

Shame, Empathy, Coping and School Safety of the Bystanders in Situations of Bullying

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Abstract

Unjustified aggression is a problem that exists in schools and represents an obstacle for achieving the goals pursued by education. The goal of this article is to explain how shame, empathy, coping style and school safety discriminate between defensive and reinforcing observers in the face of a hypothetical situation of school bullying. 505 students from public, technical and federal secondary schools of the State of Sonora with ages ranging from 12 to 17 years participated in this study. Of this sample 131 were considered defenders and 374 reinforcers. The results show that the recognition of shame, affective empathy, confrontative coping and school safety explain up to 71.4% the differences between the defensive observers and the reinforcers. It is concluded that the variables considered as predictors can differentiate between the types of observers and represent a valuable contribution in the analysis of bullying as a group process.

Keywords: Bullying, shame, empathy, school safety and coping.

Embaraço, Empatia, Confronto e Segurança Escolar do Observadores em Situações de Bullying

Resumo

A agressão injustificada é um problema que está presente nas escolas e representa um obstáculo para atingir as finalidades que a educação persegue. O objetivo deste artigo é explicar como a vergonha, a empatia, o tipo de enfrentamento e a segurança escolar discriminam entre observadores defensores y

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reforçadores perante uma situação hipotética de assédio escolar. Participaram 505 estudantes de secundária de escolas públicas, técnicas e federais do Estado de Sonora com idades que vão desde os 12 até os 17 anos. Deste modo, 131 foram considerados defensores e 374 reforçadores. Os resultados mostram que o reconhecimento da vergonha, a empatia afetiva, o enfrentamento revalorativo e a segurança escolar explicam até em 71.4% as diferenças entre os observadores defensores e os reforçadores. Conclui-se que las variáveis consideradas como predictoras servem para diferenciar entre os tipos de observadores e significam uma contribuição valiosa na análise do assédio como um processo grupal.

Palavras-chaves: Bullying, vergonha, empatia, segurança escolar e enfrentamento.

Vergüenza, Empatía, Enfrentamiento y Seguridad Escolar de los Observadores en Situaciones de Acoso Escolar

Resumen

La agresión injustificada es un problema que está presente en las escuelas y representa un obstáculo para alcanzar los fines que la educación persigue. El objetivo de este artículo es explicar cómo la vergüenza, la empatía, el estilo de enfrentamiento y la seguridad escolar discriminan entre observadores defensores y reforzadores ante una situación hipotética de acoso escolar. Participaron 505 estudiantes de secundarias públicas, técnicas y federales del Estado de Sonora con edades que van de los 12 a los 17 años. De esta muestra 131 fueron considerados defensores y 374 reforzadores. Los resultados demuestran que el reconocimiento de la vergüenza, la empatía afectiva, el enfrentamiento revalorativo y la seguridad escolar explican hasta el 71.4% las diferencias entre los observadores defensores y los reforzadores. Se concluye que las variables consideradas como predictoras sirven para diferenciar entre los tipos de observadores y significan un aporte valioso en el análisis del acoso como un proceso grupal.

Palabras clave: Bullying, vergüenza, empatía, seguridad escolar y enfrentamiento.

At present, there is an area of opportunity for research and analysis on school violence, particularly on bullying, which the scientific community has studied over the past 40 years (Hymel & Swearer, 2015), and with this the presence of this problem within schools becomes clear both internationally (Blaya, Debarbieux, Del Rey, & Ortega, 2006; Defensor del Pueblo, 2000; Olweus, 1993) and in Mexico (Backhoff & Pérez-Morán, 2015; Castillo & Pacheco, 2008; Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa [National Institute for Educational Evaluation - INEE], 2006; Valadez, 2008; Valdés et al., 2012), whose figure ranges from 10% to 30% of students who become involved, either as aggressors or as victims of harassment between peers.

In addition, research on unjustified aggression – known as bullying – has gone through three historical moments (Sánchez & Ortega, 2010). In the first place, the research focused

on the recognition, visibility and prevalence of a phenomenon that had historically been considered as “children’s thing”; then he focused on the definition or conceptualization of which behaviors should be considered harassment and which should not. In the third historical moment there was a significant advance to characterize and find explanatory frameworks, whose purpose would be to prevent bullying. These social-ecological theories emphasized the dyadic relationship: aggressor and victim (Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Olweus, 1993; Postigo, González, Montoya, & Ordoñez, 2013; Swearer & Hymel, 2015).

In the last decade, a third actor has been included in the analysis of this problem: the observers or witnesses who participate in this process, due to the preponderant role they assume, whether to reinforce, evade or reject bullying (Cuevas & Marmolejo, 2014; Cuevas & Marmolejo, 2016; Haro & García, 2014;

Haro, García, & Reidl, 2013; Lucas & Martínez, 2008; Salmivalli, 1999; Salmivalli & Peets, 2010). In this sense, bullying would be defined as the most extreme form that violence between peers can take within the school context, whose characteristics are: (a) express intention to inflict physical and/or emotional pain without there being a prior apparent provocation; (b) power asymmetry between the aggressor and the victim; (c) planning and repetition of the unjustified action; (d) the need for different direct and indirect actors, which reinforce aggressive behavior; e) dynamism in the roles assumed by the actors (Olweus, 1993; Ortega, 2010; Salmivalli & Peets, 2010).

According to the above, peer harassment is a social process phenomenon and to understand its nature it is unavoidable to include the context in which it occurs: the relational dynamics between the aggressor-victim dyad and the companions who are not directly involved but do play a determining role both to prevent and to exacerbate bullying (Salmivalli & Peets, 2010).

In this sense, Salmivalli (1999) highlights the presence of types of observers or witnesses such as: (a) Auxiliaries, who participate in bullying by helping the aggressor and belong to the network of closest friends; (b) Reinforcers, that even when they do not directly attack the victim, they offer positive feedback to the intimidator; (c) Outside or evasive people, who commonly stay away and do not take sides with anyone but allow intimidation with their silent approval; and (d) Defenders, whose behavior is clearly contrary to intimidation, given that they defend the victim, take sides and try to make others stop the intimidation.

This new approach to bullying has been called by Meter and Card (2015) as a theory of the interdependence of bullying observers, which aims to organize empirical findings about observers and raises research questions, such as: who defends who and why, how children appropriate the norms and how these norms influence their behavior to help their partners or not, and what are the individual and interpersonal factors that influence observers to defend the

victim and how this intervention affects the defender and the victims.

It is a socio-ecological theoretical proposal (Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Postigo et al., 2013; Swearer & Hymel, 2015) for the analysis of school bullying that seeks to test the hypothesis that individual, family, peer group, school, and community factors are relevant to understanding the role of defender, reinforcer and evasive observers (Meter & Card, 2015).

Studying bullying among peers in an ecological manner, incorporating different subsystems, requires several investigations. Fortunately, there has already been an advancement in this area at an international level and it has been started in Mexico with this aim (Alcántar, Tánori, & Valdés, 2016; Alcántar, Tánori, Vera, Couvillier, & Peralta, 2015; Haro & García, 2014; Haro et al., 2013; Romero & Kyriacou, 2016).

Salmivalli and Peets (2010) mention two factors that influence the role of the observer in a situation of harassment: the observer evaluates the severity of the aggression and the relationship he has with the aggressor and the victim (affiliation). However, personal factors are also important, such as empathy (Alcántar et al., 2015; Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoe, 2007), shame (Haro et al., 2013), the type of style of facing problems (Quintana, Montgomery, & Malaver, 2009) and social factors such as the school climate of the observers (Gini, Pozzoli, Borghi, & Franzoni, 2008; Meter & Card, 2015).

Empathy is defined as the affective and cognitive reaction of one subject in the face of the emotional state of the other (Davis, 1980). In the intervention programs against bullying, empathy is considered as a prosocial factor that helps to inhibit school violence (Leganés, 2013).

The two dimensions of empathy are important. A low level of empathic response is associated with a higher level of bullying, while high empathy scores would be associated with the behavior of defending the victim (Gini et al., 2007). Similarly, when the means between the different types of spectators were compared in the dynamics of bullying in relation to affective

and cognitive empathy, it was found that those observers classified as encouraging (reinforcers of the aggressors) generated the difference with respect to the others, because they were the ones that obtained the lowest averages, both in the affective dimension and in the cognitive one (Alcántar et al., 2015).

Regarding shame, its analysis focuses on the individual's recognition of emotions related to the compliance or not of social norms that are accepted in a specific context (Menesini & Camodeca, 2008). This recognition of the individual plays an important role in the regulation of moral behavior, particularly in the relationship and responsibility that one has with others, using strategies of acceptance or displacement of shame when behaviors valued as immoral are exposed (Braithwaite, 1989; Ttofi & Farrington, 2008).

Displacement of shame is manifested when those who perform immoral acts do not take responsibility and the likelihood that negative behavior will be repeated increases (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004). For example, when the passive observer blames the victim for the harm he receives "because he surely asked for it". In contrast, the recognition of shame refers to the acceptance that people assume when they consider their behavior to be inadequate and socially undesirable, which is why it improves interpersonal relationships (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008). For example, those who defend the victim report a high level in recognition of shame in situations that involve behaviors of harassment (Haro et al., 2013; Mazzone, Camodeca, & Salmivalli, 2016).

In the case of confrontation this refers to different types of cognitive and behavioral efforts that people use to manage psychological stress or problems of life in general (Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and there can be two general styles. The first style consists of people who focus on the problem itself and perform actions to solve the problem (direct confrontation) or seek to give a positive sense to change the perception of the problem (reevaluative confrontation). In the second style people focus on the regulation of emotions, that is, when faced

with a problem they express having a feeling or an emotion, they express something to escape the problem and not resolve it (evasive).

There are studies on the confrontation in situations of school violence in two lines of research: the confrontation that analyzes the strategies used in terms of efficacy/inefficacy and those related to the causal effects such as cognitive and emotional processes where the complexity, dynamism and context of the confrontation should be emphasized (Sánchez, Ortega, & Menesini, 2012).

Quintana et al. (2009) mention that these styles of problem confrontation, both confrontation focused on the problem (active, planning and seeking social support for instrumental reasons) as well as confrontation focused on emotion, serve to differentiate the types of observers. The search for social support for emotional, acceptance or religious reasons would be characteristic features of prosocial spectators with regard to amoral, indifferent or blamed spectators. Pozzoli and Gini (2013) also mention that together with other variables the style of confrontation is fundamental for the viewer when deciding or not to help victims of peer harassment.

From an ecological perspective (Postigo et al., 2013) and of interdependence (Meter & Card, 2015) on the analysis of violence, it is fundamental to look for the answers in the individual without ignoring the context in which the adolescent socializes. The immediate context would be the perception that the student has about the school climate. Meter and Card (2015) and Ruggieria, Friemelb, Sticcac, Perrenc, and Alsaker (2013) mention how crucial it is for students to perceive their school as an orderly and safe place, as they are indications of a good school social climate. For example, Gini et al. (2008) showed that the behavior of spectators is affected by the perceived sense of school safety. In this context it was the defenders who reported the greatest sense of security.

The antecedents serve to emphasize that moral emotions, coping strategies and the perception of the social climate are relevant constructs to explain the role of the spectators

as actors that can exacerbate or diminish the problem of bullying, but in Mexico they have not been analyzed in depth (Carrillo, Prieto, & Jiménez, 2013; Furlán & Spitzer, 2013; Valdés, Martínez, & Carlos, 2017) and even less from an integrative approach to the most commonly used theories for understanding and predicting spectator behavior in bullying. Therefore, it is necessary to address them in different samples, using robust statistical techniques that allow the inclusion of several independent variables to explain the behavior of the observer.

This is justified considering that in the socio-scholar context, the majority of students are observers of peer harassment, as described by Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, and Kaukiainen (1996), who found in students aged 12 to 13 years that the 23.7% assume the role of passive observers (outsiders), 19.5% are reinforcer of the aggressor, 17.3% are defenders of the victim and 6.8% are assistants of the harasser.

In addition, there are at least three important reasons for the analysis of the observers for the implementation of a socio-educational intervention program: (a) they can help the aggressor lose social status within the group by not reinforcing their aggressive behaviors; (b) the support they provide to the victim can be crucial to minimize the damage of the harassment; and (c) it may be easier to modify the behavior of the observers than that of the aggressors (Salmivalli & Peets, 2010).

The above is the central axis of an antibullying program called KiVa. The program emphasizes the importance of student observers to reduce bullying (Garandeau, Lee, & Salmivalli, 2014; Yang & Salmivalli, 2015). The evaluation of its effectiveness not only reduces harassment and victimization, but also increases empathy towards peers and self-efficacy to support and defend them (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Salmivalli & Poskiparta, 2012).

Therefore, the objective is to explain how shame and empathy, the style of confrontation and school safety discriminate between defense observers against encouraging reinforcers in the face of a hypothetical situation of bullying.

Method

Participants

Initially, 2354 students of the three school grades, men and women whose ages are between 12 and 17 years old, were selected through non-probabilistic sampling. They study in one of the 64 public secondary schools sampled and located in different latitudes of the State of Sonora in Mexico. The sample is weighted by zones, schools, grades and shifts (morning and evening). Subsequently, the methodological proposal established by Ortega, Sánchez, and Menesini (2002) was used, which consists of transforming the original scores of the subscales of the observers of school bullying to standardized scores. In this sense, a student was considered a defender when his score was greater than zero on the subscale of defenders and less than or equal to zero on the two remaining subscales. With this procedure, a subsample of 505 observer students was obtained in a hypothetical situation of bullying: 131 defenders ($Z_{Defenders} > 0$; $Z_{Reinforcers}$ and $Z_{Evasives} \leq 0$) and 374 reinforcers ($Z_{Reinforcers} > 0$; $Z_{Defenders}$ and $Z_{Evasives} \leq 0$). Of the total reinforcers, 60.5% are men and 39.5% are women. According to the grade level, 38.7% are enrolled in first grade, 33.4% on second grade, and 27.8% on third grade. Also, 63.6% study in the morning, while 36.4% study in the afternoon. On the contrary, 55.1% of the total defenders are women and 44.9% are men. Most of them study in the morning (73.7%), and many are enrolled on the first grade (49.5%).

Instruments

School Bullying Observer Questionnaire.

The participant role questionnaire (PRQ) of Belacchi and Fanina (2010) was used in the Spanish version of González (2016). The instrument evaluates the roles assumed by students in hypothetical situations of bullying. It is answered with a scale of five frequency points (Never = 1 and Always = 5). The PRQ in the Spanish version (González, 2016) consists of 15 items whose psychometric indicators obtained

with a confirmatory model were: CFI = .96, GFI = .96 and RMSEA = .050, Cronbach's Alpha of .82, which, show that the instrument is valid and reliable for this population. The results showed three dimensions or types of spectators: Reinforcer (pro-aggressor), Defender (pro-victim) and Evasive (indifferent).

Shame Management Scale. The questionnaire of Ahmed (1999) was used to measure the moral emotion of *Shame*, *Recognition of Shame* and *Displacement of Shame* (MOSS-SAST), in the Spanish version for high school students (Valdés, Carlos, Wendlandt, & Ramírez, 2016), which measures said shame from six hypothetical scenarios. It consists of nine items on a scale of five points (Never = 1 and Always = 5) grouped into two factors: *Recognition* and *Displacement*, which satisfies satisfactory indicators that give it validity by construct (CMIN = 1.29, GFI = .98; CFI = .99; NFI = .97; RMSEA = .05). In addition, it has criterion validity to allow differentiation in the two dimensions between students with and without reports of *bullying*.

Empathy Questionnaire. The empathy questionnaire adapted by Bautista, Vera, Tánori, and Váldez (2016) was used in samples of public secondary schools in Sonora, Mexico. The questionnaire is based on the Toronto scale (Spreng, McKinnon, Mar, & Levine, 2009) that measures the emotional dimension and scale of Davis (1980) that measures the cognitive dimension of empathy. This consists of nine items: five evaluate the affective dimension and four the cognitive dimension. The items are answered with a Likert scale with five points 1 (never), 2 (almost never), 3 (sometimes), 4 (almost always) and 5 (always). The instrument presents reliability values in the affective dimension ($\alpha = .81$) and cognitive dimension ($\alpha = .79$) in addition to acceptable adjustment indices in the confirmatory model (CMIN = 3.74, AGFI = .98, CFI = .99; RMSEA = .030).

Conflict Management Questionnaire. The instrument of Cassidy and Long (1996) was used, which evaluates the strategies that students use to confront conflicting situations between peers. This scale is divided into two general dimensions:

confrontation focused on the problem (direct confrontation and reevaluation) and confrontation focused on the regulation of emotions (avoidant and emotional). Each dimension has four items that were answered with a Likert scale of five frequency points (1 = never to 5 = always). The scale has a reliability equal to .89, value obtained from Cronbach's Alpha.

Questionnaire on the Social Climate of the School (CECSCE). We used the questionnaire of Trianes, Blanca, De La Morena, Infante, and Raya (2006), who point out that it has two dimensions: *Regarding the School Center*, which measures the student's relations with the school, school in general with eight items; and *Regarding the Faculty*, which evaluates the nature of the students' relationships with the professors. It consists of 14 items with response options of five points (Never = 1 and Always = 5). However, in this study the dimension referring to the school center was used, since a confirmatory analysis left six items, most of them related to the control, respect, security and trust perceived in the center. The adjustment values were (CMIN = 9.06, GFI = .97, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .05).

Data Collection Procedure

Once the battery of tests was elaborated, two meetings were held to train a group of psychologists and teachers in Regional Development about the objective of the study, the structure, filling and instructions for the application of the instruments. Four work teams led by a researcher were formed to move to the selected schools. The researcher was in charge of requesting permission to enter the school's classrooms and explain the objective of the project to the directors and teachers, while the applicators gave the instructions to the students in the classrooms.

During the application, a copy of the battery was delivered with an electronic response sheet to each student. Subsequently the objective of the investigation, the content of the battery of the instruments and the way of filling the answer sheet were explained to them. The application was made during the class schedule of each group

in a single session. As the student submitted the response forms, the applicators verified that all the questions were answered to avoid problems when capturing the information in the optical reader.

Data Analysis Procedure

Two multivariate dependency analyzes were used, since they provide a joint and integrated view (with more than two variables) to describe or explain the reality being analyzed. First, discriminant analysis was used with a step-wise inclusion method, whose objective was to estimate the relation between a series of independent variables (shame, empathy, confrontation, school safety) and a single non-metric dependent variable (reinforcers against defenders). Subsequently, the resulting significant variables from the previous analysis were submitted to a logistic regression analysis to study the probability ratio of the dependent variable in function of the independent ones. In both cases, the guidelines and assumptions presented in Cea D'Ancona were followed (2001). The entire analytical procedure was carried out with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS version 20).

Ethical Procedures

The article is derived from a project funded by the National Council of Science and Technology entitled "Design and evaluation of a management program for school coexistence in public high schools in the State of Sonora", with registration number 189638, so all possible ethical care was taken. Because they are adolescents, written informed consent was given to the parents or guardians, in addition to the consent signed by the adolescents. In the consent they informed the adolescents and their parents that there would be no financial benefits related to their participation. The data collected would be protected in the anonymity and secrecy of the information, so when answering it was clear what were the purposes of the study, the security, confidentiality of the information and the voluntary nature of their participation.

Results

The strength of each predictor variable has been analyzed to discriminate between student spectators who defend the victim against the reinforcers of the aggressor, seeking to optimize the prediction with the least number of variables. The results of the discriminant analysis, using the method of inclusion by steps, indicate that the discriminant function is significant to differentiate the defenders of the reinforcers, because, although the *canonical correlation* of .41 and the Wilks' Lambda value = .830 are moderate, the value $X^2(5) = 91.60$, $p = .001$ allows the conclusion that the averages of the five variables have sufficient strength to discriminate the groups.

The matrix of *standardized coefficients* and of *structure* show that of the total of variables included at the beginning, the discriminant analysis has needed to select for its function the greatest contribution to prediction and, therefore, with greater discriminating power among the profiles of belonging of the spectators: the recognition of shame (.573), followed by the displacement of shame (-.485), revaluative confrontation (.327), affective empathy (.285) and school safety (.279). Taking into account that the assignment of the subjects to the groups of observers has been made taking into account the degree of similarity to the mean or *centroid* responses of the discriminant function, which are -.364 for the group of reinforcers and .555 for that of defenders, the negative sign in the displacement of shame can be interpreted as subjects with high scores in this construct would be categorized as reinforcing bullying (see Table 1).

Likewise, the results indicate that the defenders of the victim are those subjects who recognize and do not displace shame, who use a revaluative style of confrontation, an affective empathy and who also perceive the school as a safe place. The predictions of the discriminant function, following the criterion of defenders/reinforcers, manages to correctly classify 71.2% of the original grouped cases, supporting the discriminant validity of the predictor variables.

The group of reinforcers appears more clearly identified with 86.4%, diminishing up to 48.0% the capacity to identify the defenders. Variables

cognitive empathy, direct, evasive and emotional confrontation were left out of the criteria of the analysis.

Table 1
Standardized and Structure Coefficients of the Discriminant Function for Reinforcing and Defending Observers

	Standardized coefficients	Structure coeficientes
Affective empathy	.285	.756
Shame recognition	.573	.751
Revaluative confrontation	.327	.659
School safety	.279	.626
Cognitive empathy ^a	---	.549
Direct confrontation ^a	---	.504
Evasive confrontation ^a	---	.478
Emotional confrontation ^a	---	.188
Shame displacement	-.485	.074

^a This variable is not used in the analysis.

Logistic Regression

The equation can correctly classify 71.4% of the group of observers and the percentage of effectiveness is greater for the group that reinforce the aggressive behavior of a partner (86.4%) compared to 48.5% of the group that defends the victim. The approximate percentage of explanation is 22.2% ($R^2 = .222$). The Hosmer-Lemeshow test [$\chi^2(8) = 8.30, p = .401$] was not significant, indicating that there are no differences in the current distribution and the predicted values of the dependent variable. The results according to the regression coefficients, standard errors, significance tests, proportion ratios (*ExpB*) and confidence intervals allow us to conclude that recognizing shame, reassessing the situation as a style of confrontation, being empathetic and perceiving safety in school defines an equation of variables suitable to predict the group belonging to the spectators who tend to reinforce the aggression in a dynamics of school harassment. That is, they are protective factors of the defender of the victim, while displacement of the shame would be a risk factor (see Table 2).

Likewise, the equation includes variables that are more important to correctly classify the reinforcers of the aggression and less important to classify the defenders of the victim. It is important to note that the confidence interval values warn us that these are values associated with minimal differences, since the highest average OR for each unit change in the independent variables was obtained for recognition of shame, that is, 95% CI = 1.24-2.191, and it is the risk of reinforcing the aggression a student has of a certain score in this variable compared to a student who has a higher score in shame recognition.

Discussion and Conclusions

As noted, the objective of this research is to explain how shame and empathy, style of confrontation and school safety, discriminate between defense observers against encouraging reinforcers before a hypothetical situation of school harassment.

In this sense, the student observer of bullying who defends the victim against his peers who reinforce the aggressor (Salmivalli

Table 2
Coefficients, Standard Error, Tests of Significance and Proportion Ratios for a Logistic Regression for Reinforcing Spectators (0) and Defenders (1)

Predictors	B	SE	<i>P</i>	OR	95% C.I.
Shame 1	.50	0.14	.001	1.65	[1.24, 2.19]
Shame 2	-.41	0.12	.001	0.66	[0.52, 0.83]
AE	.27	0.14	.056	1.31	[0.99, 1.73]
RC	.30	0.12	.014	1.35	[1.06, 1.71]
SC.S	.26	0.11	.021	1.30	[1.04, 1.62]

Note. Shame 1=Shame recognition; Shame 2= Shame displacement; AE=Affective Empathy; RC=Revaluative confrontation; SC.S= School climate. Safety.

& Peets, 2010), is explained by the recognition of shame, the displacement of shame, the revaluative confrontation, school safety and affective empathy. The recognition of shame was a protective variable for the student not to perform behaviors that reinforce the aggression towards the victim of harassment. This is because it is known that the behavior of the aggressor is wrong and socially undesirable, and to reinforce it would be to assume an immoral behavior (Haro et al., 2013). On the other hand, the displacement of shame resulted as a risk factor for assuming the behavior of reinforcing the aggressor, which is serious, because holding others responsible for immoral acts increases the probability of repeating the negative behavior (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004). In any case, the result supports the hypothesis that there is a relation between shame and observers of harassment (Mazzone et al., 2016).

Regarding confrontation in problem situations, only the revaluative type is useful as a protective factor for the defending observer against the reinforcer. This type of confrontation is focused on the problem and coincides in part with the results found by Quintana et al., (2009), for pointing out that the planning and search for social support for instrumental reasons is fundamental for the defense observers.

Even though in this study there was no in-depth analysis of the difference between men and women, the hypothesis that women tend to defend victims (Salmivalli & Peets, 2010) would explain the importance of the social revaluation

confrontation variable, because in Sonoran culture family and friends are fundamental for personal development, especially for women (Vera, Laborín, Dominguez, & Peña, 2003).

Also the school as a social context positively influences to defend the victim. This result is interesting because it poses a challenge to the actors of the school to offer students an orderly and safe place (Ruggieria et al., 2013), since they are indications of a good school social climate.

Empathy in its affective dimension continues to be a protective variable against the behavior of reinforcing the aggressor (Alcántar et al., 2015), although in its cognitive dimension it supports the results of Haro and García (2014), who reported that empathy generates some doubts about his role as a moral emotion against the types of observers.

The results presented serve to highlight that affective empathy, shame, cognitive strategies such as confrontation and perception of social climate are relevant constructs to explain the role of the spectators as actors that can contain or reduce the problem of school bullying between peers (Cuevas & Marmolejo, 2016; Haro & García, 2014) and provide information to consolidate a new theoretical proposal of interdependence or social ecology (Meter & Card, 2015) that aims to unify the findings that explain the behavior of observers of harassment between peers.

However, despite recognizing that the present variables in the statistical models help to differentiate and predict the reinforcing and

defending behavior of secondary school students and thereby contribute to the need of analyzing harassment as a social process, at least two fundamental limitations are identified. The first has to do with the cross-sectional design whose measurement is carried out in a single moment. This design has limitations in understanding the behavior of the observers, so it would be necessary in future research to consider the longitudinal designs to analyze the findings over time (Doramajian & Bukowski, 2015; Valdés et al., 2017).

The second is that there is no certainty in recognizing the group of defense observers; This is due to the fact that due to the same dynamic process in which bullying takes place, self-reporting is not an instrument that allows the phenomenon to be assertively discriminated. Pair nominations could be established for them; that is, just as the comrades recognize the aggressors, that the comrades detect who is a defender in situations of aggression within the socio-school context. The combination of methods can generate more robust typologies (Pedroza & Aguilera, 2016).

This can improve knowledge about the behavior of observers: that third part of students population who are not directly involved in peer harassment can undoubtedly become agents of change to combat unjustified aggression within the school context (Salmivalli et al., 1996). The foregoing is important considering that, at the international level, the most effective educational intervention programs are centered on empowering viewers to intervene to prevent violence instead of focusing on perpetrators or victims. This is where we must delve into with the conviction of reducing harassment and generating spaces for peaceful coexistence (Nocentini & Menesini, 2016).

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