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**"BULLYING IN ITALIAN SCHOOLS BETWEEN NORMALITY,
DEVIANCE AND STIGMA.
A STATISTICAL INVESTIGATION BUT NOT ONLY THAT"**

- Terenzio Fava (Department of, Economics, Society and Politics, University of Urbino, Italy)

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**Bullying in Italian schools between normality, deviance and stigma.
A statistical investigation but not only that.**

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Abstract

The nowadays narratives show us a strict combination between bullying and school that seems indissoluble. The latter is "imposed" on us as its natural environment. Its "natural area". But is this really the case or is it perhaps that the main context of bullying is elsewhere? Outside it? In circles of acquaintances, friendships and recreational activities?

Other questions are important. Is this a form of deviance or, more simply, a normal expression of a specific phase of life? Are we facing with individual pathologies related to internal deficits or more realistically with the dynamics of interaction typical of adolescence?

We will try to analyze all these aspects by observing the data collected thanks to field research conducted in high schools in central Italy.

What is bullying?

The essay presented here is the result of a survey conducted in high schools in the two years preceding the onset of the 2020 pandemic. A work that involves over fifty classes, divided between lyceums, technical institutes and professional schools, located in Central Italy and specifically in the regions of Emilia-Romagna, Marche, Tuscany and Umbria and in the provinces of Modena, Rimini, Ancona, Pesaro-Urbino, Arezzo and Perugia.

The investigation was born with the aim of shedding light on the phenomenon of bullying, considered today to be an emerging and very widespread behavior, despite that it always represents an ordinary practice in the relational dynamics that characterize the human experience. As it unfolds, it presents itself as a prevaricating action, based on relational imbalances, typical of certain phases of life such as those of adolescence. Without, however, being exclusive. And here, before delving into the analysis, it is important to make some clarifications.

The first is to emphasize the fact that in it there is always arrogance, aggression, oppression, intimidation, which are carried out in an abuse of power that can be direct, even in violent physical contact and in any case in face to face, or indirect, through mockery, humiliation, isolation, exclusion of the other [Fonzi 1997, Genta 2002, Civita 2006].

The second is to underline how the phenomenon remains, in the works carried out over the years, not well identified in its boundaries, not always precise and coherent [Fornaro 2012], in its actors and their characteristics, in the areas and social contexts where it occurs, in the ways in which it is carried out and the meanings it takes on.

In the common idea there is a tendency to place it within dynamics that concern relationships between peers. Among peers [Olweus 1993, Gini and Pozzoli 2018]. Ending up reading it in an almost exclusive correlation with the school environment and in particular with compulsory school, often even elementary school. A fact that appears more the result of approaches and methodological choices than the expression of reality.

It is a practice exercised in a variety of contexts and is not typical of specific environments only. Let's think about bullying between adults. To work environments where *mobbing* takes place, without this redefining its substance. To the military world where *hazing* takes place and is expressed in harmony with the hierarchical logic of camaraderie. To the field of politics where there is a growth in behavior that conforms to bullying. Which become political strategy. A source of consensus made up of abuses of power, intimidation, verbal attacks, vulgar derision which, amidst the complicit applause of many supporters, spilled over both on the political opponent and on weaker social categories¹.

for most analysts bullying, however, takes place in a relationship between peers, who share experiences related to age, attendance and, obviously, schooling. The fact is that beyond the different positions, it remains an "odd game", between a plurality of actors and roles, whose key element consists in the asymmetry between the parts. Between the bully and his prey first. Extended, however, to other positions and roles. And, therefore, between the abuser and his supporters, between the latter and the victim, etc.

The imbalance of power is the fire of interaction, which is fueled by states and facts defined in the game, in the roles, in the context and in the group dynamics. In a process of *building weakness and stigma*, which becomes the backbone of the whole. Bullying cannot disregard this process.

The abuser finds targets, victims and action only after having identified, highlighted and marked the weaknesses of others. The "easier" ones such as physical or mental discomfort, sexual preferences, ethnicity, gender. And the "perhaps more complicated" ones that imply translations of reality, conventions, positions and meanings. Think, in this sense, about the teacher dealing with some of his fragilities that are perceived and shared in the classroom, or of the *nerd* or the so-called "geek", forced to suffer harassment from classmates who are usually less gifted, if nothing else. in terms of interests, study and scholastic results.

Bullying finds its genesis in an observation of diversity, placed at the center and made stigma in sharing and communicating with others. It is not a relationship between two (bully vs victim), but rather a group dynamic. Strategic interaction between roles². Complementary, interchangeable, superimposable. Hybrids. Due to

¹Think in this sense of the political use of the "mud machine", central to the action of a political leader like Matteo Salvini. But one could also think of many other examples.

²The most classic distinction identifies six figures: the bully, the bully's helper, the supporter, the victim, the victim's defender, the spectator [Olweus 1993, Civita 2006, Gini and Pozzoli 2018]. Others add those of the consoler and the mediator [Belacchi 2008]. All figures that then encounter further distinctions within them (not always convincing). The bully can, therefore, be defined as aggressive,

an almost exhaustion of "pure" figures. It is a practice that loses its meaning without the public. The prevaricating gesture needs its stage and its audience.

Generally, we tend to attribute to the bully a lack of empathy, an inability to take on board the suffering of others, an insensitivity towards the damage or discomfort caused by their behavior. But perhaps defining the bully as a person lacking empathy is too scholastic.

Empathy has two souls, *emotional* and *cognitive* [Goleman 1997, Damico 2013]. Bullying feeds in the second. The first characterizes children, pre-adolescents, subjects with a "limited self" whose "mirror" is not yet *the generalized other*³, who should not be included in the phenomenon as they are incapable of activating within complex social processes, to take on the role of the *distinct other* without, however, still being able to place themselves within a group dynamic and a competitive game [Mead 1966].

The bully lives on *cognitive empathy*, which develops during adolescence in the face of a personality that takes shape and a Self that becomes social. In an attitude that allows to fully take on the point of view of others and *understand their perspective*. In the distinction between self and other, without the need for identification, sharing and emotional involvement.

Abuse has its own elaboration. His own rationality. It is a *cognitive attitude*, a "perspective taking" that captures the emotions and suffering of others and makes them the cornerstone of the game. *Cognitive empathy* towards *instrumental use of another's affiliation*. Suffering (the crying body) is not only captured, but also strategically extended to others. "Artfully" placed as a central element on the stage where the game takes place. But this is possible only starting from the transition between childhood and adolescence. This is where the bully and bullying are born. In the instincts of adolescence and in the reference (pragmatic and symbolic) to the *other* which, in the evolution towards the social self, becomes *generalized*. This is to disprove those who explain the phenomenon as a conduct whose intensity tends to reduce as age passes (towards adolescence) [Fonzi 1997].

Bullying is *ritualized aggression*, both *expressive*, in being communication and "relational target" (also towards the formal order) [De Leo 1998], and *instrumental*, being equally "purpose-oriented" and aimed at affirming status and positions within the group.

The ideal type of the prevaricator expects him to be a winner. In his ability to identify the victim, process and project the stigma, place him at the center of the interaction between roles and obtain recognition, rewards and leadership.

A final point to clarify the subject concerns the idea of *repetitiveness*⁴, established, albeit with some exceptions [Rigby 2002], as the basic condition for talking about bullying. Perhaps the point is not so much about the *repetitiveness* of the action but rather about its *reproducibility*. Essential element in the game economy and,

anxious, passive, temporary [Marini and Mameli 2002, Genta 2002, Civita 2006], while for the victim a distinction is made between passive and provocative [Lawson 2001]. The victims are then still defined as collusive [Besag 1989], false [Baldry 2004], true, paranoid and denying their role [Genta 2002].

³Explaining the aggressive behavior typical of third childhood, it would be more correct to refer to a deficit in *emotional empathy* which we could also explain as the result of a deficiency in the learning of *social grammar*, connected to psycho-social conditions, environmental situations and the first socialization process. Stop indeed considering it a form of bullying. Which is something else.

⁴ «A student is the object of bullying actions, that is, he is bullied or victimized, when he is exposed, repeatedly over time, to offensive actions carried out by one or more classmates» [Olweus 1993, 12].

therefore, in the strategic interaction between roles. In bullying, the significance of the action does not lie in its repetition (against a predestined victim) but in the "perceived" possibility that it can be reproduced by involving other and new actors. In his case references can be different. Think of the choice to stay out of the game (the *outsider*), or the even more appropriate choice of supporting the bully (the *passive bully* or *gregarious bully*). Two positions in strong relation with the idea that a certain type of action that can be reproduce and reverberate on themselves as well⁵.

Research

After the foregoing and before moving on to data analysis, there remain some brief considerations on the research and its methodology.

The first concerns the choice of the observation context, which falls on the school environment, where the phenomenon is certainly present and where it can be studied by finding conditions that are well suited to the operation. This, however, is in the awareness that school does not represent the *natural area* of bullying, but rather one of its *daily realities*. Consequently, avoiding proposing improper *elective affinities* for a much more widespread phenomenon outside it, in circles of acquaintances and friendships, in spaces for meeting and recreational activity.

Furthermore, this leads to the exclusion of both third childhood and pre-adolescence from the observation, by focusing exclusively on adolescence. The age of identity construction [Erikson 1974]. The first "road test" [Elmer and Reicher 2000] between internal (self-)control systems and new forms of external control. The docking point to the formalized world. The phase in which the subject defines and proposes desires, preferences, objectives, capabilities and limits. With the peer group - one of the places in which social identity is outlined [Tajfel 1971] - which is an essential reference in the construction of a "map of social reality" through which to understand the surrounding world [Elmer, Reicher 2000] and with behavior that is reflected and fed between subjects who interact on a daily basis, know each other, hang out and seek recognition (position, status and reputation) in the conduct adopted [Polmonari 2000]. Furthermore, adolescence represents an existential moment that can open channels of crisis towards the construction of "negative identities" [Erikson 1974], which can be compared, on a hypothetical and potential level, to deviant behavior. Where techniques of *moral disengagement* [Bandura 1996] and/or *neutralization of norms* [Matza 1976] are also refined.

The idea is, therefore, to subject young people attending high schools (lyceum, professional and technical institutes) aged between 14 and 19 to observation.

Bullying is associated, sometimes inappropriately, with deviant behavior but it must be said that the "deviance problem" can be addressed from different perspectives. Observing "the deviant in his nature" according to a (prevalent) psychological perspective, with an approach centered on the subject whose personality and psychic functions are accounted. Or, differently, "deviance in its nature" following a sociological perspective, with attention to the complexity of social behavior, its processes and its cognitive and interactive dynamics [De Leo 1998].

⁵ «The passive bully is not interested in overpowering others but joins the group for fear of being a victim» [Civita 2006, 34].

The second path runs into observing the behavior in its context (social and cultural), in its manifestations, in its being an expression of a precise season of life - made up of continuous new *others* to interact with, measure and compete, in the diversified spaces of everyday life – and provides the conditions for abandoning and purging the idea that too often reads, explains and deforms the young "bully" in its alleged pathological dimensions.

The work uses quantitative and qualitative methods, techniques and tools and set of data collected through a questionnaire administered to a sample of young people enrolled in high schools. With the support of testimonies and subjective experience of teachers, students and parents, obtained thanks to around seventy interviews.

Deviant behaviors

The starting point of the research is to *define the situation*, identifying conduct that concerns the world of youth and is expressed in the violation of rules, norms and social conventions.

In the first section of the questionnaire, students are therefore asked to indicate the so-called "deviant" behaviors they have witnessed in the classroom, within the institute and in the context of their friendships and acquaintances.

Let's start from the classroom, where the most widespread behavior consists of a lack of respect towards teachers. Reported by almost half of the respondents (46.7) and also fully recognized by the teachers: "It is a serious problem, some teachers suffer real violence and in some cases they can even be threatened in exchange for high grades" (Teacher 1).

This is followed by thefts (22.0), offenses regarding physical appearance (15.9) and heavy teasing (15.1), racist insults (9.0), acts of vandalism (7.6), illicit requests for money (6.9), homophobic offenses (3.8) and sexual harassment (2.5). Girls report more frequently the lack of respect towards teachers, thefts, physical and racist insults, mainly concerning boys coming from disadvantaged families from the point of view of socio-cultural status, which are then those most present in professional schools, where certain habits (almost all) find a more sustained diffusion. To an extent even double, sometimes even triple, compared to the other two institutes. An evident, structural, in some ways a functional fact. Inside schools that seem to be an *ad hoc* solution for a mass of *other students* to be accommodated. Schools where the environment is overheated, conflictual and, of course, there is no shortage of violent events: "bitch, slut, whore, it was truly a climate of tension where everyone hated everyone" (Student49); "a few days ago at the professional school a boy was barred" (T28).

Tab. 1. Deviant behaviors observed in class

<i>Behaviors</i>	<i>Av</i>	<i>Professional institutes</i>	<i>Technical institutes</i>	<i>Lyceums</i>
Thefts	22.0	30.2	17.5	18.8
Lack of respect for professors	46.7	47.3	43.0	52.8
Sexual harassment	2.5	2.5	3.6	0.5
Physical offenses	15.9	19.0	14.1	15.0
Homophobic offenses	3.8	3.4	3.8	4.4
Racist offenses	9.0	10.7	9.2	6.3
Heavy teasing	15.1	19.8	14.7	8.8

Requests for money	6.9	11.9	4.7	4.1
Vandalism	7.6	10.2	7.8	3,4

Source: University of Urbino 2018, n. 847 cases (for all tables onward)

By observing data for the two-year and the three-year courses the picture is redefined. Given the average value recorded on the entire sample for each individual conduct and compared with the one of the two-year courses, a less problematic situation emerges in technical institutes and lyceums, especially when it comes to theft, vandalism and heavy teasing. In schools "where people go to learn a trade", however, there is a clear worsening on all fronts, with very strong variations of improper requests for money (+16.9) and heavy teasing (+15.6). Numbers that explain the professional two-year course as certainly difficult contexts.

In the transition to the three-year period the changes are not very strong and fluctuating in the technical institutes and high schools. In the former, racist insults (-4.1) and sexual harassment (-4.0) decrease, while physical insults increase (+6.1). In the latter, lack of respect towards teachers rises (+8.3), thefts (+7.1), acts of vandalism (+4.2) and physical insults (+3.1), while racist behaviors decrease, even decisively (-13.8).

Differently, in professional schools the trend follows a single direction, that of degrowth, usually quite rapid. This is the case of requests for money (-16.7), heavy teasing (-15.3), physical insults (-13.8) and acts of vandalism (-10.9). If it is true, therefore, that so-called deviant behaviors tend to decrease with age, this applies to professional schools and less so to other types of schools, where, however, they are more limited. Which could also be explained in the *exit*, in the abandonment, concerning subjects (perhaps among the most problematic) who do not pass the transition to the three-year period.

Tab. 2. Deviant behaviors observed in class. Two-year and three-year course compared

Behaviors	Av	Two-year course: change in % points compared to the average value			Change in % points between the two-year and the three-year course		
		Profess. institutes	Technical institutes	Lyceum	Profess. inst.	Technical institutes	Lyceum
Thefts	22.0	+11.8	-4.3	-9.2	-5.1	-0.4	+7.5
Lack of respect for professors	46.7	+6.5	-2.8	-0.5	-8.2	-1.6	+8.3
Sexual harassment	2.5	+6.3	+3.4	-2.5	-8.8	-4.0	+0.6
Physical offenses	15.9	+12.9	-5.5	-3.4	-13.8	+6.1	+3.1
Homophobic offenses	3.8	+3.0	+1.1	+1.5	-4.7	-2.0	-1.1
Racist offenses	9.0	+8.3	+2.6	+8.3	-9.1	-4.1	-13.8
Heavy teasing	15.1	+15.6	+0.5	-7.0	-15.3	-1.5	+0.9
Requests for money	6.9	+16.9	-0.9	-1.8	-16.7	-2.2	-1.0
Vandalism	7.6	+10.3	-0.5	-7.6	-10.9	+1.2	+4.2

The noteworthy aspects are also others. If we compare the behaviors detected in the classroom and in the school environment, we observe that some of these lose strength, such as, obviously, the lack of respect for teachers (-26.0) and thefts (-8.6), while others remain stable and others still tend to increase their diffusion, such as homophobic offenses (+4.3) and vandalism (+4.9). With the emergence, then, of conduct missing in the classroom which in the school environment (corridors, courtyards, etc.) have a certain force, such as physical violence (+7.2) and, above all,

threats and bullying (+11.6). And, once again, the picture appears much more critical in professional schools.

The situation becomes further aggravated when we move from the classroom to the outside, i.e. to the circles of acquaintances and friends, where the behaviors observed find maximum diffusion. Homophobic offenses increased fivefold (+15.7). Vandalism (+20.1), sexual harassment (+6.5) and racist insults (+20.8) by over three. Harsh teasing (+16.1) and physical abuse (+12.8) by approximately two times. Increases also concern physical violence (+23.0) and threats and bullying (+32.3). This scenario, certainly not positive, presents the school as a place which, in some ways, seems to protect, at least in part, the students.

Tab. 3. Deviant behaviors observed in the classroom, in the school environment, and in circles of friends and acquaintances (external).

<i>Behaviors</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>School environment</i>	<i>External</i>	<i>External-Class</i>
Thefts	22.0	13.4	19.1	-2.9
Lack of respect for professors	46.7	20.7	-	-46.7
Threats and bullying	-	11.6	32.3	+32.3
Sexual harassment	2.5	1.8	9.0	+6.5
Physical offenses	15.9	16.4	28.7	+12.8
Homophobic offenses	3.8	8.1	19.4	+15.6
Racist offenses	9.0	10.8	29.8	+20.8
Heavy teasing	15.1	13.3	31.2	+16.1
Requests for money	6.9	4.4	7.7	+0.8
Vandalism	7.6	12.5	27.7	+20.1
Physical violence	-	7.2	23.0	+23.0

Bullying

The focus now shifts to bullying. In this specific case, young people are asked to indicate its presence in the environments of their daily lives.

The analysis shows that for one student in ten it is "fairly or very" widespread within their classroom (10.4). With a percentage that rises among young people in professional schools (15.9), double compared to that recorded in technical institutes (7.9) and lyceums (8.5). We also register a decrease in the transition from the two-year period to the three-year period (-3.5 percentage points).

Bullying is also spreading outside the classroom. Going from 10.4% to 15.1% in the school environment, to almost tripling within the external circles of acquaintances and friends (27.3). So that, data deny another stereotype, often present in research on the topic, according to which it is «a phenomenon linked above all to the dynamics of school life [...] to the relational and communicative aspects contextualized to school life and in particular to class life» (Scardaccione 2012, 54).

Tab. 4. Presence of the "quite-a lot" bullying phenomenon

<i>Context</i>	<i>AV</i>	<i>Profess. institutes</i>	<i>Technical institutes</i>	<i>Lyceum</i>	<i>Two-year course</i>	<i>Three-year course</i>
Class	10.4	15.0	7.9	8.5	12.8	9.3
School environment	15.1	29.6	8.5	7.0	13.6	15.9
External	27.3	31.3	19.1	36.5	24.8	28.4

By proceeding with observation, it is possible to shed light on the different types of bullying. In this regard, one young person in four claims to have witnessed abuses

against *nerds*, those who stand out for their superior scholastic abilities (23.6). A fact confirmed by the testimonies of the teachers.

This is followed by ethnic bullying (10.0) aimed at students who, even at school, continue, at times, to be outcasts, wrong in their origins, which, even in their relationships with peers, represent weaknesses on which discrimination and abuse are fueled.

The sexual one (9.8) violates the victim's sexuality and physical-sexual characteristics. The one towards disabled people (8.3), which focuses on the physical and/or cognitive differences of others and elevates them to stigma, to an anomaly of a guilty body, to be abused. And, finally, that towards subjects with *other*, non-heterosexual orientations (5.2).

It should be added, then, that not infrequently the forms of bullying can also overlap, generating extremely effective combinations if weaknesses that are particularly functional to the game are identified. *Fat and other religion. Gay and nerd*. With combinations that can be multiple.

Finally, there is no shortage of behaviors that can be considered cyberbullying (6.6). For bullying that "changes part of its characteristics" (T1) and becomes an "entertainment" that involves, expands and often takes on the appearance of entertainment amidst school boredom.

But at this point some other considerations are in order.

The first is to explain bullying as an exercise which, regardless of the way in which it is classified, seeks *diversity* but is achieved only when it is turned into *weakness*.

The second concerns the reality of professional schools, which is certainly worrying, with a marked growth in violent behavior and the phenomenon in all its expressions, primarily when it comes to ethnic bullying, bullying towards disabilities and, also, cyberbullying. In other institutes the situation certainly appears better. However, in lyceums there is a higher frequency of young people having witnessed forms of bullying towards *nerds*. In these institutes the importance of the grade (which usually counts more than performance) and competitiveness between students grow. With the consequent emergence of exploitation, revenge, exclusion and oppression.

Tab. 5. Forms of bullying observed "sometimes" in class, by type of school and by school course

<i>Types of bullying</i>	AV	<i>Profess. institutes</i>	<i>Technical institutes</i>	<i>Lyceums</i>	<i>Two- year course</i>	<i>Three- year course</i>	<i>Three- Two-year course</i>
Ethnic	10.0	13.2	10.1	5.2	15.6	7.3	-8.3
Homophobic	5.2	4.8	5.4	5.4	6.8	4.4	-2.4
Sexual	9.8	10.8	11.0	6.5	16.2	6.8	-9.4
Towards disability	8.3	10.8	6.5	8.0	15.4	4.9	-10.5
Towards nerd	23.6	25.0	19.6	29.0	23.4	23.7	0.3
Cyberbullying	6.6	10.1	5.4	4.2	7.5	6.2	-1.3

In general, behaviors associated with bullying are more frequent in two-year periods. With some exceptions in technical institutes, where, in the first two years there are slight decreases regarding bullying towards disabilities (-1.5), towards nerds (-3.6) and cyberbullying (-3.2). In these schools, the greatest increase was seen in sexual bullying (+5.3), and a slight increase in ethnic bullying (+2.8). In lyceums, however, higher values were recorded in the case of disability bullying (+18.2), of ethnic

(+6.2) and sexual (+3.0) bullying. In the professional schools, where reality is more difficult and complicated, the growth is strong and generalized, when it comes to sexual (+10.2), ethnic (+10.8) and disability bullying (+21.3).

In the transition from two-year to three-year periods, the observed behaviors tend to lose strength, with a decline that mainly depends on what happens in the latter schools.

In technical institutes the variations are limited, decreasing regarding ethnic bullying (-4.7) and sexual bullying (-7.1) and growing in cyberbullying (+3.4). In lyceums there are more sustained decreases, primarily when it comes to sexual bullying (-7.8), ethnic bullying (-13.7) and bullying towards disabled people (-22.6), and a rise in bullying towards nerds (+7.3). In the professional sector there is a sustained decrease which concerns primarily ethnic bullying (-10.6), sexual bullying (-13.0) and disability bullying (-25.4).

Considering all schools, in the transition between the first two years and the last three, bullying towards nerds is stable (+0.3), there is a limited fluctuations regarding cyberbullying (-1.3) and homophobic bullying (-2.4), marked drops in the cases of ethnic (-8.3), sexual (9.4) and disability bullying (-10.5).

Tab. 6. Forms of bullying observed "sometimes" in class, per school course and type of school

<i>Kind of bullying</i>	<i>AV</i>	<i>Two-year course: change in % points compared to the average value</i>			<i>Change in % points between the two-year and the three-year course</i>		
		<i>Profess. institutes</i>	<i>Technical institutes</i>	<i>Lyceums</i>	<i>Profess. institutes</i>	<i>Technical institutes</i>	<i>Lyceums</i>
Ethnic	10.0	+10.8	+2.8	+6.2	-10.6	-4.7	-13.7
Sexual	9.8	+10.2	+5.3	+3.0	-13.0	-7.1	-7.8
Homophobic	5.2	+4.9	+0.3	+0.1	-7.5	-0.2	+0.2
Towards disability	8.3	+21.3	-1.5	+18.2	-25.4	-0.5	-22.6
Towards nerd	23.6	+6.4	-3.6	-0.5	-7.0	-0.7	+7.3
Cyberbullying	6.6	+8.6	-3.2	+1.1	-7.2	+3.4	-4.4

Reality changes the moment one leaves the classroom. Into the corridors and courtyards, the situation worsens slightly, with limited growth relating primarily to homophobic bullying (+4.5) and a decrease only in the abuses towards nerds (-12.4). The latter decline becomes (understandably) even more pronounced when one leaves school (-16.9). Excluding this conduct, what emerges in the circles of acquaintances and friendships is decidedly critical, much more so than in the school context. In comparison with what was found in the classroom, the growth is very strong, first when it comes to ethnic (+33.7), sexual (+25.0) and homophobic (21.6) bullying, with non-negligible increases which also concern disability bullying (+8.5) and cyberbullying (+11.9). And it is, therefore, still the school that seems to be the context where the young person enjoys greater protection.

Tab. 7. Forms of bullying observed "sometimes" in the classroom, in the school environment and in circles of friends and acquaintances

<i>Types of bullying</i>	<i>Classroom</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>External</i>	<i>External-Classroom</i>
Ethnic	10.0	12.3	43.7	+33.7
Sexual	9.8	10.0	34.9	+25.1
Homophobic	5.2	9.7	26.7	+21.5
Towards disability	8.3	9.0	16.8	+8.5
Towards nerd	23.6	11.2	6.7	-16.9

Cyberbullying	6.6	7.7	18.6	12.0
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Class and bullying

Within the framework described, it is interesting to discover how the class reacts to the abuses that occur within it. Capturing reactions which, referring to social learning theories [Burgess and Akers 1966], can provide an idea on the *definitions* expressed by the adolescent world with respect to bullying and on the possible *reinforcements* (positive or negative) and *discriminating stimuli* to behavior and its repetition.

Let's move to data. At a first insight an important distinction concerns the victim who can be a student as well a teacher. Starting from the victim-student we observe that the classroom tends to be distributed around three different positions. The first indicated by approximately half of them sees the class reaction sided in favor of the victim to whom it recognizes solidarity and protection, it emerges more strongly in technical institutes and with more weakness in professional schools. The second, that of the indifferent, involves one respondent in six, establishing itself more (albeit slightly) in lyceums and technical institutes. The last one, what we could define as pro-bully role, indicated by a third of students, tends to marginalize the victims or abuse them and is more widespread in professional schools.

Tab. 8. Bullying towards classmates and class attitude

<i>Institute</i>	<i>Marginalizes/denigrates/rages</i>	<i>Indifferent</i>	<i>Solidarize</i>	<i>Total</i>
Professional inst.	40.7	12.3	47.1	100.0
Technician institutes	28.9	16.8	54.4	100.0
Lyceums	32.2	16.8	50.9	100.0
<i>AV</i>	33.5	15.4	51.2	100.0

The situation is redefined in the case in which "the targeted person" is a teacher and, while the three groups remain, the numbers change substantially. The pro-bully position becomes the majority, primarily in lyceums where, according to the respondents, the class isolates, denigrates and abuses the teacher-victim more than in other schools. The group of indifferent people is also increasing, finding greater support in lyceums. The rate of solidarity among young people decreases, while in high schools is reduced by almost half compared to what happens if the victim is a classmate. Bullying, when it "targets" a teacher, seems therefore capable for further redefining the climate in the classroom by creating strong sides in favor of the bully or bullies, which greatly complicates the choice to take sides in support of the unfortunate person: «No one never defends the professor. And if he is there we throw a bench at him» (S47).

Differences between schools continue to persist. If in professional institutes bullying is not only more widespread but also harsher and more violent, on some occasions even lyceums can turn into a difficult, insidious and cynical context. And this can happen precisely when the victim is a teacher: "I saw students doing very negative things, with the class in chaos and the teacher crying" (T1).

Tab. 9. Bullying towards teachers and class attitude

<i>Institute</i>	<i>Marginalizes/denigrates/rages</i>	<i>Indifference</i>	<i>Solidarize</i>	<i>Total</i>
Professional institutes	39.2	18.0	42.7	100.0
Technician institutes	42.4	19.3	38.3	100.0

Lyceums	49.2	23.2	27.5	100.0
AV	43.5	20.1	36.5	100.0

Bullying and its actors

After having investigated the phenomenon, we shift our attention to the actors, trying to understand who they are, also in the mechanisms and logic of their actions.

- The bully

For more than nine out of ten interviewees (91.7), bullying must be understood as a group phenomenon in which a leader and a group of other guys act against a subject identified as weak and persecuted: «The bully is strange and acts alone, he needs someone who recognizes his personality and admires him, there is always a group that pushes him» (S46). For only less than one young person in ten it can be understood as a behavior carried out by a single individual (8.3).

It should be underlined, however, that sometimes group action can take place even without a leader, with the presence of a plurality of interchangeable bullies: «They beat, they were delinquents, there were several leaders coordinated in throwing everything down and if the first leader was punished, the other emerged and then the other, an infinite chain» (T33).

The bully who acts alone is more present in professional institutes. Mainly in the two-year course, where we can find, more than elsewhere, the behavior of even multi-repeated, older and "more physical" kids, who act like bullies in their "parking" school regardless of their supporters: «Here we have the "old bully", the strongest, the one who uses force. In lyceums there is a different bully, with other tools» (T29).

The bully wears blue and more than eight out of ten young people believe he is usually male (83.8). While underlining a female presence that is growing in certain professional schools: "In fashion course you only find females and all of them are disadvantaged, a real jungle, no joke!" (S54).

In this regard, it is important to highlight a significantly growing female presence among bullies (as well as among victims). A different kind of bullying: "more subtle, less obvious, males punch you, this is more psychological, more difficult to understand" (T2). Without, however, underestimating the growth of behaviors like those of men, more centered on the physical and violent gestures: "Today girls do not have major problems in adopting behaviors that, until a few years ago, were considered masculine" (T23).

And it is bullying, recognized in his "head", first and foremost as an Italian (58.8): "There are more Italians, I have also seen foreign bullies, but fewer" (S45).

The foreign abuser grows in professional schools, where in some situations one could even find the existence of an ethnic conflict: «In certain mechanical institutes there is an ethnic minority of Italians and an ethnic majority of Moroccans and Slavs, and the Italians are having a bad time... it's almost a social revenge» (T33).

Tab. 10. Profile of young bullies

Who are the bullies?	AV			Profess.	Technical	Lyceums
		M	F	institutes	institutes	
Single guys	8.3	10.3	6.2	11.7	8.9	3.6
Groups of kids	91.7	89.7	93.8	88.3	91.1	96.4

<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Males	83.8	87.7	79.9	75.7	91.2	82.2
Females	16.2	12.3	20.1	24.3	8.8	17.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Italians	58.8	49.6	67.6	61.1	54.2	63.4
Foreigners	41.2	50.4	32.4	38.9	45.8	36.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

As data explains clearly the phenomenon is, therefore, a collective practice. It's a role-playing game between different actors. The abuser needs a group – «He would not have the ability to act without» (S59) – and of a victim, who, in his «physical or psychological weakness» (T31), must be sought out, made target. «The difference must be identified» (D18), it must be constructed, stigmatized - «You create a label for it, something difficult to take off» (D29) - and also proposed to others who enter the game in a more or less direct way. *Bullying occurs not so much in the gesture but in the sharing of the stigma, in relation to which the gesture itself is activated.*

- The victim

The criminal is certainly a different figure. *Other*. In its ideal configuration it is usually a single subject, as demonstrated by over nine out of ten respondents (92.3). Single, alone, isolated. Often, being alone and isolated in the world of adolescence means being "loser": «They have no friends, they have physically defined characteristics, they are ugly, losers!» (S60).

The concept of "loser" among young people is clear. Elaborate on being, on appearance, on presence, on strength, on success. There is a stigmatizable difference in being "loser". Discrediting attribute. Discreditable deviation. Social malformation to be discredited: «In the word "loser" we can see an infinite number of things; you are not like us, for how you dress, for how you speak, for the culture you express. In lyceums "you're a loser" can also mean that you can't read or write» (T23).

On certain occasions, however, the game can involve even more victims, as claimed by 7.7% of respondents. This happens if being a loser is understood as a characteristic to be attributed to a group of peers: «The mechanisms are the same, they do not change if four or five are considered "losers"» (T1).

According to those interviewed, the victims can be both male (56.1) and female (43.9). With opinions that vary depending on gender and the school attended. Girls, especially in professional institutes, tend to identify them mainly as their peers (59.6 compared to 30.9 of their male classmates). This is a further confirmation of how in these schools there is a greater feminization of the phenomenon.

«There are females who bully and females who are bullied in a very strong way» (T17) and if for males the victims are the target of the attention of their peers, for the girls the abuses come from peers of both genders: «She had been bullied by some classmates who had sent around unpleasant photos, photomontages, where she was clearly recognizable» (Parent35).

Another point, which is not very surprising, already partially emerged, concerns the origins of those who suffer the abuses. In fact, seven out of ten respondents identified the victims as being of non-Italian origin (70.1): «If they catch a foreigner with perhaps a little shyness and fear, well then we're cool» (S54).

Tab. 11. Profile of bullying victims

<i>Who are the victims</i>	<i>AV</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Profess. institutes</i>	<i>Technical institutes</i>	<i>Lyceums</i>
Singles	92.3	92.4	91.3	91.3	92.1	93.8
Groups	7.7	7.6	8.7	8.7	7.9	6.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Males	56.1	40.4	43.3	43.3	67.4	51.9
Females	43.9	59.6	56.7	56.7	32.6	48.1
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Italians	29.9	25.1	27.8	27.8	31.0	30.6
Foreigners	70.1	64.8	72.2	72.2	69.0	69.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

The young people interviewed believe that the victim could be a boy or girl with a different sexual orientation (48.2): «There are both girls and boys bullied for being from the other side» (S51). Female students support strongly this trend (55.4), as well as the lyceums students (58.5). But it could also be a person with disability problems, as 45% explain and as the teachers themselves also confirm: «Those with disabilities are often targeted, whether they have a DSA or have an even more serious problem» (T28).

Finally, for 4.8% of students it may happen that, in the school context, the victim is "often or usually" a teacher, while for 3% it may also be a school worker (janitors, cleaning staff, etc.). Even for these figures the game starts from the identification of some of their weaknesses - «Personal problems that they pass on to us» (S50) - which end up characterizing them in a definitive way: «She was a wonderful person, she was just a little hunchbacked, they lifted her skirt, they took photos under the teacher's desk, in the end she left, she couldn't take it anymore» (S61).

Tab. 12. Who can the victims "usually" be?

<i>Who are the victims (multiple answers)</i>	<i>AV</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Profess. Inst.</i>	<i>Technical institutes</i>	<i>Lyceum</i>
Boys with other sexual orientations	48.2	42.1	55.4	46.0	44.2	58.5
Children with psycho-physical problems	45.0	36.1	55.4	43.3	40.4	55.5
Teachers	4.8	4.9	4.7	4.7	4.7	5.0
School staff	3.0	2.9	3.1	4.0	2,2	3.0

Bullying is a strategic interaction that involves other actors in addition to the bully and the victim. Complementary, but also interchangeable. This is to explain that in the game, as it varies, you take on different roles. And the figure of the bully does not necessarily have its own precise authenticity.

Of the entire sample, 3.2% stated that they had assumed the role of bully with some frequency, 3.9% that of helper and 3.2% that of supporter. 17.4% then declared that they had worn the role of the defender and 24.2% that they had chosen to remain outside, while 5.3% declared to be themselves, on several occasions, in the position of the victim. And among all of them, many found themselves taking on different roles. Hence both the "serial" bully and the victim are figures that are not as widespread as the phenomenon, and its narrative would seem to suggest.

The key to the game therefore does not lie in the "pure" figures, but in the variability of the roles that can be covered. Hence, more than three out of ten kids declare that they have posed "at least sometimes" as bullies (32.5), more than a quarter as helpers of the bully (27.5) and as supporters (28.6). Three quarters say they have taken on the role of defender of the victim (75.9), almost seven out of ten have chosen, on

some occasions, to stay out of the game (68.2), while more than a third admit to be the victim (34.2). And only one young person in seven claims to have never played the game (13.8).

A framework that clearly denies the (too simplistic) idea according to which «Being a bully, victim, bully-victim or spectator corresponds, from a psychosocial point of view, to the assumption of roles which, like all social roles, tend to crystallize and to reproduce, making change difficult» [Scardaccione 2012, 52]. It also explains how bullying is, in the world of youth, a game played by many and not by a few. In some ways, a "normality" typical of the relational dynamics that age, its learning and its impulses express.

Tab. 13. Roles assumed

<i>Role</i>	<i>More than a few times</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Involved</i>
Helper	3.9	23.6	72.5	100.0	27.5
Bully	3.2	29.3	67.5	100.0	32.5
Defender	17.4	58.5	24.1	100.0	75.9
External	24.2	44.0	31.9	100.0	68.2
Supporter	3.2	25.4	71.4	100.0	28.6
Victim	5.3	28.9	65.8	100.0	34.2
No active role	-	-	13.8	-	-

It should be added that among those who say they have assumed the role of bully on some occasion, eight out of ten declare they have also held the role of defender (81.8), seven out of ten that of helper and/or supporter (69.7) and almost half that of the victim (48.2). If we consider young people who are "sometimes" victims of bullying, it emerges that more than eight out of ten have also taken on the role of defender (83.4), half that of helper or supporter of the bully (49.1) and just under half that of the bully (45.7).

The roles of the abuser, as well as those of the helper and supporter, are assumed mostly by males, by those attending a two-year period and, above all, by those enrolled in a professional school. The girls, again together with the young professionals, report, however, to be into the victim's condition.

Tab. 14. Roles assumed by gender and school attended

<i>Role</i>	<i>AV</i>		<i>Profess. institutes</i>		<i>Technical institutes</i>	<i>Lyceum</i>	<i>Two-year course</i>	<i>Three-year course</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>					
Helper	27.5	30.2	24.3	35.5	24.9	21.0	31.3	25.7
Bully	32.5	34.3	30.4	39.0	28.7	30.5	32.2	32.6
Defender	75.9	70.9	81.9	76.0	72.1	82.8	78.3	74.8
External	68.1	66.1	70.5	59.9	68.5	79.0	65.2	69.5
Supporter	28.6	29.3	27.7	40.2	23.6	21.6	30.9	27.5
Victim	34.2	28.9	40.6	41.1	28.8	34.7	32.0	35.3

Adjectives, feelings and opinions on bullying and its actors

A section of the questionnaire is dedicated to the opinions, considerations, feelings and adjectives that young people adopt when faced with the phenomenon.

The first questions focus on the "idealized" figure of the bully, with respect to which they are asked to make characterizing associations. And, of course, from the answers it does not emerge in a very negative way.

18.2% of students recognize a leader, "a boss" (S58), who finds followers within his own reference group (but not only). 43.3% consider him to be someone who enjoys the consideration of others: "If the bully is important the whole class listens to him" (S45). 39.2% indicate him as a peer who inspires fear, disliked and who "should be avoided to avoid problems" (S64). Finally, 12.3% see him as an outcast without friends. But it is an idea that, as the numbers say, does not find many willing to subscribe, as: "Bullies are anything but marginalized, they are well known and have many friends" (S50).

Tab. 15. Images of the bully (strongly agree)

<i>Bully (independent responses)</i>	<i>AV</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Profess.</i>	<i>Technical</i>	<i>Lyceums</i>
				<i>institutes</i>	<i>institutes</i>	
Outcast and friendless	12.3	14.2	10.0	11.4	13.7	11.0
It's scary, I don't like, I avoid them	39.2	34.9	44.4	32.0	41.0	45.5
Enjoys the consideration of others	43.3	36.3	51.8	40.8	36.9	58.2
Leader	18.2	15.5	21.8	18.8	16.4	20.6

The "idealized" image of the victim is very different. For 57.6% of the young interviewed, they are marginalized and friendless: "They are closed, speak little and have a way of acting different from others" (S57). A third say they are peer who does not enjoy the esteem of others (34.9): «She is less smart, she is considered a bit of a loser» (S55). Finally, just less than one respondent in twenty states that they do not like victims and avoid them (5.8). With respect to these attitudes of denial, it must be said that in expressing sympathy or in any case closeness to the victim there is the risk, not unlikely, of finding oneself in the same condition: «She is abandoned, the others are afraid of being her friends in the fear that the bully and the group will bully them» (P43).

Tab. 16. Images of the victim (strongly agree)

<i>Victim (independent responses)</i>	<i>AV</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Profess.</i>	<i>Technical</i>	<i>Lyceums</i>
				<i>institutes</i>	<i>institutes</i>	
Outcast and friendless	57.6	49.7	67.0	49.6	54.7	73.6
Does not enjoy the consideration of others	34.9	31.7	38.7	27.6	34.5	45.6
I don't like them, and I avoid them	5.8	7.5	3.9	7.5	5.3	4.7

Now let's move on to the terms, feelings and adjectives that can be associated with the different actors.

Discomfort and problems are the aspects most taken into consideration and are associated with the bully (38.3), the helper (32.1) but also the supporter (15.5). The main pairing is, however, with the figure of the victim (46.4). Obviously, these are attributions declined differently depending on the actor considered. In the case of the bully, the discomfort is explained by citing a situation of internal discomfort which outlets in the oppression of a weak subject: "The person who bullies is certainly a person who has something to vent inside" (S48). As for the helper and supporter they see a deficit of the self, an inability to express one's own personality, with a consequent need for guidance, for a strong reference that attenuates one's weaknesses. While when we talk about the victim, they figure something that distances us from others, isolates, defines diversity and exposes the so-called "bad luck".

The actors active in the negative action (bully, helper and supporter) also find other matches. Stupidity and ignorance, referring primarily to the supporter (45.4). Arrogance and rudeness, mainly attributed to the bully (16.2). Cowardice is accorded less to the latter (6.1) and much more to the helper (24.0) and the supporter (19.8). Cowardice is also recognized externally, i.e. to those who choose not to be involved (21.6). However, even more selfishness and carelessness are attributed to this figure (69.3), and stupidity and ignorance (5.9).

The bully is also associated with aggression, violence and malice (11.3) as well as exhibitionism (5.4), while his supporting characters, helpers and supporters, are associated with hypocrisy (6.4 and 4.6).

The defender is recognized as friendship and altruism (48.3) and, even more, strength and courage (51.1). These aspects are also attributed, in a very limited way, to the bully (3.3).

Finally, the victim, in addition to being associated with discomfort and problems, is indicated as a weak and marginalized subject (8.7), targeted and always at the center of the negative attention of other peers (39.8).

Tab. 17. Terms and adjectives associated with the different active roles in bullying

<i>Associations</i>	<i>Bully</i>	<i>Helper</i>	<i>Supporter</i>	<i>Defender</i>	<i>External</i>	<i>Victim</i>
Aggression, violence	11.3	2.7	2.0	-	-	-
Friendship, altruism	-	-	-	48.3	-	1.0
Targeted	-	-	-	-	-	39.8
Cowardice	6.1	24.0	19.8	-	21.6	-
Weakness, marginalization	-	-	-	-	-	8.7
Discomfort, problematic	38.3	32.1	15.5	-	-	46.4
Selfishness, carelessness	-	-	-	-	69.3	-
Exhibitionism	5.4	1.4	0.6	-	-	-
Strength, courage	3.3	-	1.2	51.1	-	3.0
Hypocrisy, inconsistency	-	6.4	4.6	-	1.4	-
Arrogance, rudeness	16.2	6.2	10.9	-	-	-
Stupidity, ignorance	18.8	27.1	45.4	-	5.9	0.5
Other	0.5	-	-	0.6	1.8	0.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

The images that bullying presents in its roles produce different thoughts and moods among respondents.

The figure of the bully activates feelings such as anger (52.0), annoyance (10.8), shame (7.7) and sadness (6.3), which tend to arise, albeit to different degrees, also for of the helper and the supporter.

Indifference (49.2), annoyance (11.5), anger (9.0) and shame (7.8) are associated with those who prefer to stay out of the game. Admiration (47.5), gratitude (15.7), satisfaction (9.9) and sense of compassion (8.9) emerge with respect to the defender. Compassion (30.4), sadness (30.1), impotence (11.9) and guilt (7.8) are associated, finally, with those who suffer the attentions of the bully and his acolytes.

Tab. 18. Feelings associated with the different active roles in bullying

<i>Feelings</i>	<i>Bully</i>	<i>Helper</i>	<i>Supporter</i>	<i>Defender</i>	<i>External</i>	<i>Victim</i>
Admiration	-	-	3.7	47.4	1.0	2.7
Compassion	5.6	4.5	4.5	8.9 ⁶	2.7	30.4
Fun	1.6	4.7	8.7	,5	1.0	2,3

⁶In this specific case compassion stands for compassionate.

Annoyance	10.8	16.7	18.4	3.8	11.5	,9
Gratitude	,2	3.3	,8	15.7	-	,5
Impotence	3.0	4.7	5.2	1.6	5.2	11.9
Indifference	4.4	5.0	8.9	3.5	49.2	2.7
Envy	1.6	1.4	1.7	,9	1.0	,2
Fear	4.0	3.5	2.7	1.9	1.3	4.1
Anger	52.0	27.6	19.4	1.9	9.0	4.8
Guilt	0.7	3.3	3.5	1.4	5.0	7.8
Satisfaction	1.9	2.9	1,2	9.9	-	0.2
Sadness	6.3	9.5	8.3	2,3	5.5	30.1
Shame	7.7	13.0	13.0	,2	7.8	1.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Respondents are also asked to express the degree of agreement with some statements. Young students appear to be particularly in tune (males first) when bullying is combined with a bad education (42.4), while they are much less so when it is associated with belonging to disadvantaged families (16.9), with a "girlish" which concerns age (6.8) and difficulty in studying (6.8).

Tab. 19. Opinions on bullying (strongly agree)

<i>Bullying (independent responses)</i>	<i>AV</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Profess. inst.</i>	<i>Tech. inst.</i>	<i>Lyceums</i>
It is the result of bad education	42.4	47.6	36.2	42.0	45.2	37.9
It concerns people with disadvantaged families	16.9	19.1	14.2	18.7	18.7	11.1
It is a "girlish" who is part of the age	6.8	8.3	5.0	8.4	6.5	5.1
It concerns boys with study difficulties	6.8	9.2	4.0	8.1	6.8	5.1

Reflecting on the opinions expressed by young people and considering the size of the phenomenon, we could explain bad education as a characteristic that certainly characterizes the adolescent world or at least an important part of it. But perhaps we could even talk about a "culture of bad manners" - of which bullying is certainly a child - where not even school "the place of education and learning" is able to counteract and stem, often suffering it with inertia: «The desk was full of spit aimed at a companion and I put my hand on it. In my class, spitting has been very popular since last year and, this year, it is even more popular» (T3).

Some considerations can also be made regarding the bully's belonging to disadvantaged families and his presumed difficulty in studying.

Let's start from the first point. If we consider those stating to have been bullies on "more than a few occasions", the number of young people from families with a low socio-cultural level appears to be growing. But once the data is separated out by the school, the discussion is relatively different. In professional schools, the highest rates are among young people with a medium-level family status, while in technical institutes are, differently, the least involved. If we look at all those who have taken on the role of bully "at least once", we see that in professional schools the practice is spreading among those from families with a medium-level socio-cultural status, while in lyceums it increases among young people with a higher status and only in technical institutes the rule that sees the phenomenon lose intensity with the passage of status upwards applies. Therefore, given the data, it appears rather difficult to establish meaningful relationships.

In the case of scholastic performance, however, there seems to be a more defined link and in all schools (although less so in professional institutes) the presence of bullies grows among less virtuous young people.

Tab. 20. Bullies (at least once) by school, family status and school performance

<i>School</i>	<i>AV</i>	<i>Family status</i>			<i>School performance</i>	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Good</i>
Lyceums	30.5	31.6	26.2	41.7	47.6	25.0
Professional institutes	38.6	33.8	47.1	33.3	40.4	37.6
Technical institutes	28.8	34.1	26.8	22.6	39.0	24.4
<i>Total</i>	32.5	33.5	31.9	30.8	41.1	28.6

Now let's shift attention to the victim, who are consistent in number among those with low status. However, if we refer to school attended, we notice that in professional institutes and in lyceums it grows among young people with a medium level condition and only in technical institutes it decrease as they rise in status.

As regards school performance, at a first glance, there seems to be a relationship between victims and low achievement. In lyceums these figures seem to be concentrated in the group of the less virtuous. Differently, in professional schools those with good performances are growing. So that, even in this case it appears therefore difficult to establish meaningful connections.

Tab. 21. Victims by school, family status and school performance

<i>Institute</i>	<i>AV</i>	<i>Family status</i>			<i>School performance</i>	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Good</i>
Technical institutes	28.5	31.0	27.3	26.4	33.3	26.7
<i>Lyceums</i>	34.5	31.6	36.4	33.3	52.4	30.8
Professional institutes	41.2	40.0	43.1	40.0	37.2	43.0
<i>Total</i>	34.1	35.3	33.9	30.8	38.2	32.6

Finally, the students are also asked to express some opinions regarding the victim. The first focuses on the role of the school, which for seven out of ten respondents (mainly girls and lyceum students) should have the duty to defend young people abused by their peers (70.3). Even if this does not always happen: "The school has never addressed the topic, not even to inform us or help us, it is not there, it is indifferent" (S63). More than two out of ten respondents believe, however, that those who suffer oppressive actions should learn to defend themselves (22.6): "It would take a little courage to avoid being bullied" (S62). An idea which comes mostly from males and above all from those attending professional institutes, who express a degree of agreement over double compared to their peers from other schools. This explains that in the battlefield that these schools live in they need to be prepared and "Either you adapt to the environment or you get torn to pieces" (S54).

Tab. 22. Opinions on the victim (strongly agree)

<i>The victim (multiple answers)</i>	<i>AV</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Prof. inst.</i>	<i>Tech. inst.</i>	<i>Lyceums</i>
The school has a duty to defend it	70.3	66.4	74.7	70.3	65.0	79.7
He should learn to defend himself	22.6	24.1	20.8	36.3	17.0	13.6
He's weak, he deserves treatment	1.5	2.0	0.8	1.1	1.7	1.5

Final summary

In this essay the focus is on forms of juvenile deviance and bullying. Such behaviors are more consistent in professional schools and seem to lose intensity in the transition from the two-year course to the three-year period and tend to grow in a sustained way in the transition from the classroom (and the school environment) to the circles of friends and acquaintances. This suggests that school is a context where young students seem to encounter greater protection.

Bullying comes out in different forms in all the schools considered, but it is always in professional institutes that it highlights its harshest and most violent face. Among its manifestations, the most observed is the one that sees nerds as victims. This is followed by ethnic, sexual, disability and homophobic bullying. The phenomenon is widespread everywhere, even in the *cyber* version; its digital evolution which differentiates it from the past and makes it more visible today.

Regardless of the methods and intensity with which it occurs, bullying starts in *another's diversity* (identified and stigmatizable), but only occurs when this is transformed into a weakness which is then recognized and "approved" in the group and among the other actors who enter the game. In this sense, it is accomplished not so much in the gesture but in the sharing of the stigma in relation to which it is activated.

In the classroom, the transgressive practice can affect a student but also a teacher and depending on the case the class tends to take sides in different ways. When the victim is a student, three groups emerge. The first, the majority, indicated by half of the students, who sympathizes with the victim, the second, supported by a sixth of the respondents, who appears indifferent and the third, indicated by more than one student in three, who tends to marginalize the unfortunate person. Three groups that are redefined if the victim is a teacher; the pro-bully camp becomes a majority, those who are indifferent grow and those who show solidarity decrease. Lyceums students represent the least sensitive.

According to the narrative of the interviewees, we are faced with group behavior, with a leader whose prevaricating action finds support in other young people who are his allies, followers and subordinates. Although there is no shortage of cases in which the subordination is less evident, less marked, we can even speak of a "group of bullies". There is also the bully who acts alone without needing the support of the group. First in the professional two-year periods, where there are multi-repeated, older and more "physical" kids.

Often male-oriented, the phenomenon has seen, in recent times, a significant female growth with girls tending to propose less physical and more psychological strategies, in an action perhaps less evident but equally prevaricating. And although they usually speak Italian, they often find foreign interpreters, especially within certain professional institutes where the traits of *conflict between cultures* can also be read in the group dynamics.

The victim is certainly a different figure. Almost always is a single subject, alone and isolated (or in any case in a weak situation), in a condition that today in the youth world is "loser". That is, bearers of stigmatizable diversity. Social malformation. "Deservingness" in the face of the prevaricating gesture.

The victims are almost never "group". Unless being "loser" ends up being combined with a collective dimension. Among these, a widespread group of individuals of

foreign origin also emerges. And even in this case the state of the young man of non-Italian origin is easily translated into "loser". The female presence is also growing. With a prevarication that can specifically be bidirectional and come from both male companions and female companions.

Considering the figures who more than others risk, within the school context, of incurring abusive actions, the index falls primarily on young people with different sexual orientations and on disabled people⁷. With a small minority of children who, however, also recognize teachers and school workers as victims.

Bullying is a game between roles, even interchangeable ones. In the overall view the figure of the bully does not have its own precise authenticity. If not rarely. As well as that of the victim. Which certainly complicates the "positivist" claim to build tailor-made pathological profiles centered on emotional or, in any case, internal deficiencies.

Considering the "more than a few times" option, only 3% of young people say they have taken on the role of bully and 5% that of victim, while 4% say they have acted as a helper, 3% as a supporter, 17 % as a defender of the victim and 24% of having chosen, more than once, to stay out of the game.

If, however, you switch to the "sometimes" option the picture changes radically. More than three out of ten kids say they have taken on the role of bully, just under three that of helper or of supporter. Three out of four say they acted as advocates for the victim and seven out of ten said they chose, on some occasions, to stay on the sidelines. A third stated they are in the victim's situation and only just over one in ten having never been involved in any way in the "game". It must be added that among the bullies half were also victims and, thus, about half of the latter also acted as bullies.

The roles of the abuser, as well as those of the helper and supporter, are supported more by boys, while girls report having been victims more frequently. Vocational schools are confirmed as the true problematic context where all the different figures grow in them: bullies, helpers, supporters and victims.

The bully, ideally, is generally seen as a subject who enjoys the consideration of others, but also, albeit to a lesser extent, as a real leader. Not rarely he is, however, recognized as a scary companion, to be avoided. Few time only he is referred as a friendless outcast. A subject who, therefore, even in his own way, enjoys a certain popularity. Very different from that of the victim, seen mainly as alone and marginalized and, often, as a companion who does not enjoy the consideration of others. And in certain cases, although rare, like a figure you don't like and towards whom you don't feel empathy and sympathy.

In the opinion of their classmates, the bully is indicated as a problematic individual (who vents his discomfort on others), overbearing, aggressive and violent, sometimes even stupid. Problems and discomfort (which determine isolation and relational deficits), being always at the center of negative attention, however, are the aspects highlighted most in the case of victims. Given the feelings and moods, the abuser finds association with anger, annoyance, shame and sadness, while the victims activate feelings of compassion, sadness, impotence and guilt. Bullying is also associated with a certain frequency with bad education, much more than what

⁷It seems to declassify bullying towards nerds, which remains the most widespread in the school environment.

happens when we talk about belonging to disadvantaged families. The dominant thought among young people believes that schools should be able to defend those who are unjustly oppressed by their peers, but there is someone - males and students enrolled in professional schools first - thinking the victim should learn to defend himself even by himself.

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