

Moral Domain as a Risk and Protective Factor against Bullying. An Integrating Perspective Review on the Complexity of Morality

How to cite this article: Romera-Félix, E. M., Casas, J. A. Gómez-Ortiz, O., & Ortega-Ruiz, R. (2019). Moral domain as a risk and protective factor against bullying. An integrating perspective review on the complexity of morality. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 45, 75-82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2018.07.005>

Abstract

Developmental psychology has paid special research attention to explain how certain moral-nature factors influence behavior. Most research on morality and bullying has focused on studying moral disengagement as a risk factor for peer aggression. However, neuroscience has revealed that morality is a complex phenomenon composed of several factors. Thus, it requires the usage of holistic explanatory models that study the complexity of the moral functioning. The purpose of this review is to explore—from an integrative perspective—the moral elements that influence the transgressive behavior that damages other people, and its relation to bullying, a clear example of unjustified and immoral aggressiveness. This article reviews the state-of-the-art of morality including moral sensitivity, reasoning, emotion, motivation and identity, and group norms, analyzing its protective role against bullying. The need for a comprehensive theoretical approach to morality understood as a complex construct is discussed, starting from the articulated analysis of all its dimensions. This work advances knowledge useful for the design of educational interventions aimed to prevent bullying, to stimulate the socially desirable and prosocial behavior, as well as to improve peer relationships.

1. Introduction

Interventions to prevent intimidation, harassment and abuse among peers—present in the phenomenon called bullying—mostly paid attention to the modification of these behaviors in children and adolescents who are involved. Children involved in bullying

are classified as victims, bullies and bystanders. In this social dynamic, bullies display aggressive behaviors, victims are submitted and defenceless and bystanders are indifferent, and give their consent so these problems continue in time. In addition to the extension of unjustified aggressiveness acts and the social power imbalance between the victim and the bully, bullying is defined as an unfair and immoral behavior (Ortega-Ruiz, 2010). Morality is built on different evaluative systems which may act in a coordinated way, in competition or in conflict and that help the person make decisions on what is right and wrong (Buon, Seara-Cardoso, & Viding, 2016).

From a developmental psychology perspective, the study about morality has included a wide range of terms and definitions, such as reasoning, sensitivity, cognition, emotion, motivation. These terms have been used interchangeably to understand behavior through different tasks and methods for its analysis —moral dilemmas, self- and others' judgments, etc.— (Garrigan, Adlam, & Langdon, 2016).

From the neuropsychological perspective, we move towards the design of complex explanatory models of morality in which multiple complex processes are recognized to be involved (Narvaez, 2008; Sevinc & Spreng, 2014; Young & Dungan, 2012). Young and Dungan (2012) indicate that there is not a domain-specific morality located in a particular area of the brain, but multiple domain-general processes, such as affective arousal, attention, intention, understanding and decision-making, which are activated in different brain areas. Therefore, there is not a “moral brain”, but an interplay of an “emotional brain” and a “social brain” during moral cognition.

The purpose of this work is to review the main contributions from the developmental psychology studies about morality and bullying to gain a holistic view on the moral elements that prevent bullying and the development of prosocial and defending behaviors when facing immoral and unjustified aggressiveness acts which occur in bullying (Ortega-Ruiz, 2010). Although it has repeatedly been argued that many bullies show deficit in their morality (Hymel, Schonert-Reichl, Bonanno, Vaillancourt, & Henderson, 2010; Perren, 2010), there is a lower number of studies that have focused on the positive aspects of morality that protect children from involvement in bullying and that promote defending the victims (Malti & Ongley, 2014). Each of the moral factors addressed here —knowledge, sensitivity, reasoning, emotion, motivation, identity and group norms— includes an introductory overview of the key terms according to developmental research literature and the advances on its description and relationship with bullying. The following section presents the main contributions of the educational

interventions to promote desirable moral development. Finally, the future lines of research are identified in this area of study.

2. Moral Knowledge, Moral Criterion and Bullying

According to the social-cognitive domain theory, morality refers to “conceptions of human welfare, justice, and rights, which are functions of the inherent features of interpersonal relations” (Nucci, 2001, p. 7), conceptions that are built in terms of the effects that the own behavior has on other people. These cognitive structures of moral knowledge, originated in the childhood, are used in the social information processing to establish moral judgments (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004; Rutland, Killen, & Abrams, 2010). Even, the existence of a “universal moral grammar” has been recognized, which is developed in a parallel way to the structure of language (Mikhail, 2007). Concepts such as “hurt” or “harm” are genuinely moral and associated with the disapproval towards those who hurt others (Haidt, 2007).

The knowledge and the moral criterion vary depending on age (Kohlberg 1976; Piaget, 1932). Small children assess the moral situations according to specific facts that damage the wellbeing and as they grow up, they do it following abstract concepts of justice and rights (Killen, Rutland, Abrams, Mulvey, & Hitti, 2013; Turiel, 2006). An evolution which is linked to the development of complex cognitive structures, such as the executive functions, is involved in the processes of regulating the thinking and behavior (Kerr & Zelazo, 2004). These moral-nature prescriptions are used for all the situations and contexts, being bullying a clear example of moral transgression which affects the other people’s wellbeing (Thornberg & Jungert, 2013).

Boys and girls were found to justify their judgments in terms of harm that their actions caused (Thornberg, Thornberg, Alamaa, & Daud, 2016). Research reported that bullying is condemned by the vast majority of children (Goldstein & Tisak, 2010; Smith, Morita, Junger-Tas, Olweus, Catalano, & Slee, 1999).

The studies on moral cognition and bullying point out that children with prosocial behaviors who help others consider that transgressions of moral norms are less acceptable than children involved in bullying (Gasser & Keller, 2009). In this sense, it has been shown that children and adolescents who bully consider more breakable a moral norm if the authorities (in this case, teachers) allow it due to the socio-conventional nature they attribute to the norm (Caravita, Miragoli, & Di Blasio, 2009). From this perspective, it is a wrong conception of the universality of these moral norms,

what allows them to accept its transgression in an easier way. In the study developed by Caravita, Gini and Pozzoli (2012), it was additionally observed that having a high level of social preference may be a protective factor against the involvement in bullying, even buffering the effects of potential risk factors such as perceiving moral norms as breakable, precisely in order to keep this degree of likeability status within the group. Furthermore, the studies on the schoolers' conceptions about bullying indicate a tendency to perceive the direct bullying as more serious and the retaliation as less serious (Gasser, Malti, & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012; Thornberg et al., 2016). However, it has been recognized that some individuals who bully others actually have advanced moral knowledge about what is right or wrong. Studies focused on the comparison of the moral cognition of defenders and bullies found that defenders show a good level of moral understanding and a well-developed theory of mind, among others (Pozzoli & Gini, 2010; Sainio, Veenstra, Huitsing, & Salmivalli, 2011) in comparison to bullies, with whom no differences were observed in the ability to assess the moral permissibility of harmful actions (Gini, Pozzoli, & Hauser, 2011; Young, Cushman, Hauser, & Saxe, 2007). These results suggest that the problem of a bully is not a moral knowledge problem, but a problem of access to that knowledge when giving a self-critical moral judgment that seems to mediate between their possible aggressive tendency or desire and a specific immoral behavior (Gini et al., 2011). The discrepancy between behavior and moral standards requires a better understanding of the moral functioning in children involved in bullying which could help to understand what influences on boys and girls taking into account (or not) their moral knowledge (Levasseur, Desbiens, & Bowen, 2017).

3. Moral Sensitivity, Moral Behavior and Bullying

Moral sensitivity (MS hereinafter), one of the four components of moral function identified by Rest (1983; Narvaez & Rest, 1995) —along with moral reasoning, motivation and action—, can help us understand how our mind works when interpreting a moral behavior and reacting to this behavior. Moral sensitivity is defined as "the ability to recognize moral issues in complex situations" (Jordan, 2007, p. 325). It requires putting into practice the ability of interpreting cognitive and emotional information, which allows us to understand how actions affect others and how to they influence others' behavior (Moll et al., 2002). Following this line of study, from a neuropsychological perspective, the neural correlates of the psychological processes

involved in MS and moral reasoning have been found including two clearly differentiated processes at a neuronal level (Han, 2017). Specifically, MS has even been considered a predictor factor of moral reasoning (Yoder & Decety, 2014). A gender meta-analysis reported that girls show higher levels of MS than boys (You, Maeda, & Bebeau, 2011). These differences may be due to the strategies that are used in moral appraisals, with girls being those who tend to adopt care-based moral evaluations and boys being those to adopt justice-based moral evaluations (Harenski, Antonenko, Shane, & Kiehl, 2008).

Thornberg and Jungter (2013) propose the use of the concept “basic moral sensitivity” in relation to bullying, as it is a prototype of moral transgression which does not present any ambiguity, given its inherent harmful nature towards the other person. Basic moral sensitivity is an automatic and involuntary mechanism that activates latent mental structures —schemes, stereotypes, plans, scripts— and that influences on the interpretation of the social information received in a given situation (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004). While most children and adolescents perceive bullying as something wrong, there are others who do not express the same opinion (Perren et al., 2012). This fact indicates possible individual differences in basic moral sensitivity. For instance, in this moral function, it has been recognized that higher levels of MS are related to stronger readiness to differentiate moral transgressions from transgressions of social-conventional rules (Thornberg & Jungter, 2013). This helps understand the results of previous studies in which some schoolers identify bullying with a socio-conventional transgression (Caravita et al., 2009, 2012; Gasser & Keller, 2009), moving away from the ethical interpretation the rest of the people attribute to that behavior. It has also been found that defenders show high levels of MS (Menesini et al., 2003). However, we need more studies on the relationship among MS, moral reasoning and bullying, as research has paid more attention to moral reasoning to understand the process of moral-decision making.

4. Moral Reasoning and Involvement in the Phenomena of Bullying

Bullying has been defined as an immoral behavior characterized by the intention to harm. Intentional harm is considered morally wrong (Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987). The attribution of intention to a person and its relation with moral judgment has been widely studied in moral psychology studies (Manfrinati, Lotto, Sarlo, Palomba, & Rumiati, 2013). Traditionally, moral behavior has been considered as the result of moral

reasoning (MR hereinafter), a specific component of social cognition, defined as the thinking mechanism that allows to establish moral judgments about what is right and wrong (Moll, Zahn, de Oliveira-Souza, Krueger, & Grafman, 2005). Research on MR indicates that schoolers generally tend to give morally responsible arguments (Perren et al., 2012) and that girls are those who show higher levels of MR (Malti, Killen, & Gasser, 2012). Although during the early ages, incipient manifestations of MR are observed, it is during early childhood when they are more explicit through social situations that allow children to put into practice concepts such as reciprocity, equity and justice (Killen & Rutland, 2011). Children continue developing MR skills with age, being MR associated with several executive functions (Vera-Estayetal, Dooley, & Beauchamp, 2015). Although throughout the adolescent period, girls and boys are prepared to assess morally a wide range of social behaviors, some of them may have also learned that the aggressive behavior is an effective way to achieve their goals through antisocial behaviors (Caprara et al., 2014). In this way, research has shown that MR does not always lead to engagement in moral behaviors (Leenders & Brugman 2005). Moral engagement is related with defending and prosocial behaviors (Doramajian & Bukowski, 2015).

In the last years, research on bullying and MR has tried to delve into the moral functioning as a key factor to understand the different schoolers' behaviors in scenarios of bullying (Doramajian & Bukowski, 2015; Gini, Pozzoli, & Bussey, 2015; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013). There are still not many studies on the individual moral functioning in relation to bullying, except research on moral disengagement (MD hereinafter) in bullies (Gini, Pozzoli, & Hymel, 2014; Hymel & Bonano, 2014; Thornberg & Jungert, 2014).

In the last decades, research has specially paid attention to the MD, an affective self-regulatory mechanism that can explain the discrepancy between MR and moral behavior (Wang, Lei, Liu, & Hu, 2016; Yan & Wan, 2012). According to Bandura's theory, MD inhibits the connection between moral standards and immoral conduct, as bullying and aggression (Bandura, Barbaranelli, & Caprara, 1996). Thornberg and Jungert (2013) indicate that MD is more useful to explain engagement in immoral than moral behaviors. From a preventive point of view, the activation of MD mechanisms can be reduced by different factors, such as a high level of moral reasoning, which boosts the adherence to moral standards (Bussey, Quinn, & Dobson, 2015). In this regard, MR has been recognized to mitigate the relationship between MD and cyberbullying, an indirect

form of bullying (Wang et al. 2016). In adolescents with higher values of MR, the relationship between MD and aggressive behavior is not significant (Wang et al., 2016; Yang & Wang, 2012). Moreover, variables of social cognition such as the empathic concern and perspective-taking (associated with the development of MR) (Vera-Estay, Seni, Champagne, & Beauchamp, 2016) have been observed to reduce the relationship between MD and peer aggression (Bussey et al., 2015). These results, which outline that high levels of MR can buffer the effect of MD on behaviour, contradict Bandura's MD theory, according to which MR is subject to MD (Bandura et al., 1996). Research papers on bullying prevention and aggressive behavior must continue focusing on the interaction between MD and MR.

Several longitudinal studies on MD and bullying indicate that low MD predicts higher defending of victims of bullying (Doramajian & Bukowski, 2015). While some studies note that MD is negatively associated with passive bystander and defender behavior (Gini, 2006; Menesini et al., 2003; Pozzoli, Gini, & Vieno, 2012; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013), others recognize stronger MD on passive bystanders (Levasseure et al., 2017; Obermann, 2011). The need of the passive bystanders to morally disengage may be an escape route from the emotional distress towards the victim's suffering, what leads to inhibit eventually the bystander's prosocial behavior such as defending (Doramajian & Bukowski, 2015). Some studies about the three-dimensionality of empathy—cognitive empathy, emotional contagion and emotional disengagement—recognize the value of low emotional disengagement as an adaptive social mechanism (Herrera, Gómez-Ortiz, Ortega-Ruiz, Jolliffe, & Romera, 2017). However, the fear of embarrassing themselves in the presence of others, of being the next victims or of losing their social status within the group may lead them to show MD and inhibit their help (Mayeux & Cillessen, 2008). What promotes moral engagement and therefore, defenders' prosocial behavior, in contrast with passive bystanders, is precisely a strong belief in their ability to intervene in a satisfactory way in bullying situations (Levasseure et al., 2017; Poyhonen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2010).

Some studies indicate that girls show less MD in comparison with boys—this may be due to their higher level of basic moral sensitivity and MR; see above—(Thornberg & Jungert, 2014). However, the influence of MR in bullying does not differ between girls and boys (Gini et al., 2014). Although most research on MD has used self-reports for its assessment, some studies using hypothetical situations found that the violent action is mainly justified based on egocentric hedonistic reasoning (Menesini et al., 2003; Perren

et al., 2012). This line of study suggests that schoolers may judge their own hedonistic goals as more important than the victim's suffering, but it does not underline the existence of a specific moral disengagement pattern (e.g., deviant rules), as it is highlighted in self-report studies. According to these results, the promotion of empathy towards the victim becomes an important strategy to prevent bullying (Perren et al., 2012). Nevertheless, it is necessary to continue focusing on the study methodology of MD in its interaction with the MS and the MR in social phenomena occurring in groups whose social proximity and interaction is relevant, such as bullying.

In a similar way, the theory of neutralization techniques has been used to understand the moral reasoning function in transgressive behaviors (Sykes & Matza, 1957). This theory postulates that people are able to ignore and neutralize their aggressive or controversial actions and behaviors, justifying them as if they were totally normal and adequate actions (Ribeaud & Eisner, 2010). From this point of view, any subject is free to transgress legal, moral and ethical norms by using verbal or cognitive techniques of self-persuasion on the acceptability or convenience of their behaviors in a specific situation. Thus, certain social norms that are useful to control or inhibit criminal, aggressive or harmful activities no longer effective. This inhibition provides a person with the sufficient freedom to break the conventions, avoiding labelling him/herself as a bully or offender (Maruna & Copes, 2005).

The advances during the last decades in neuroscience have helped us understand how our mind works in order to judge if an action is right or wrong (Moll, Oliveira-Souza, & Zahn, 2008; Wang, Ryoo, Swearer, Turner, & Goldberg, 2017). The valuations, interpretations and decisions we make are influenced by conscious and unconscious mechanisms, what allows us to distinguish between two systems: on the one hand, one which is intuitive and implicit (System 1) and, on the other, one which is deliberate and explicit (System 2) (Lapsley & Hill, 2008; Narvaez & Vaydich, 2008).

Diverse research has recognized the important role that this dual process model of MR has on moral judgments and moral behavior (Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen's, 2001; Narvaez & Vaydich, 2008). New research on bullying have taken into account the interplay between automatic processes and explicit forms of moral dimensions in bullying and defending behaviors (Pozzoli, Gini, & Thornberg, 2016). The results indicate that implicit mechanisms moderates the relation between explicit mechanisms and moral behavior. In this way, when there are high levels of implicit moral judgments, explicit moral mechanisms are related to bullying (positively) and

defending (negatively). In spite of the important advance in understanding the interplay between implicit and explicit mechanisms in relation to bullying, future studies should try to further analyze the function of both moral dimensions for bullying and defending including moral emotions (Menesini & Camodeca, 2008; Thornberg, Pozzoli, Gini, & Jungert, 2015).

5. Moral Emotions and Bullying Involvement

In general, schoolers have been seen to feel good when they put into practice their moral decisions. In addition, the level of positive emotions after performing a moral action increases with the age (Malti, Keller, & Buchmann, 2013). In a longitudinal study, it was recorded that schoolers prefer carrying out moral actions to immoral actions, especially because they promote pride, sense of self-worth and self-satisfaction feelings by doing what they consider as right (Malti & Keller, 2010). Those boys and girls who defend and help others who are bullied are more likely to feel angry, sad or scared given this type of behaviors (Price et al., 2014). For instance, bullies show great deficits in feeling moral compassion (Gini et al., 2011). Even, feelings of happiness and satisfaction have been found in bullies before perpetrating aggressive behaviors, what is consistent with the concept of “happy bully” or “happy victimizer” (Arsenio, 2014). Emotions foster the adherence to moral standards (Malti & Noam, 2016). Moral emotions (ME hereinafter) are defined as self-conscious emotions generated by the self-assessment in moral events (Eisenberg, 2000). Developmental research holds that ME, such as guilt or shame, have a genuinely cognitive component as they require the understanding of other people and the situation, of the consequences related to the action, as well as the internalization of the self-moral standards (Malti, Gasser, & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2010). ME are important to the development of moral action tendencies because they motivate reparative or prosocial behavior and inhibit immoral behavior (Menesini, Palladino, & Nocentini, 2015; Tangner, Stuewig, & Mashed, 2007). Positive emotions are generally related to the maintenance of already established actions, while negative emotions foster the change of behavior that transgresses moral values (Baumeister, Vohs, DeWall, & Zhang 2007). Developmental theories of morality consider negatively emotions such as guilt and shame and positively emotions such as pride, as they express an internalized norm orientation. For instance, in situations of moral transgression, feeling guilt or sympathy may lead to help or repair behaviors, while emotions of pride or happiness tend to foster the continuation of the transgressive

behavior (Malti & Ongley, 2014). Studies about bullying tend to report negative associations between bullying and guilt and shame (Menesini & Camodeca, 2008) and positive shame management (high levels of shame acknowledgment and remorse and low levels of shame displacement) (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008). Apart from individual factors related to the cognitive and emotional processing of reality, other elements — such as the intervention of authority figures— have shown to be essential to foster a positive management and development of moral emotions. Following the reintegrative shaming theory (Braithwaite, 1989), the way in which parents, teachers or other authority figures foster the shame acknowledgement in minors when they transgress moral norms conditions the effect of this emotion on the minor's behavior. Some studies have indicated the relationship between this theory and bullying. In particular, their results highlight the importance of the following actions: (a) to foster abilities that allow to recognize and confront the shame acknowledgement in minors; (b) to use this emotion in a reintegrative way (i.e., indicating the correct way to act, showing affection or empathy towards the minor although it does not involve accepting his/her immoral behavior, etc.); and (c) to combine it with forgiveness. This type of action —carried out by authority figures— seems to prevent the development of bullying behaviors. However, the use of shame displacement —in which the minor is condemned and rejected without using inductive techniques or expressing a minimal feeling of connection with him/her— is related to avoiding this moral emotion and increases the likelihood of minors developing bullying behaviors (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004, 2005).

ME are related to behavior in two ways: as a consequence or as an anticipation of a behavior, being the emotional anticipation of an action what influences the decision-making process (Tangney et al., 2007). In this line, several research studies highlighted the connection between emotion expectancies and (im)moral behaviour (Arsenio, Gold, & Adams, 2004). At a general level, we recognize a tendency to anticipate ME followed by positive moral actions (Krettenauer, 2013). In particular, in a meta-analysis including more than 40 studies, it was found that anticipated ME predict high levels of prosocial behavior and, mainly, low levels of antisocial behaviors from 4 to 20 years (Malti & Krettenauer, 2013). This relation is explained by authors according to the affective and cognitive components of moral emotion attributions. Self-evaluative emotion reflects the validity of moral rules and obligations. For this reason, the combination of affective reaction toward the transgression and this internalized moral knowledge, can lead to

(im)moral behavior. Studies in neuropsychology about how affect and cognition are integrated in the MR processes, highlight that emotions act as a precedent of moral judgments. Specifically, these studies note that negative emotions warn the individual about moral deviation of a situation, causing discomfort, unease and self-condemnation (Buon et al., 2016; Decety, Michalska, & Kinzler, 2011).

Recent studies on moral emotions have highlighted that although most studies in this area are focused on explaining how individuals feel after carrying out an immoral action towards their peers, it is necessary to advance on explaining how schoolers understand the emotional consequences that aggression has for the victims (Peplak, Song, Colasante, & Malti, 2017). In this regard, in studies with hypothetical bullying scenarios, it has been shown that what characterizes prosocial boys and girls and what differentiates them from aggressors is precisely the ability to appreciate the emotional consequences that their behaviors cause on the others and to empathize with the others' feelings (Gasser et al., 2012; Gini, 2006). Previous studies about bullying and empathy highlighted that low of affective empathy —the ability to experience others' emotions— is precisely what characterizes bullies and not low understanding of their victims' emotions —cognitive empathy— (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006, 2011). Although, recent sistematic review and meta-analysis showed that perpetration is negatively associated with cognitive and affective empathy in bullying (Zych, Ttofi, & Farrington, 2016) and cyberbullying (Zych, Baldry, Farrington, & Llorent, 2018).

The emotional attribution regarding the victimized peers allows children to delve into the level of understanding and sympathy for their wellbeing. In the meta-analysis carried out by Malti and Krettenauer (2013), it was observed that differences in self- and other-attributed moral emotions are related with antisocial behavior —aggression and externalizing— and not with prosocial behavior. Moreover, connections between moral emotion attributions and antisocial behavior were stronger when schoolers attribute emotions to their own actions and not to the hypothetical others. In particular, schoolers' expectations of feeling more positive or less negative emotions after victimizing others (normally with material purposes) were related to higher levels of aggression. These results show that the differences in moral emotion attributions are not due to a deficit in the cognitive abilities to take the perspective of self and other, but a higher personal connection with self-attributed antisocial situations. It provides key information on how affective-moral experiences are linked to moral reasoning and behavior and suggests that studying about children's emotional understanding of

prosocial children, aggressors and victims provides relevant information about the motivating factor behind bullying.

6. Moral Motivation and Bullying Prevention

Moral motivation (MM hereinafter) is defined as the willingness to behave according to a moral norm, although this motivation may be in a conflict with other desires and amoral reasons. It consists on doing what one knows is right although it may have a personal cost (Nunner-Winkler, 2007). Following this definition, MM requires, on the one hand, understanding the validity of the moral norms, ability which is developed from the four years of age (Smetana & Killen, 2008), and, on the other, reflecting about the self-responsibility in the moral transgressions (Blasi, 2004). This concept of morality is related to what has been defined as internal morality, in which people follow moral rules because they consider them as valid and important to the self (Krettenauer, 2011). From the developmental research, the MM has been measured by emotional attribution and justification of moral transgressions (Arsenio 2014; Malti, Gummerum, Keller, & Buchmann, 2009). Several longitudinal studies have shown that MM increases through childhood and adolescence (Nunner-Winkler, 2007) and that a high MM is related to the prosocial behavior (Malti et al., 2009). Girls have been registered to show higher levels of MM (Malti & Buchmann, 2010; Nunner-Winkler, Meyer-Nikele, & Wohlrab, 2007).

In order to understand the functioning of the MM and its influence on behavior, the concept of agency and communion has been used, which covers the issue of promoting self-interest versus others' interest (Walker & Frimer, 2015). Schwartz (1992) defines agency as the motivation to advance the self-enhancing values of power and achievement, whilst communion involves the motivation towards the promotion of others' interests enhancing the values of benevolence and consideration of others' wellbeing. Agency and communion may function dualistically but there are situations in which some tensions may arise when integrating both. Walker (2014) suggests that the best for the MM is the integration of both being agency channeled into communal goals. Walker and Frimer's developmental study (2015) registered a tendency to achieve this integration with age; additionally, they registered communion as a value which increases with age. Nevertheless, agency is the dominant motive for all ages.

In bullying studies, the important role of motivational aspects has been recognized to understand bullies' moral deficits, which precisely respond to their self-serving

intentions (Gasser & Keller, 2009). In this regard, we may underline those studies about the *happy victimizer phenomenon* (Arsenio, 2014), according to which the attribution of positive emotions to the victimizer is due to justifications based on personal gains (Gasser & Keller, 2009). The happy victimizer paradigm allows to link children's moral cognition, emotion, motivation and behavior. In this regard, happy victimizer task studies suggest that children's emotion attributions, linked to the moral justification they make, indicate important aspects about MM. If they focus on the victimizer's personal goals, they attribute positive emotions to the action, and if they focus on the validity of moral rule, they attribute negative emotions to the action. Nevertheless, if this attribution of negative emotions is due to the fear of punishment, it does not express MM; that is why it is necessary to study both criteria (Malti, Gummerum, & Buchmann, 2007; Nunner-Winkler, 2007). In relation to defenders' MM, Kollerova, Janosova and Rican's study (2015) points out that MM predicts the defending behavior and that the social preference strengthened the link between MM and defending. These results underline the MM relevance to prevent bullying situations and the importance of the social link among peers in understanding defending.

7. Moral Identity and Bullying Involvement: The Individual and the Group

Previous research has shown that bullying is a group phenomenon whose dynamic marks roles of an individual with a Machiavellian mind, especially in relational bullying (Pepler & Craig, 1995) and a high level of a theory of mind to manipulate others (Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999). This requires an analysis of the moral identity that explains not only the individual factors but also those of the group. Moral identity (MI hereinafter) has been defined as "the degree to which being a moral person is important to an individual's identity" (Hardy & Carlo, 2011, p. 212). The MI power lies on the necessity of the individual of being honest with him/herself and acting according to his/her identity. This concept has been identified as a self-regulatory mechanism that combines thoughts, experiences and perceptions on moral self-concepts through two dimensions: internalization, which is central to the self-concept, and symbolization, which refers to the importance that a person attributes to keep a public moral self (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Hardy, Bean and Olsen (2015) suggest one more facet of MI, moral ideal self, which refers to the degree in which one wishes to be a moral person. Developmental studies point out that MI is formed throughout the adolescent period and that it is strengthened in the adulthood; most studies are carried out in adulthood

(Krettenauer & Hertz, 2015). Different research found the predictive nature of MI in moral outcomes —moral cognition, emotion and behavior (Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, & Felps, 2009). It has been demonstrated that for those for whom MI is important, moral standards become an essential element of their self-concept, they are more prone to be empathetic with the others' suffering. Additionally, MI strengthens self-evaluation ME, enhances the accessibility of knowledge structures and reduces the activation of MD mechanisms (Hardy et al., 2015; Stets & Carter, 2011), what influences on individuals to act morally. A recent meta-analysis —carried out with 111 studies— highlights that MI strengthens prosocial behavior and decreases antisocial behavior. This result supports the idea that MI predicts moral behavior, although the effect is not much stronger than the effects of moral judgment or ME (Hertz & Krettenauer, 2016). In this line, a three-way interaction between moral identity internalization, symbolization, and recognition to explain this relationship has been suggested (Winterich, Aquino, Mittal, & Swartz, 2013). Similarly, MI has been identified as a moderator variable between MD and aggression (Hardy et al., 2015). Gini et al. (2016) focused on this relationship in bullying (negatively) and defending (positively) behavior and noted that self-regulating processes can be motivated by MI. Despite the recognized relationship among different moral elements at a cognitive, emotional, motivational and behavioral levels, it is necessary to explore more deeply the relationship between MI and bullying and defending behavior, as well as their moderator relationship (Gini et al., 2016). Finally, it is important to underline that the studies recognize that MI is influenced by situational variables (Aquino et al., 2009). In violent contexts, such as the ones originated by some videogames, its influence on MD is moderated by MI (Teng, Nie, Guo, & Liu, 2017), according to the social cognitive model, which highlights that situational variables can affect social cognition and behavior (Bandura, 2001).

8. Peer Group Psychology and Bullying: The Challenge of the Immediate Social Context

Sutton et al. (1999) suggest that bullies show a good theory of mind in general but they also show deficits in specific areas, particularly in moral emotions, for example in guilt, shame and pride. From the social cognitive theory of moral agency, it is stated that the moral behavior is the result of the joint and reciprocal interaction between the social environment and cognition (Bandura et al., 1986). The social influences affect the

functioning of the internal system in three different ways. First, they contribute in an important way to the development of a self-regulatory efficacy through internal and social affection incentives. In fact, the studies on bullying show that some bullies have a high social status and acceptance despite their coercive strategies (Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2003), using aggression as an adaptive strategy within the group to achieve prestige and social recognition (Caravita et al., 2012). Second, social influences provide collective support for the adherence to moral standards. Previous studies supported the idea that moral standards are influenced by norms and acceptance of the peer group and that peer attitudes, behaviors and norms remarkably influence bullying (Pozzoli et al., 2012; Salmivalli, 2010). Third, social influences facilitate the selective activation and deactivation of moral self-regulation according to the situation (Bandura, 2001). In this regard, the MD studies have shown that bullying behavior is influenced by the MD level in classroom, what suggests that the group may promote immoral behaviors although they do not match with the individual moral criteria (Pozzoli et al., 2012). We cannot omit the fact that the class group is one of the most influential contexts in childhood and adolescence, where moral norms are determined, which —implicitly or explicitly— give a certain level of approval or rejection towards negative behaviors (Gini et al., 2014).

Following the social cognitive theory, bullying cannot only be explained by taking into account the individual moral deficit, but its understanding also requires taking into account the peer-group norms, which may be explaining most of the schoolers' moral behaviors (Salmivalli, 2010). In this regard, research has shown that bullying is more frequent in school settings where bystanders reinforce bullying and less if bystanders defend the victims (Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011). In addition to the potentially negative consequences of the peer group (e.g., pressure to conform to antisocial attitudes and behavior), peers can also promote positive behaviors, such as defending victims of bullying (Sijtsema, Rambaran, Caravita, & Gini, 2014). This line of study requires to continue focusing on the influence of the peer group in bullying prevention and the development of defending behaviors towards the victim.

9. Conclusion: The Relevance of Moral Complexity on Bullying Prevention

We have carried out this work in order to offer a holistic view from the developmental psychology field of the studies on morality and bullying. This review highlights the necessity of reconceptualizing the traditional models introduced in developmental

psychology (Piaget, Kohlberg, Turiel) that has focused on the psychological developmental description. These models have paid less attention to the transversal dimension and complexity of a field of development and social behavior which may be determining to understand some of the characteristics of bullying. Particularly, we refer to the intention, sustainability or continuation in time as well as the important role that moral behavior of each bullying role —bullies, victims and bystanders— has in bullying. The reconceptualization —assuming and integrating neuroscientific studies, of emotional psychology, as well as the new cognitive-affection approaches— is relevant not only to understand better this phenomenon but also to carry out a more appropriate intervention against intimidation, abuse and social discrimination which are deeply embedded in the phenomenon of bullying. To do so, we based on the integrating model of morality developed from the neuropsychology, in which different moral elements are recognized to act in an interconnected way. Additionally, bearing in mind the size of the effects observed in the different meta-analyses, it was shown that there is no moral component with a higher predictive power than others. The review of the studies show that although we have widely advanced on the study of the relationship among moral knowledge, reasoning and emotion in their role of moral action, we need to continue studying their relationships with moral sensitivity, motivation and identity, mainly in the bullying studies. Regarding this type of immoral behavior, research outlines the important role that the moral component plays in the understanding of the phenomenon. Despite having registered a remarkable tendency to analyze the moral elements which are a risk for aggression, paying special attention to moral disengagement, the review of this work allows us to emphasize the moral keys for its prevention. Particularly, prosocial and defending behaviors towards the victims have been said to be associated with a recognition of bullying as a moral transgression that infringes upon the justice and equity principles. High levels of basic moral sensitivity, which allow young people to identify when they are facing an immoral situation and therefore, activating their latent mental structures. Furthermore, it requires a level of implicit and explicit moral reasoning, the interconnection of which reduces the relationship between moral disengagement and aggression. At an emotional level, it is important to consider moral emotions taking part in the process of moral reasoning and to foster the ability to appreciate the emotional consequences that our own behaviors may have on others. Regarding motivation, it is important to combine agentic and communal goals and to justify the self-actions taking into consideration others' feelings and wishes. It is

important to have a moral self-concept and to act in consequence to their identity. Finally, we recognize the importance of studying the moral values and norms of the peer group as an influential context in the schoolers' behavior.

In earlier research, it has been observed that girls show higher levels of moral development in all their dimensions, except in moral identity, in which no differences have been observed. This may explain why they show to a larger extent positive attitudes towards the victims and a higher tendency to be involved in defending the victims (Thornberg & Jungert, 2013).

It is also necessary to pay attention to the assessment methods that are used to measure the different moral dimensions, as it has been shown that results vary depending on the assessment of our own actions or the others'. In fact, studies on neuropsychology show that we use different brain areas (Garrigan et al., 2016).

This work reviews the main studies in this field, but it also opens up new lines of study, which mainly aim to address the global analysis of morality to understand immoral behaviors such as bullying, as well as the attention to emotions, reasoning and motivations that explain the phenomenon. There is a tendency to explore the defending behaviors following the inverse relation with negative variables such as guilt, shame or moral disengagement, but we need to further study its relationship with positive moral elements (emotions, engagement, behavior) (Malti & Ongley, 2014). From a methodological point of view, we need to advance towards measure forms of the implicit components through measurements that do not require consciousness-raising and task control to be carried out, such as self-reports and interviews. Finally, it would be interesting to carry out cross-cultural studies that allow us to analyze the possible cultural differences in self-concepts, cognitive processes, emotional expectations, and value orientations when facing bullying situations. So far, most research on bullying and morality has been carried out with Western schoolers (Jia & Krettenauer, 2013).

10. Funding

Funding: This work was supported by the National Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness [grant number PSI2016-74871-R].

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