

An Analysis of Italian Newspaper Articles on the Bullying Phenomenon

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses its attention on two Italian daily newspapers circulated nationwide: *La Stampa* and *La Repubblica*. By measuring the space dedicated to this issue on these two newspapers, the study evaluates the importance newspapers attribute to this phenomenon along with the journalists' viewpoints. We studied the headlines and articles of the daily newspaper *La Stampa*, starting from the year 2000 up to September 10, 2007. We analyzed a total number of 891 articles or headlines which contained the term bullying. Articles published during the same years by the newspaper *La Repubblica* were also studied. The complete texts were taken from a selection of 245 articles. The articles of *La Stampa* underwent a quantitative analysis with the software SPSS 12.0. The research took into consideration the page number, the edition and the year of publication of a number of articles that mentioned the term bullying/bully in its title or body of the text. The articles of *La Repubblica*, were instead subjected to a textual analysis with the software T-Lab, to identify the words used and their association to the term bullying. We reached the conclusion that during the last two years, bullying has become a highly relevant social and political theme. An increasing number of articles on bullying is not only confined to news reports, but is also found in theoretical analyses of the phenomenon and preventive measures. Without mentioning the the public interest in the phenomenon, even politics has made its moves to create permanent observers and lay down guidelines for action on the territory.

Key words: Bullying, Mass-media, social representation, italian newspapers

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es considerar el espacio dedicado al fenómeno del *bullying* en los periódicos de tirada nacional *La Stampa* y *La Repubblica*, la importancia que se le otorga y el punto de vista con el que se afronta. Se han tomado en consideración los artículos publicados por *La Stampa* desde el año 2000 al 10 de septiembre de 2007 que contienen en el titular o en el texto la palabra *bullismo* (*bullying*), un total de 891 artículos. También se ha estudiado el texto completo de una selección de 245 artículos publicados en el mismo período por *La Repubblica*. Los artículos de *La Stampa* se han analizado cuantitativamente a través del *software* SPSS 12.0. El análisis tuvo en consideración el número de páginas y el número de artículos que utilizan el término *bullying/bully* en el título o en el texto, indicando el año en que fue publicado. Finalmente, una evaluación del tipo de artículo fue estudiado. Los artículos de *La Repubblica*, también fueron analizados con el *software* T-Lab, para identificar las palabras usadas y la asociación con el término *bullying*. Se concluye que el *bullying* se ha convertido en un tema de relevancia política y social en los dos últimos años. El incremento de artículos sobre

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el *bullying* no se refiere sólo a las noticias nuevas, sino también al análisis teórico del fenómeno y las medidas preventivas. Además del interés del público en general, en el mundo político se han tomado medidas para crear observatorios permanentes y leyes que guíen la creación de líneas de actuación en el territorio.

Palabras claves: *bullying*, medios de comunicación, representación social, periódicos italianos.

This paper is part of a more extensive research project aimed at studying the ways mass media reports and expounds on the bullying phenomenon. This paper focuses its attention particularly on two Italian daily newspapers circulated nationwide: *La Stampa* and *La Repubblica*. In gauging the space dedicated to this issue on newspapers, the study evaluates the importance newspapers attribute to this phenomenon along with the journalists' viewpoints.

The phenomenon of bullying has become a social representation (Moscovici, 1961). Like all social representations, it possesses a dynamic and evolutive feature and it is connected to communications and interdependence among individuals (Grande, 2005). As a means of communication, mass media becomes an instrument for the joint construction and remodeling of the cognitive and emotive aspects of a social symptom. There are various reasons why the media influences collective opinion, allowing the reader to access facts which would otherwise not be diffused (Istituto degli Innocenti, 2007). The manner in which the repercussion of an event is perceived is strongly associated to the selection of information, and the form and style in which it is described. Mass media therefore brings events to the fore, call society attention, building up images of reality and offers interpretations of events, thus organizing the information given on the issue (Wolf, 1985; Belluati *et al.*, 1995).

Diffusion, propagation and propaganda are three communication systems that act on a social representation. The journalist stands between the need to provide news, document it and report a fact, and the need to capture the reader's interest. Though there is no desire to *propagate* or make *propaganda*, the newspaper becomes a means of *diffusion* and as such influences the reader (Moscovici, 1976). "... Diffusion which does not invoke a global behavior... But tends to favor the growth of opinion on specific problems" (Moscovici, 1961, p.401 -translated by authors).

METHOD

Sample

We studied the headlines and articles of the daily newspaper *La Stampa*, starting from the year 2000 up to September 10, 2007. We analyzed a total number of 891 articles or headlines which bore the term bullying. The material was gathered with the help of the newspaper staff who searched in the digital archives of the newspaper's headquarters. All the articles which used the term *bullying* either in their headings,

subheadings or body of the text were selected.

Articles published during the same years by the newspaper *La Repubblica* were also studied. The complete texts were taken from a selection of 245 articles gathered through the search engine made available on the online version of this newspaper.

Procedure

The articles of *La Stampa* underwent a quantitative analysis through the software SPSS 12.0. In order to point out the attention given to the phenomenon, the research took into consideration the page number and the edition (national or regional) of a number of articles that mentioned the term bullying/bully in the title or in the body of the text. Finally, an evaluation of the nature of the article (the presentation of a bullying episode or a theoretical reflection, and articles for prevention and control) was evaluated.

The articles of *La Repubblica*, were instead subjected to a textual analysis with the software T-Lab, to identify the used words and their association to the term bullying.

RESULTS

From year 2000 up to now, *La Stampa* has published 891 articles containing the term bullying, either in the heading or body of the text. The word appeared in the heading of 178 articles (20%), in the subheading of 145 articles (16.3%), and in both heading and subheading of 2 articles (0.2%), whereas it was used in the text of the remaining 566 articles (63.5%).

The articles were not distributed uniformly throughout the years surveyed (Table 1). There was a remarkable increase starting from school year 2003-04, in November 2005 there was a significant growth in the number of articles on the theme and a peak during school year 2006-07 during which 66.9% of the total involved articles was published. The table highlights a trend that follows the periods of scholastic activities. The articles decreased during the summer periods taken into consideration (Figure 1).

The growing trend started after some bullying episodes reported on the national edition of the daily paper. In November 2005 one of the first events that shocked, concerned an eleven year-old who was slapped and pushed around by his classmates who accused him of not allowing them to copy his homework. This first article was followed by a series of bullying episodes which occurred on a school bus. The public attention during the last school year concentrated particularly on two episodes strongly focused on by the media. The first happened in the month of November and concerned a serious episode of violence in the classroom and of *cyber-bullying* suffered by a disabled student. The second occurred in March and was the suicide of a student who was the victim of repeated bullying acts. The great attention given by the press to these events also called the political world to react, so that the new focus on the phenomenon gave rise to concrete policies aimed at strengthening preventive measures and control of bullying in school environments.

We studied some of the characteristics of the articles selected, and we found confirmation of the increasing attention given to the phenomenon. By analyzing the

Table 1. Trend in time (subdivided into scholastic years) of the number of articles published by *La Stampa*.

School year	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
1999-00	15	1.7	1.7
2000-01	21	2.4	4.0
2001-02	18	2.0	6.1
2002-03	16	1.8	7.9
2003-04	33	3.7	11.6
2004-05	59	6.6	18.2
2005-06	124	13.9	32.1
2006-07	596	66.9	99.0
2007-08	9	1.0	100.0
Total	891	100.0	

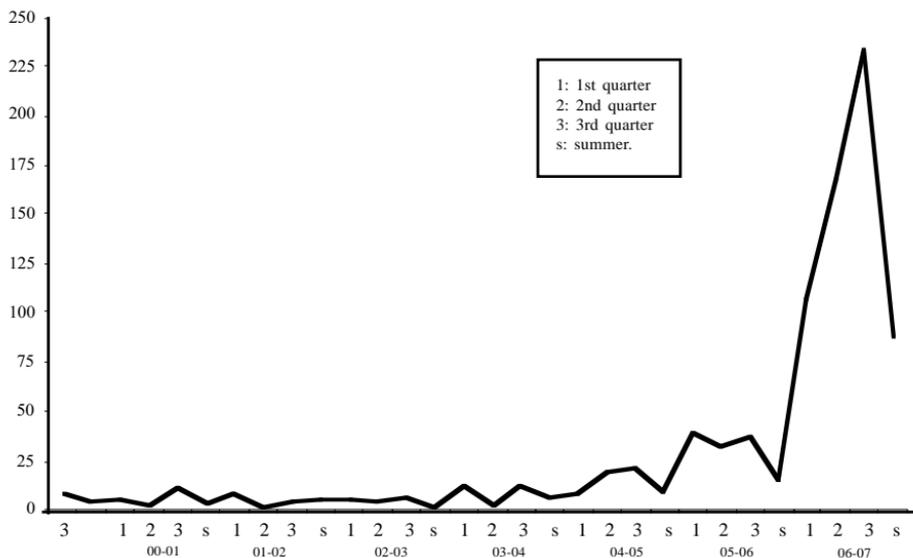


Figure 1. Trend in time (subdivided into scholastic quarterly semesters) of the number of articles published by *La Stampa*.

frequent use of the term “bullying” in the headings, we noticed that during that period, the percentage assessed was at 40% with an increase of about 10 percentage points compared to previous years.

Referring to the different editions of the daily paper, there is a presence of articles on the theme both on the national (182, equal to 21.4%) and local editions, and this demonstrates that the issue not only appears in local news, but has by now also become a theme for reflection and interest on a national level. Such a trend is confirmed

by the analysis of articles published during the various years of the national edition of the paper (Table 2). Besides the increase of the number of articles on the theme, what can be seen is a greater recurrence on the first pages of newspapers, and the transversal incidence of the phenomenon because this issue is also discussed in other sections of the paper.

Considering the viewpoints about the phenomenon, the analysis first concentrated on the articles that strictly focused on the theme of bullying and as a consequence contained the term in the heading of the article. The articles were labeled under categories on the basis of their fields of argumentation (Figure 2). With respect to this subdivision, the themes associated to the bullying phenomenon were mostly news reports of recurrent episodes (22.9%), followed by theoretical analysis (22.19%) and initiatives for preventive measures (19.15%).

Upon deepening the analysis of these three fields of argumentation, it is interesting to note their variations along the scholastic years that were studied (Figure 3). There is an evidently strong increase of the three categories starting off from school year 2004-05. This tendency is first seen in news articles and then in the other types of articles. The occurring bullying episodes seemed to spark the growing awareness as seen in the considerations and analyses from a theoretical point of view and in the articles that dealt with preventive measures.

When the range of analysis widened to all the articles, some other categories were identified from which some themes emerged. On the 891 articles studied, the theme of prevention appeared most frequently (20.2%), represented by the description of projects to be implemented or already taken up, by the presentation of initiatives such as seminars and research, other initiatives and political directives. The second category of articles (17.7%) regarded the theoretical investigations on bullying and related themes such as problematic youth, violence in schools, youth transgressions and the role of the media (especially the internet and television); 14.8% of the articles reported bullying episodes. Other categories were identified (criminality, supervision and television), but in a minor ratio. The last phase of the analysis considered the third category (bullying episodes) and 53.68% of the presented episodes concerned events

Table 2. Articles published in the national edition of *La Stampa* (*for the school years 2007-08, the data of which refer to the first 10 days of November).

School year	Number of articles	Number of pages				
		Minimum	Maximum	Average	Median	Mode
1999-00	7	5	21	15	17	5
2000-01	9	2	45	13	13	13
2001-02	3	11	32	24	28	11
2002-03	5	1	16	10	12	16
2003-04	4	1	27	14	14	1
2004-05	20	8	30	17	15	16
2005-06	26	1	64	18	13	12
2006-07	120	1	64	22	21	1
2007-08*	3	1	8	6	8	8

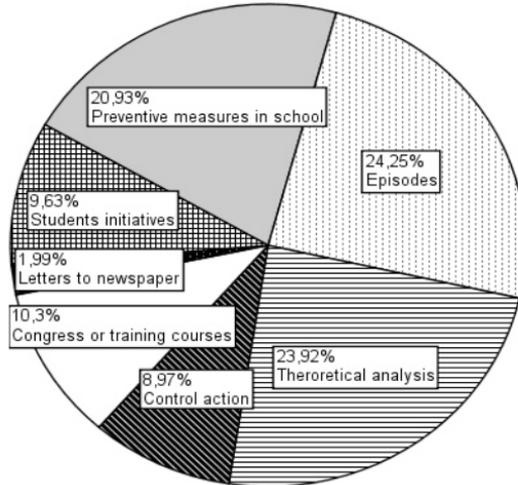


Figure 2. The fields of argumentation of articles on the bullying phenomenon.

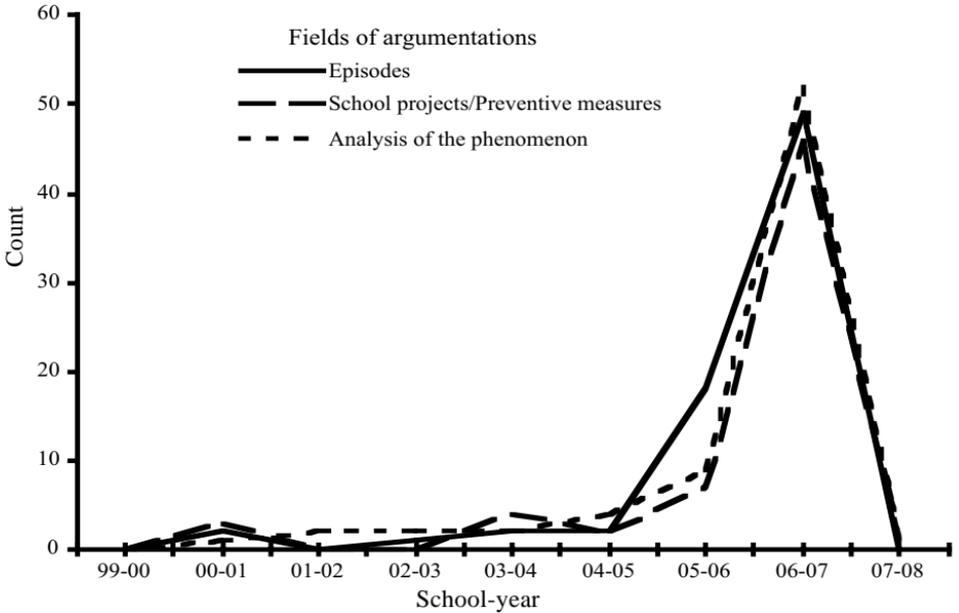


Figure 3. Fields of argumentation related to the bullying phenomenon (episodes-school projects/preventive measures-analyses of the phenomenon)

that came about in the school context. The type of schools involved are presented in Figure 4 (58.49% Intermediate schools, 30.19% Secondary schools, 7.55% Elementary schools, 3.77% Nursery, Kindergartens).

The last part of the study involved the analysis of the 245 articles published in *La Repubblica*, were the appearance of terms associated with the term “bullying” was

studied (Figure 5). The most frequent among these was the term “school” (C= 0.2703) followed by “phenomenon” (C= 0.2670), “episode” (C= 0.2591), “youth” (C= 0.2171), “act” (C= 0.2033), “victim” (C= 0.1736), etc. The discussion concerned the theme as

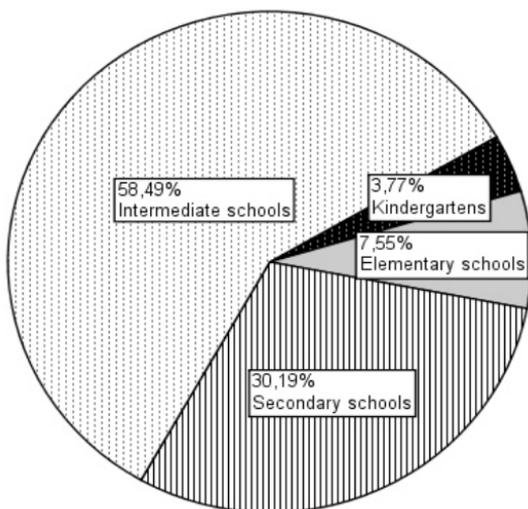


Figure 4. School levels involved in bullying episodes.

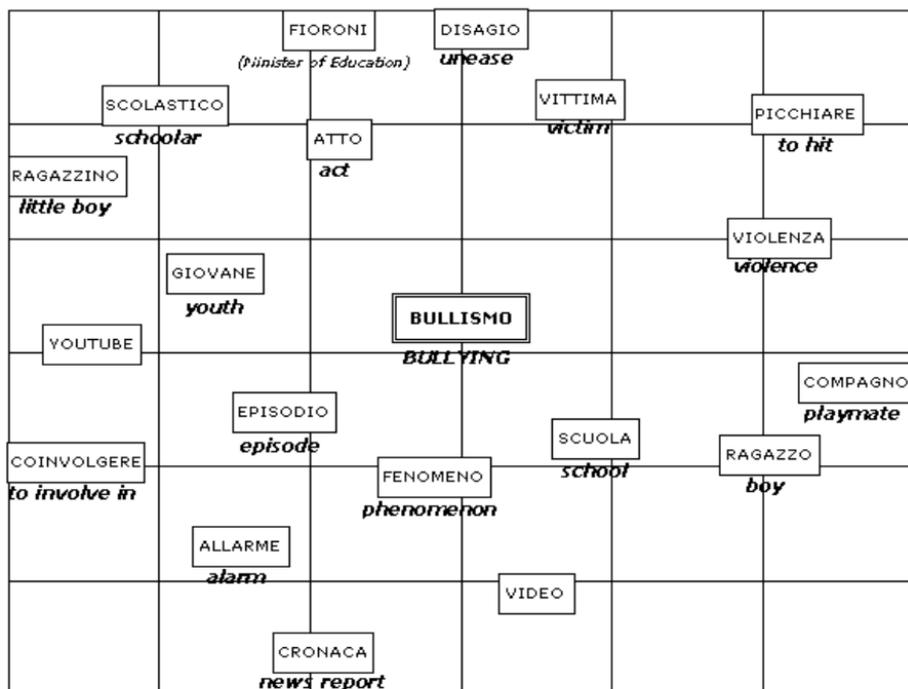


Figure 5. Words associated to the term bullying.

located within the environment to which it is most frequently related (school), the theoretical aspect (phenomenon), the concreteness (episode, act) and the protagonists involved (youth, victim, boy, playmate). It is interesting to note that only one of the protagonists involved in bullying episodes (the victim) is strongly associated with the term “bullying”, while it is not the case for the others (the bully, onlookers). Of the terms associated to bullying, the terms “video” ($C= 0.1503$) and “YouTube” ($C= 0.1490$) appeared only in the most recent articles.

CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis of the data, we reached the conclusion that during the last two years, bullying has become a highly relevant social and political theme. The increasing number of articles on bullying are not only confined to news reports, but are also found in theoretical analyses of the phenomenon and preventive measures. Without mentioning the fact that, triggered by the public interest in the phenomenon, even the world of politics made its moves to create permanent observers and laid down guidelines for the creation of action on the territory. The very extensive use of the word bullying in daily life may be a strong indication of the significance the term bullying has assumed in society. The terms derived from the word “bully” are in fact, used inappropriately according to two different concepts. On one hand “bully,” for example, is used to define the soccer player who makes fun of his opponent, and on the other hand it is used to describe people who commit devious or criminal acts such as rape.

The journalistic choice of the word coincides with the greater sensitivity of public response and increased attention seen in the concrete responses of the social, political and scholastic worlds. The complexity of the study lies in gauging whether the attention given by journalists to this phenomenon is connected to the emotive impact provoked by single events or rather by the awareness of this phenomenon’s importance.

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