Moral Judgments of Sociometrically Neglected Children Concerning Their Bullying Experiences in the First Grade.

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to investigate children's experiences and moral judgements of school bullying. Three first grade classes participated in the study, one from a public and two from private primary schools in Thessaloniki. More specifically, sociometrically neglected children were observed and interviewed about their bullying experiences. Two researchers observed the daily interactions of neglected children for three days in a row and recorded specific interactions and bullying incidents in which the "target-children" were involved and they interviewed them about these particular occasions. Children's responses revealed significant levels of social distress, submission and low self-esteem, but they also suggested the "moral" nature of the motives of bullies, such as sadistic and deliberate aspects of bullying that are not fully included and described in the existing subtypes of aggression. The aforementioned finding may help researchers to broaden current conceptualizations of bullying and victimization.

Keywords: sociometry, peer group, peer relations, moral development, neglected children, children's experiences, bullying.

1. Introduction

For many 6 and 7-year old children, entering kindergarten and first grade is an important developmental step because they face a variety of challenges and difficulties. For example, they have to establish themselves in the peer group, create a positive relationship with the teacher and carry out a wide range of cognitive and academic skill-building activities (e.g., Gregoriadis & Tsigilis, 2008; Mantzicopoulos, 2005; Pianta, 1994). Research findings have shown that there is tremendous variability in how children behave towards different peers, and this variability is likely to be associated with children's sociometric status (Rabiner & Keane, 1993). Because peers can be the judges of a child's social status, an obvious first source of information concerning the behavioral bases of those judgments is the perspective of the peer group (Coie, Dodge & Kupersmidt, 1990; Gregoriadis, 2007).

However, as Coie et al., (1990) argued, social withdrawal and rejection from the peer group is not an instant creation, but a result of a long procedure which, in part, can be attributed to the child's difficulty to interpret the "social signs" presented with, by his or her peers. For example, it is reasonable to assume that peers would display more positive behavior towards popular children, whilst rejected children would tend to receive more aversive treatment (Putallaz & Gottman, 1981). When neglected and rejected children interact with their classmates, their interactions appear to be more disruptive and less prosocial than other children. The aforementioned impressions about the nature of neglected and rejected children's interactions are empirically supported by a number of studies (e.g. Coie et al., 1990; Newcomb, Bukowski & Pattee, 1993; Wood, Cowan & Baker, 2002). But, even if these interactions do not escalate to the point of aggression, the social experiences of neglected children are very often marked by negative, argumentative or defensive exchanges and bullying (Rubin & Hubbard, 2003).

Being disliked by the other children (peer rejection) and being a target of peer aggression or bullying (peer victimization) are two related yet distinct problems concerning the acceptance from the peer group (Perren et al., 2006; Schuster, 1996). Perhaps peer rejection and low sociometric status function as a precursor of peer victimization (Hodges et al., 1997) and may play a crucial role in establishing a child's victim role (Hanish & Guerra, 2004; Perren et al., 2006). In a meta-analysis, Newcomb et al., (1993) showed that children who are characterized as neglected from their classmates display a high degree of withdrawn behavior and are not particularly sociable. In accordance with these findings, Hodges et al., (1999) found that over time internalizing behavior problems, such as withdrawal, anxiety and depression) contribute to victimization and being bullied.

Recent findings have shown that school bullying is becoming an ongoing and serious problem that children and educators face on a daily basis (Bosacki, Marini & Dane, 2006; Marini et al., 2006). Being involved in bully/victim problems in kindergarten and the first grade has been associated with a variety of negative implications, such as school avoidance (Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker, 2009) and perhaps even with a continuous victimization cycle (Perren & Alsaker, 2006). The current literature acknowledges the existence of various types of bullying, such as (a) children who bully others and are not victimized (bullies), (b) children who are victimized and bully others (bully-victims), and (c) children who are victimized without being aggressive (passive victims) (e.g., Perren & Alsaker, 2006; Schwartz, 2000).

Bullies, bully-victims and victims not only have different roles in bullying, but they also display different social behavior patterns (Perren & Alsaker, 2006). As Pellegrini (1998) proposes, bullies use aggression instrumentally against weaker peers, whereas bully-victims use aggression reactively. It is possible that bullies and bully-victims display different forms of aggression. In previous research, investigators have examined bullying from a social-cognitive point of view in order to clarify the decision-making processes of children who behave like this (Bosacki et al., 2006). Crick and Dodge (1994) showed that aggressive children, who display bullying behaviors, consider aggressive responses to social problems as more appropriate and likely to produce more positive instrumental outcomes. These children also tend to underestimate the damage caused to social relationships and the harm done to victims by their behavior (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004; Crick & Dodge, 2006). However, recent research efforts have started identifying bullying as a classic moral issue, insofar as it involves intending to hurt another person or behaving in a way that causes harm to others (Arsenio et al., 2006; Nucci, 2004; Bosacki et al., 2006).

The prevalence of bully/victim problems has been investigated in numerous countries (Smith et al., 1999) mostly in adolescents and older primary students and only a few studies have been conducted among younger children in kindergarten and the first grades of primary school (Alsaker & Valkanover, 2001; Bosacki et al., 2006; Hanish et al., 2004). In addition, although previous research efforts provided important findings about children's decision making in bullying situations, they used quantitative approaches based mainly on teacher reports, observation and questionnaires administered to older children. Although such approaches are necessary, they constrain the participants to answer only to specific questions, rather than being able to discuss the aspects of bullying that are of most interest to them (Bosacki et al., 2006). A few authors attempted to design qualitative studies by asking children to provide drawings and narrative illustrations of bullying and victimization experiences (e.g., Owens et al., 2001, Reimer & Furrow, 2001).

Bosacki, Marini and Dane (2006) extended the previous research of investigators with children from the second to the sixth grade of primary school. In particular the researchers attempted to investigate children's bullying experiences combining pictorial and narrative representations (Ravanis, Pantidos, & Vitoratos, 2010). Specifically, they attempted to elicit children's perceptions on how bullies justify their actions, their motives as well as their suggestions to prevent these bullying incidents from happening again. Their findings showed that children's comments on bullying and victimization were not completely consistent with theories and models generated by quantitative research. Instead, they suggested that apart from the instrumental and behavioural motives, bullies' motives also have a psychological, "moral" nature, such as "sadistic and deliberate aspects of bullying" (Bosacki et al., 2006, p. 243) that are not fully included and described in the existing subtypes of aggression. These research efforts showed that bullying experiences are multidimensional and that it is not easy to gather information for the "lived experiences" (van Manen, 1990) of bullying incidents through teacher report or peer report measures. In addition, the use of qualitative methods provides an insight concerning the variety of tactics used to carry out bullying.

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For example, Owens, Shute and Slee (2000) found that an important motive for teenage girls engaging in indirect or relational bullying was merely that it was fun and exciting to gossip about other children. This finding differentiates the motives that researchers usually ascribe to bullies, which tend to focus on psychopathological issues (Bosacki et al., 2006). Therefore, these kind of qualitative research designs provide the advantage that children's responses will offer a different perspective to the researchers.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate children's thoughts and feelings about bullying and victimization. Due to their ample bullying experiences, children characterized as neglected from their peers were selected to describe their feelings and their thoughts about specific bullying incidents they experienced. Based on the aforementioned research of Bosacki et al., (2006), the current study attempted to extend their work and elicit, in a non-directive manner, sociometrically neglected first graders' views on how bullies justify their behavior, their perceptions of the harm caused to the victims, as well as suggestions for dealing with the bullies. Following the methodology of Bosacki et al., questions aimed at what the bullies and the victims were thinking of and feeling, the motivation for bullying, the reasons that a child is being picked on and actions that might be taken to prevent bullying.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The research was conducted during the spring period of 2006. Three first grade classes, one from a public and two from private primary schools in Thessaloniki, Greece, participated in the study with a total population of 83 children. Parents of all participating children were informed about the study and were asked to fill in a consent form. Very few parents objected to their child's participation and nearly all children (n=79, 43 girls and 36 boys) participated in the study.

2.2 Procedures and measures

Sociometric nominations

The data concerning children's sociometric status were collected during a single session that took place in their classrooms. Interviewers obtained three positive and three negative sociometric nominations from participants. Children were asked to name three classmates whom they "like the most" and three classmates whom they "like the least". In addition to the standard nominations, children were asked to identify three classmates who get "picked on and teased" so that victimized subgroups of neglected or rejected children could be identified. The sociometric interview was conducted with the parallel use of a big cardboard containing the photos of every child in the class in order to assist children to remember their classmates.

Sociometric status was determined by calculating and standardizing numbers of positive and negative nominations received by each child across all children in each classroom, based on the procedure described by Coie, Dodge, and Coppotelli (1982). Social preference (SP) scores were calculated as the standardized difference between liking and disliking scores, and social impact (SI) scores were calculated as the standardized sum of liking and disliking scores. Within the 'neglected' group, children that their Z score for "picked on and teased" was >1.0, were categorized as victimized-bullied.

Observational data

The children's sociometric classification revealed a total of 9 children that were identified as neglected in their classrooms. Six of these children were classified as victimized-bullied as described above. These 6 children (4 boys, 2 girls) became the "target-children" of the current study. More specifically, two researchers observed the daily interactions of each one of these children for three days in a row. Each observer recorded specific interactions and bullying incidents in which the "target-children" were involved. There was an attempt to capture the stream of activities across the school day, although observations during break time and free play were considered as the most important because they provided more useful observation data.

A wide range of bullying episodes and negative interactions including threats, insults, false accusations, swearing, aggressive gestures, dirty looks, ridicule, hitting, kicking, spitting, tripping, throwing things, stealing friends, stealing possessions, excluding someone, avoidance, etc. were observed by the observers during these 18 days.

Every bullying incident that was linked with the target-children and every negative interaction were coded by two independent observers into three categories (Perren & Alsaker, 2006): a) verbal abuse, b) physical abuse and c) exclusion-rejection as presented in table 1. Inter-rater reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa for all the coded categories. Cohen's Kappa between observer pairs ranged from $K = 0,82$ to $K = 0,86$, suggesting relatively high inter-rater reliability. Intercoder disagreements were resolved by review from a third observer and discussion. In addition, the three observers-coders selected, from the total amount of bullying incidents that were recorded, three specific incidents for each target-child in order to discuss them with the children in the interview that would follow. For every target-child there were selected three incidents concerning verbal abuse, physical abuse and exclusion-rejection.

Children's interviews

In agreement with related studies on qualitative inquiry (e.g., Bosacki, Marini, & Dane, 2006; Rogers, 2000; Reimer & Furrow, 2001), a semi-structured interview was designed to elicit the target-children's responses about their bullying experiences. Children were individually interviewed in a quiet room away from the classroom. Each of the six target-children were prompt to answer open-ended questions about three particular bullying episodes that occurred to them the previous days, concerning verbal abuse, physical abuse and exclusion-rejection.

Each interview was conducted with the use of two identical fluffy animal puppets, named Zip (the victim) and Pep (the bully). The examiner introduced them to the child, and the puppets reproduced-narrated three bullying incidents-stories that happened to each child and then encourage them to talk about their feelings. In particular, the questions included in the interview focused both on the victims' feelings and the victims' perceptions about the bullies' feelings and intentions. The children were called to answer six questions for each incident: 1) "how do you think Zip felt when this happened?", 2) "what was Pep thinking?", 3) "why would Pep want to bully?", 4) "how do you think Pep is feeling", 5) "why is Zip being teased and picked on?", 6) "what could Zip do so that s/he is not teased and picked on?".

Coding of children's responses

Children's responses to open-ended questions were initially analyzed and coding categories were developed in accordance with the most important topics that emerged for each question. Responses to the questions 2 and 3 regarding the victims' perceptions about the bullies' motives and thoughts, were coded to reflect whether the content was instrumental/behavioral or psychological in nature. Responses to the questions 1, and 4, regarding the victims' feelings and the victims' perceptions about the bullies' feelings were coded in terms of positive, neutral and negative affect (Bosacki, et al., 2006). Because all six target children described that their feelings were negative, and in accordance with previous research (Bosacki et al., 2006; Keller et al., 2003), children's responses were further coded to indicate whether the feelings were simple, primary emotions (e.g. happy, angry, sad) or complex moral emotions (e.g., shame, embarrassment). Responses to the question 5, regarding the reasons that the victim was being teased and picked on were coded into those referring to physical characteristics such as physical appearance, clothes, hair, etc,, those tapping psychological attributes and behavioral characteristics such as personality or intelligence and those referring to external causes/others' fault (Bosacki et al., 2006). Finally, responses to question 6, were divided according to whether the target-children proposed active strategies to limit or avoid being picked on, including telling the teacher or confronting the bully, or passive approaches such as retreating, hiding or ignoring the bully.

3. Results

Children produced a total of 392 answers for the 108 questions they were called to answer with an average answer of 3.62 per question (see table 2). In particular, the six target children were each called to answer 18 questions, 6 for each one of the three bullying incidents. Needless to say, all children did not produce the same number of answers, as some children gave multiple explanations and answers, whilst other were more brief in their descriptions and only two children had difficulties answering some of the questions.

Regarding the feelings of the victim, in response to question 1 (table 3), "how do you think Zip (victim) felt when this happened?", 84,6% (66/78) of the responses referred to negative emotions such as "*Zip feels sad*", "*angry*", "*crying inside*", 12,8% (10/78) referred to neutral emotions such as "*did not care*", "*didn't expect that*", "*doesn't remember*", and only 2,6% (2/78) referred to positive feelings such as "*it's ok*", "*Zip loves him anyway*".

From a total of 66 answers concerning their negative emotions, target-children gave 65% (43/66) answers referring to simple emotions (e.g., not happy) and 35% (23/66) referring to a complex or moral emotion (e.g., ashamed, miserable, wants to go home). As far as the first question is concerned, children gave the largest number of answers 19,1% (78/392) showing that the victims' feelings attarcts their attention a lot.

In response to the 2nd question, "what was Pep (bully) thinking", as it is presented in table 4, 65% (41/63) of the responses referred to psychological aspects such as "*Pep tried to harm her*", "*wants to scare her*", "*he thinks he is bigger*", whereas 35% (22/63) of the responses referred to behavioral or instrumental responses, such as "*Pep wants to take his toys*", "*he wanted to take his seat*". According to this finding, children seem to acknowledge, apart from the practical/instrumental aspect of bullying, a psychological aspect as well, since they refer to deliberate actions intended to harm or to cause pity to the victim. Compared to the total of 392 answers, the second question concentrated 16,1% (63/392) of the responses children gave.

Regarding the motives of the bully, in response to the 3rd question (table 5), "why would Pep want to bully?", the majority of responses 54,1% (33/61) involved action or instrumental/behavioral references, such as "*Pep wants her things*", "*he takes Zip's toy*", whereas an equally large amount of responses 45,9% (28/61) included psychological references. From the total of the responses that included psychological references, 64,2% (18/28) referred to deliberate and intentional actions, such as "*because he likes it*", "*because he is bad*", "*because Pep is stronger than Zip*", "*Pep has fun teasing Zip*", and 35,8% (10/28) referred to reactive aggression and emotional reactions, such as "*Pep is jealous*", "*cause Zip plays with his friends*". Even though they seem to have difficulties in explaining the motives of bullies, children perceive an important part of the bullies' behavior as a result of an intentional and deliberate behavior. The third question receives the 15,6% (61/392) of the answers the children provided for all the questions asked.

The 4rth question gathered the 15,8% (62/392) of the answers given by the children. 83,8% (52/62) of the responses to question 4 "how do you think Pep is feeling" (see table 6), referred to positive emotions, such as "*Bullies enjoy it*", "*Pep is laughing*", "*Pep likes teasing and is happy*", 9,7% (6/62) referred to negative feelings, such as "*Pep never smiles*", "*he is angry*", "*he hates Zip*", and only 3,3% (2/62) referred to neutral emotions (e.g. *he doesn't care*, *Pep doesn't understand*, *I don't think Pep knows he is doing bad*). Another 3,3% (2/62) of the responses were coded as missing or uncodable. In agreement with the results from question 2 and 3, children's responses to this question also seem to describe deliberate practices and intentional actions in the bullies' motives, thoughts and feelings.

Regarding the reasons that the victim is being bullied, in response to the 5th question (table 7), "why is Zip being teased and picked on?", most of the responses 51,5% (36/70) involved psychological attributes and behavioral characteristics of the children, such as "*Zip is stupid*", "*kids don't love Zip*", "*he has no friends*", "*Zip doesn't play well*", "*he can't draw and paint*", "*cause he is not a good boy*". Also, 41,4% (29/70) of the responses involved physical characteristics references, such as "*Zip is ugly*", "*she is fat*", "*because she doesn't have nice clothes and hair*", "*the others are bigger*", while only 7,1% (5/70) of the neglected children's responses attributed their bullying experiences to the others' behavior and responsibility, such as "*it is Pep's fault*", "*Zip didn't do anything*", "*bullies are bad and stupid*", "*Pep hates her*". Looking at this particular result, one can assume that neglected-victimized children seem to blame mostly themselves for the bullying incidents and much less the bullies and their classmates. Children's explanations to the reasons victims are being bullied gathered an important percentage 17,8% (70/392) of the total answers given in this research.

The last question, "what could Zip do so that s/he is not teased and picked on?" gathered the smallest amount of answers on behalf of the children 14,8% (58/392), indicating perhaps that children with low sociometric status who are characterized as victimized-bullied, face difficulties in proposing strategies and practices to avoid being picked on and teased. In particular (see table 8), 72,5% (42/58) of the responses reflected a passive activity, such as "*Zip should ignore Pep*", "*she should change seat*", "*I wouldn't do anything*", "*my mom says not to talk to bullies*", whilst only 18,9% (11/58) of the responses referred to active strategies and positive coping with the problem, such as "*tell him to stop*", "*Zip should go to the teacher*", "*try to be friends with him*". Finally, 8,6% (5/58) of the responses were coded as missing or uncodable. In sum, the results suggest that children characterized as victimized and neglected are not very capable of thinking and using active ways to deal with bullying. Especially when it comes to confronting the bully or talking to him about his motives, children manifested very poor skills.

4. Discussion

This study was designed to investigate young children's feelings and thoughts by asking open-ended questions about bullying and victimization. This kind of interpretative methodology facilitates children "to provide intuitive and spontaneous comments" (Bosacki et al., 2006) about their bullying experiences which can assist researchers into broadening and understanding of bullying mechanisms.

In response to the question "how do you think Zip (victim) felt when this happened?" 85% of the children referred to negative emotions showing that their daily school life is characterized by frustration, isolation and negative feelings. In addition, some of the children's answers included complex feelings such as desire to go home, embarrassment and descriptions of low self-esteem. It seems that neglected children, who are already considered to have poor social skills and difficulties achieving positive interactions (Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker, 2009), are negatively reinforced by their bullying experiences, thus resulting to withdrawal, rule violations, loss of interest for academic achievement and even school denial. Therefore, one can assume that there seem to be developmental trends with regard to behavioral correlates of bullying and low sociometric status (Perren et al., 2006). Moreover, based on theories that underscore the importance of interaction with other people in the development of the self (e.g. Mead, 1934), it can be assumed that individual differences in self-concepts may emerge based on the amount and types of interactions children have with their classmates (Nelson, Rubin & Fox, 2005). For example, Boivin and Hymel (1997) report that socially withdrawn and neglected children have been found to be associated with low-self perceptions in middle childhood. Additionally, few if any authors have examined the influence that peer acceptance might have in the development of self-perceptions across early childhood.

Regarding the reasons that the victim is being bullied, in response to the question "why is Zip being teased and picked on?" children's answers focused both on psychological attributes and on physical characteristics references. More than half of the answers involved the victim blaming itself for the bullying incident. Children reported low self-esteem and feelings of self-unworthiness, lack of intelligence, lack of friends and lack of attractive skills and abilities. Having no friends may thus be considered as a social risk factor for being victimized. However, despite the fact that children reported not having friends as a possible factor for attracting bullies, there was no mention on behalf of the children concerning skill deficits or the social skills required to make friends and gain peer acceptance. This last finding which is in agreement with the findings of Bosacki et al., (2006), seems important since most of the anti-bullying intervention programs focus on improving the social skills as a means to enhance the peer relationships of victims as well as bullies.

Another 41,4% of children's responses involved the victim blaming himself/herself for physical characteristic references, such as lack of beauty, weird clothes, ugly hair, small height and answers showing guilt for low socioeconomic status. This finding is intriguing because factors concerning physical characteristics and socioeconomic status cannot be altered directly through interventions and usually they are not the primary target of the intervention programs. What's even more impressive, is the fact that only a small percentage of children's answers (7,1%) attributed responsibility to the behavior of their peers and the actions of the bullies. As Crick and Bigbee (1998) argue, submissiveness and low self-esteem is considered a hallmark of victimization. Perhaps some cognitive reinterpretation processes may lead children to internalize the responsibility for the bullying incidents and consider themselves as worthless of being accepted (Bandura, 1978; Perren & Alsaker, 2006).

In response to the question "what could Zip do so that s/he is not teased and picked on?", the majority of the children's answers (72,5%) referred to passive activities such as avoiding or ignoring the problem, withdrawing from the incident or the class activity or accepting the harassment without doing anything. It seems that children with low sociometric status face difficulties in coping with the bully and in using various active strategies to minimize the problem. Besides, there are several studies available showing that victims have serious problems defending themselves (e.g., Schwartz, 2000). Only 18,9% of the children's answers referred to active strategies and positive coping with the problem, such as confronting the bully, seeking assistance from an adult, attempting to communicate and make friends with the other, thus, showing that children with low peer acceptance are in need of assistance concerning their "coping style and strategies". However, literature on children's coping style and strategies against everyday rejection experiences, such as being picked on, bullied and excluded by the peer group is quite limited. In one of the few available studies, Fabes and Eisenberg (1992) investigated the relation between young children's social competence and their anger-related responses to peer provocation. They found important differences in coping responses as a function of social history.

In particular, their findings showed that popular children handled interpersonal anger in relatively straightforward, active and non-aggressive ways, while less socially competent children on the other hand, were more likely to rely on indirect strategies, such as withdrawing, telling the teacher, etc. It seems that victimized children have problems setting limits and defending themselves effectively. Therefore, they could benefit from special assertiveness training (Perren & Alsaker, 2006). Nevertheless, this individual training may be more successful if it is followed by broader interventions in the classroom. Perhaps classroom discussions about the moral implications of bullying children combined with teaching of social skills and strategies to interact in a positive way with the bully can be a first step in improving the classroom climate and empowering the coping styles of less socially competent children.

The children's answers to the question "what was Pep (bully) thinking" attributed motives to the bullies that included psychological reasons for bullying. Specifically, 65% of the children's answers referred to psychological motives of the bullies, such as deliberate actions to harm the victim, intentional efforts to intimidate and conscious bullies' attempts to inflict themselves upon the victims, whilst only 35% reported behavioral/instrumental motives like stealing possession and friends. A small change in the children's answers occurred, when participants were asked "why would Pep want to bully?", without however altering the original pattern of answers on the previous question. A slight majority of the children's answers (54,1%) involved behavioral/instrumental references such as power games, inflicting upon the weaker child, grabbing toys, while an equally important part of children's answers (45,9%) included psychological references, such as reactive aggression, emotional reactions and deliberate actions on behalf of the bully. This finding is in partial agreement with those of Bosacki et al., (2006), since in their research effort, children ascribed reasons to the bullies' actions regarding behavioral/instrumental motives to a much larger extend. However, in that study children also indicated an important amount of psychological motives concerning the bullies' reasons to bully.

The same pattern of responses was observed also in children's answers concerning the bullies' feelings. In particular, in response to the question "how do you think Pep is feeling", an imposing 83,8% of the children's answers referred to positive emotions on behalf of the bully, thus, describing the intentional and deliberate nature of their actions. Answers like "he enjoys it" and "he is happy" show that victims describe up to point a whole different set of motives and behaviors concerning bullying that do not seem to match with the existing subtypes of aggression in the literature.

As far as the victims' reported behavioral/instrumental motives for bullying is concerned, they seem in agreement with the concept of proactive or instrumental aggression, which involves the brutal and without emotion use of force as a means for the bully to confirm his/her power (Bosacki et al., 2006; Poulin & Boivin, 2000). On the other hand, reactive aggression refers to emotionally driven actions in response and retaliation to any kind of provocation (Poulin & Boivin, 2000). As for the psychological motives that the participants' answers attributed to the bullies, they seem in partial agreement with this concept of reactive aggression. Descriptions showing that bullying was initialized because of anger toward the victim is somewhat fit with this subtype (Bosacki et al., 2006). Therefore, investigation of children's explanations concerning bullying seem to support at first the validity of the proactive/reactive distinction.

However, the existing subtypes of aggression do not appear adequate in trying to categorize answers that bullying was committed on purpose to harm or hurt the victim. One can trace an emotional origin to this motive for bullying but it is not completely compatible with reactive aggression because positive and not negative emotions are attributed to the bully. In addition, as Bosacki et al., say "if one were to search for a label to describe this kind of bullying, one might say that it had a sadistic quality" (2006, 241). For example one answer said that "the bully bullies just because he can", and another that "Pep feels better when Zip cries". The repetition of this finding becomes even more important taking under consideration that it concerns 6-8 years old children.

Overall, the findings support the aspect that it is beneficial to include qualitative methods while investigating victims' feelings and perceptions about bullying and that they can contribute to the existing knowledge concerning bullying. The extension of our understanding of the social and interactional nature of bullying has practical implications for the design of such prevention and intervention efforts (Perren & Alsaker, 2006). The intervention efforts that targeted only on the acquisition of social skills may be too narrow in scope.

Apart from variables like assertiveness training, conflict resolution, anger management and social problem-solving which focus on skill deficits that may contribute to the problem, it may be useful to include "classroom-wide modules that address morally based issues (Bosacki et al., 2006), such as establishing a positive classroom climate, teaching social skills, discussing bullying openly in the class and composing with the children clear rules against bullying. In some occasions bullies behave aggressively not from a lack of social skills but because this behavior is producing the desirable social or instrumental rewards, such as getting the attention of peers and the teacher (Sutton et al., 1999). Based on the findings of this study, if bullying is perceived by some children as a very functional, rewarding behavior, then it might not be enough only to teach them strategies for anger management, to compose rules and to use problem-solving procedures. In order to reduce bullying incidents for these children, a more class-wide approach would appeal attractive, turning attention on the perspective of the victim, and emphasizing moral concepts such as compassion, caring, sharing, social inclusion, respect, acceptance of others, etc.

Strenths and limitations of the study and further research

The current study was partially based on the methodology Bosacki et al., (2006) used on 8 to 12 year old students, while in this study the research design was developmentally adjusted for first graders. One limitation of the study was the small number of the participants that do not allow us to proceed to further conclusions and findings. The repetition of such a research effort is surely needed before one can talk with certainty about the moral motives of bullying.

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APPENDIX - TABLES

Table 1.: Coding system for target-children's interactions and bullying incidents

Category	Description
Verbal abuse	Threats, insults, accusations, calling names, teasing, aggressive gestures, ridicule
Physical abuse	Tripping, spitting, throwing things, pushing, hitting, kicking
Exclusion-Rejection	Stealing possessions, not sharing toys, stealing friends, excluding someone, avoidance

Table 2: Frequencies of answers to the total 108 questions (18 questions per child)

Questions	1st bullying incident	2nd bullying incident	3rd bullying incident	Total answers
1. How do you think Zip felt..?	28	25	25	**78** (19,9%)
2. What was Pep thinking?	21	22	20	**63** (16,1%)
3. Why would Pep want to bully?	20	19	22	**61** (15,6%)
4. How do you think Pep is feelling?	18	23	21	**62** (15,8%)
5. Why is Zip being teased and picked on?	24	26	20	**70** (17,8%)
6. What could Zip do so that s/he is not teased and picked on?	20	17	21	**58** (14,8%)
Total	**131**	**132**	**129**	**392 (100%)**

Table 3: Coding of 1st question

Coding categories	1st question: feelings of the victim	
Negative affect	**66**	84,6%
Neutral affect	**10**	12,8%
Positive affect	**2**	2,6%
Total	**78**	100%

Table 4: Coding of 2nd question

Coding categories	2nd question: what is bully thinking?	
Instrumental/behavioral	**22**	35%
Psychological	**41**	65%
Total	**63**	100%

Table 5: Coding of 3rd question

Coding categories	3rd question: what is bully's' motive?	
Instrumental/behavioral	**33**	54,1%
Psychological	**28**	45,9%
Total	**61**	100%

Table 6: Coding of 4rth question

Coding categories	4rth question: feelings of the bully	
Negative affect	**6**	9,7%
Neutral affect	**2**	3,3%
Positive affect	**54**	87%
Total	**62**	100%

Table 7: Coding of 5th question

Coding categories	5th question: why is Zip being teased and picked on?	
Psychological attributes/behavioral characteristics	**36**	51,5%
Physical characteristics	**29**	41,4%
External causes/others' fault	**5**	7,1%
Total	**70**	100%

Table 8: Coding of 6th question

Coding categories	6th question: what could Zip do so that s/he is not teased and picked on??	
Passive activity	**42**	72,5%
Active positive psychological coping	**11**	18,9%
Missing-not coded	**5**	8,6%
Total	**58**	100%