-racism based on cynicism, which from the outside accepts the coexistence of other

ethnic groups but in daily life protests against the rights of its members (Silva and Silva, 2011:218).

7. Conclusions for discussion

The specific consideration of the Roma ethnicity thus corroborates the complexity of school bullying and the difficulties in making generalizations and simple judgments that, for example, put in the same bag all social groups that suffer some kind of discrimination. By using the prism of the relationship between the victim and the abuser, and in particular the possibility of revenge, we have been able to improve our understanding of bullying by increasing the negative definition, that is, what it is not. It does not depend on the social class of the victim, on the neighbourhood where they live or on the type of neighbourhood in which the centre is located, or even on the type of centre. Nor does it depend on whether there are gangs or other types of school violence. It does not depend on the family violence experienced, nor does it have to do with mass murders in schools or hazing.

It is important to relativise this type of association because it establishes causal explanations for bullying around uncertain profiles of victims and aggressors. Such interpretations can be considered false in many cases since they do not withstand logical analysis or have empirical support.

However, by settling among public opinion as beliefs shared by citizens, they produce real effects, according to Thomas's Theorem (Thomas W.I. and Thomas D.S., 1928). Some of them may at times encourage the ghettoization of public schools with high proportions of immigrants or gypsies, or in any case and in general, the segregation of both in the spaces of coexistence outside the classrooms.

Spontaneous sociology coincides with what Paulo Freire called "ingenuous knowledge" and is reflected, in the educational sphere, in spontaneous, "unarmed" teaching practice. The formation of democratic teachers implies surpassing this level in order to reach critical thinking. In order to do so, he will have to reflect on practice by training himself in the methodological separation of everyday gestures, an apparently paradoxical condition that requires his understanding. Although Paulo Freire did not use the specific term of social pedagogy, as Da Silva reminds us, it follows from his work that no social group can do without this discipline – especially in times of strong social change – since the objective is not only to liberate the oppressed but also the oppressor (2016:189). This seems especially appropriate for the relationship between aggressors and victims of bullying and their socio-cultural contexts. The pedagogy of autonomy proposed by Freire is elaborated in a social dimension, which is why he insists on the need to analyze the "gestures" and "intrigues" produced in the school space beyond the strict transmission of knowledge that occurs in the classroom (2004: 20).

This article has attempted to show teachers how to analyse the most frequent spontaneous discourses on the causes of bullying. Its function is to simplify a complex phenomenon and avoid critical reflection. It is thus framed in the sociological perspective that follows the modern epistemological path and that, as Pierre Bourdieu has insisted – one of the major referents of the sociology of contemporary education –, since the classics has sought "the rupture with the representations that social agents make of their state" (2011:92).

We must not forget, on the other hand, that spontaneous explanations also fulfil the function of unloading responsibilities, of not assuming the part that corresponds to all the school actors.

Notes

[1] https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2017015
[2] http://www.epis.pt/mediadores/barometro-epis/escola

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