

Santiago Ramón y Cajal: Retrospective Analysis of a Case of School Harassment

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Received: April 09, 2019; **Published:** May 17, 2019

Abstract

Bullying has a special validity today, however, it is a problem that has always existed with greater or lesser intensity. A special case of harassment is presented which, due to the relevance of the character, can be a source of inspiration for current cases of harassment. The method followed has been to analyze, first, the characteristics of harassment by resorting to experts, and second, the allusions that Cajal makes of harassment in his work, especially the content *Memories of my life* where a thorough description of his experience is made. Then both situations are compared.

In the autobiography of Santiago Ramón y Cajal, there are descriptions of certain episodes of his childhood that turn out to be perfect definitions of cases of „bullying” experienced by him during his school years. These pages also have the interest of offering a sharp analysis about the causes of those harassments, and about their meaning for the child’s life. Given the origin of these analyzes and solutions, which are so diverse in different circumstances, it is convenient that the experts in bullying know them and take them into account.

Keywords: *Bullying; Ramón Y Cajal*

Introduction

The current issue of bullying in our day is due to two causes. One is the increase of this type of behavior in the last ten years; another, the growing social concern generated by the constant presence of these cases in the press.

Bullying exists, existed and will exist because it is something that is intrinsically linked to human behavior: the domination of the other. Sociology, social psychology and biology have studied copiously the fact of the hierarchization of individuals that occurs in many species, as well as the more or less forceful methods used to achieve it.

An effective social organization implies the existence of a leader and followers. In general terms, the leader, by virtue of his power, ability or intelligence, can find more quickly the solution to the problems facing the group and, in such cases, the majority of the members recognizes his superiority and accepts his leadership. However, this natural order is perverted as soon as someone who has strength imposes itself on others, using it, pretending to be the leader without being functionally functional and, above all, resorting to force to achieve it.

That is precisely what happens in cases of bullying that we find in school: the strong are violently imposed on the weak, the lonely, those who are different or have some defect, even if they are apparently as insignificant things as myopia or obesity.

The issue of bullying has reached high levels of attention since the seventies. To a large extent, the beginning of his study has been the merit of D. Olweus (1973), a great Swedish scholar of child harassment. He defined it as: “a type of harassment or social aggressiveness

that repeatedly addresses certain children, referred to as victims, and usually occurs in the school context" [1]. From their research, many scholars have dealt with this issue throughout the world. In Spain, the study began in the late eighties (Ortega, *et al.* 1989) and the first known work was done by the Ombudsman (1999), followed up later (2007) and seconded by many other jobs, as we will see.

Violence in the school is very plural and affects all the estates that coexist in it. There is violence against: teachers against students, parents against teachers, parents against students, students against teachers, and students against colleagues. They all suppose an abuse of power. We will deal here only with the latter, because it is the one that is expressly related to the case of bullying suffered by Ramón y Cajal in his school days several times.

Note that for a behavior to be diagnosed as harassment or bullying, there must be a series of conditions: an imbalance of strength, power or number; its reiterative character (2 - 3 times a month, according to Olweus, 1993); It must also be intentional and intimidating behavior. If such conditions are not met, it is not possible to speak of harassment, but, at most, of cases of violence and circumstantial fights. This behavior of harassment is also called "school violence" [2].

There are many degrees and types of harassment: the physical minor: tripping, shoving, cheeks, threats, but also the most serious: robberies, beating, harassment, destruction of belongings. There is also psychological harassment that consists of criticism of the intellectual, moral and social aspects of the harassed individual and especially of his family. There is also another subtype that is disparagement through insults, teasing, jokes, nicknames or rumors. Another modality is ostracism, which consists in subjecting the other to isolation. Although it may seem that bullying is not as serious as physical bullying, its negative consequences are often very negative and long-lasting.

But in addition to all those active forms, there is also what is considered a harassment by omission when there is no help to the subject who suffers harassment [3]. This is the case of the spectators who observe the harassment, consent and even cheer or admire the harasser. The permissiveness of harassment on the part of the non-harassing comrades who contemplate the action, is perhaps one of the surprising characteristics of the behavior of those who would be the only people who could stop this type of behavior without much effort.

It is considered that bullying in general and in any of its forms can affect 25 or 30% of the school population; physical harassment, between 3 and 5% of it, and the latest Spanish data that today have an increase of these figures by 75% [4]. A recent report from the Community of Madrid [5] compares complaints of harassment in 2014 - 2015, which were 69, and those that were registered in the 2015 - 2016 academic year, which reached 179; of them 133 were in public schools, 43 in concerted and three in private schools. These data confirm the existence of an increase, but its location according to type of education gives only raw data, which would have to be completed with percentages that represent the relative value of such estimates.

On the other hand, as children mature, social adaptation and mental development produce a decrease in child aggression [6], but with respect to harassment, on the contrary, there is an increase in such behavior: as age rises and peaks in adolescence [7].

Method

Case Evaluation

The evaluation method is the observation of the behavior through the writings of Ramón y Cajal that appear in the references, collecting all the allusions that he narrates of his difficulties in the different school centers where he studies his school and high school. The data collection mainly focuses on the analysis of his work: Ramón y Cajal S [8]. Recovered from my life, 3rd edition. Madrid: Juan Pueyo and of all those where reference is made to his life: Ramón y Cajal S [9]. General considerations on the morphology of the nerve cell, The Spanish veterinary, XXXVIII, Ramón y Cajal S [10]. Coffee talks Madrid: Espasa Calpe), Ramón y Cajal S [11]. Rules and advice on scientific research. (The tonics of the will). Madrid: Beltran Bookstore (8th edition).

In addition, the definition of bullying has been used by experts in the subject Olweus, Diaz Aguado, Fundación Anar: Insults, physical aggression, in a repetitive manner perpetrated by superior aggressors in number and/or age.

Analysis of the case of bullying in the schooling of Santiago Ramón y Cajal.

With all the previous data that conceptualize and define the harassment, we are going to contemplate the case of the boring schooling of Santiago Ramón y Cajal and we will analyze whether or not the conditions of an effective bullying occur in it. To begin at the beginning, Ramón y Cajal belonged to a lower middle class family in which the father, D. Justo Ramón, was a barber, who with his continuous effort became a “second-class surgeon”, and in 1858, doctor in medicine and surgery [12]. The mother, Antonia, daughter of a weaver, was a housewife all her life. They lived in a small village, Petilla de Aragón, administratively Navarre, although located in Aragón, where Cajal was born in 1852. Two years later they moved to Larrés and Luna (1852-1856) and then to Valpalmas (1856-60) where he began his schooling without incident. D. Just changed often from town looking for improvements in the exercise of their profession. D. Santiago’s father was described by his son in this way: “Tenacious, skillful, vigorous mind, powerful memory, hardworking, austere worker, believer in the strength of the will. Excellent midwife of intelligences”.

This last feature undoubtedly referred to his teaching skills that he applied harshly to his son. He was afraid and admired at the same time, and it was not for less, since this modest barber-surgeon from town who became a doctor managed to teach at the Faculty of Medicine of Zaragoza. In spite of the differences that very soon arose between both, the vision that offers of his father is very positive.

Curiously, he describes her mother, Antonia, through the words of others as if he feared he would not be even if he described her directly, and saying of her: “Beautiful, good, industrious. Consenting behind the father’s back”.

It is true that the mother hid D. Justo, who was very strict, some of the pranks of his son, Santiago, and fed him secretly when his father punished him with a fast. Most likely this required great courage, because that husband was really scary. His son often speaks of his father’s fear as much as admiration.

He also describes himself as a child: “I read and wrote when I was 6 years old. He was restless, mischievous, curious, shy, unfriendly, passionate about nature and drawing”.

The one who read and wrote at that young age, and more at that time, suggests two things. First, that his father instructed him with great diligence, since at the age when he would then enter school, to learn to read and write there, he already knew how to do it in advance. And, second, that he was indeed a boy not only intelligent, but really precocious. Cajal has referred to intelligence on other occasions, emphasizing the importance of mental effort in the expansion of neural connections that are at the base of intelligent behavior (1894). One can also think that his vision of himself was quite accurate, because all his subsequent biography came to support this first appreciation of himself. The drawing, which had such prodigious consequences for his studies of the nervous system and the innumerable forms of neurons, led him as a child innumerable problems with his father, who tried to inhibit as much as possible that hobby, because it did not seem serious. Left to himself, Cajal would have been a painter, and probably very good. However, he channeled that vocation, frustrated by his father, into the path of his medical profession. His father admired the wonderful drawings of bones he made for his anatomy classes and later amazed the world with his drawings of what he saw and examined under a microscope.

Later, the family journey took them to Ayerbe (1860 - 1861) and finally to Huesca (1861) and Zaragoza. At the Ayerbe school, the first episode of harassment occurred. D. Santiago narrates it like this: “My appearance in the Plaza de Ayerbe was greeted by a general whistle of the boys. Of mockeries happened to the truths. As soon as some of them met and believed their impunity was assured, they insulted me, beat me with blows, or stoned me with stones” ([8], p. 23).

It was a full-blown psychic and physical harassment. The reasons were the usual in this type of event: arrive new, be different, talk different, dress differently: “I did not wear pants or espadrilles, nor a scarf around my head, and that was enough to appear as *señorito* for those uncouth... My antipathy and the strangeness caused by my language also contributed ([8], p. 24)”.

It is curious that Cajal objectively analyzes the issue and discovers what seem to be the usual causes of harassment (novelty, dress and language) and also adds another, rather due to a defect of himself (antipathy).

He then describes how he reflected and devised a solution to the problem that, in this particular case, consisted in assimilating to the ways of behaving of others: "As it was not for everyone to learn one's language, I ended up adjusting to their strange gibberish. I took part in games of the pawn, the yew, the espandiella, the marro, races, fights and jumps. At first I put up resistance to brutal games, but the spirit of imitation was stronger than the wise advice of my parents ([8], p. 24). This brought me a reputation as rogue and mischievous, but I was an unhappy one" ([8], p. 28).

In this case, he opted for a simple solution: he followed the well-known rule of "wherever you go, do what you see", to achieve the social adaptation that will free him from the rejection and harassment of his companions. He changed his language, his way of speaking, of playing and solving problems. Soon he became the leader of the group and captained some countless treasures. And all this he did reflecting, without asking for help and with only eight years, something that makes us think that not only was it great looking through the microscope. He tells it from the adult perspective, but those determinations and actions he carried out being a complete child. Cajal [10] refers as an adult already refers his childhood pillars as reminiscent of ancestral behaviors aimed at solving the elementary problems presented by life (hunting, fishing, fleeing, fighting, etc).

This experience gave him a reputation as mischievous and undisciplined. Laín Entralgo [13] compares him to Tom Sawyer, hero of the time thanks to the famous novel by Mark Twain, for his eagerness to search for adventures and because they both liked other things than those that occurred within the classrooms Cajal has real pleasure in the mess in which he got in search of adventures, such as blasting the door to a neighbor, or how he stole some roses or how he was about to die to fall to a frozen raft in the middle of winter. His true passions were drawing, reading and adventure. Those of his father studying and becoming a man of profit. In this dialectic, his childhood passed.

When he was ten years old, when he started high school, his father took him to study at the school of the Piarists of Jaca (Huesca), staying at his uncle Juan's house, brother of his mother. Juan treated him well, but his economic situation was going through an important break and therefore in that house he went through a considerable hunger due to lack of resources.

When he arrived he did his entrance exam, which happened brilliantly. There he had no problems with his classmates, but with the subjects and the teaching system and especially with a father Jacinto who decided to teach him Latin and grammar at whatever cost. The disinterest of the child Santiago for both subjects was total, and the punishments to which he was subjected by the father. Jacinto scored in the abuse. But at that time he enjoyed, on the other hand, the support of his companions, who tried to soften the situation of confinements and fasts to which he was frequently subjected to punish his lack of interest in studying.

The problems that Santiago had with the method of the Piarists and the bad grades that he obtained, induced D. Just to transfer his son, mid-course, to the Huesca High School (1864), when he was already 12 years old. D. Just as he had been a teacher of his son, he thought that he could perform much more and that something was not going on in his education.

The change produced a great rejoicing in Cajal, who was dazzled by the city, accustomed until then to live in towns, and by the quality of the teachers of the High School. However, things got complicated again, since the harassment appeared again, now much more serious than the first: "Among those who most abused their forces for me, I remember a certain Azcon... chronic pigre who had interrupted his studies several times. He would be close on eighteen or nineteen years" ([8], p. 57).

Cajal carefully explains the reasons why he was insulted, vexed and beaten by his colleagues in the High School. The insults can be summarized in two: "Italian and goat meat" ([8], p. 58). The first was because he had been raised in Ayerbe and this town was famous for its many herds of goats. The second came from the fact of wearing a long coat that his mother had made for him, expecting that he would grow up. It seems, moreover, that at that time there were some Italians in frock coats who traveled the villages with a lyre making poetic recitations.

But in addition to insults there were strong beating, because the belligerent attitude that faced the insults had, at that time the boy Santiago, made the behavior of Azcón and his followers more than energetic. He tells it like this: "I threw myself like a tiger over Azcón and his insolent friends, distributing to right and sinister punches and kicks ... parts of the surprise, the assaulted ones returned to me with aggression, giving me a massive beating ... and so on for two or three months ([8], p. 58)".

When he finally got tired of receiving blows, he calmed down, gave up on confronting himself, and became calm enough to think about how to solve the problem. Again astonishing the capacity for analysis and decision making carried out by that child of only twelve years. After analyzing things, he decided that he had three possible attitudes in front of him: "The flattery and the flattery towards the runners, the invocation to the authority of the superiors, or, in short, the supra-intensive exercise of the muscles, combined with the cunning" [8].

He decided that the first two - flattery and accusation - were dishonorable, so he had only the third way available: exercise of muscles and astuteness. To this he ardently remembered a phrase from his father: "If you want to succeed in the arduous companies, put in them all your will" ([8], p. 59).

And he began his plan by achieving two positive things: strengthen himself and get away from his enemies: "I resolved to give myself systematically to the physical exercises, to which end I spent lonely hours and hours, in the groves and groves of Isuela, occupied in climbing the trees, jumping ditches, lifting heavy piles, executing, in end, how many acts I thought were conducive to accelerating my muscular development, elevating it to the maximum vigor compatible with my few years ... the fruit of my training, as it is now said, was magnificent. Since the third year (13 years), my fists and the skill in handling the sling and the stick instilled respect for the bullies of recent years and even the athletic Azcón" ([8], p. 59).

This new corporal strength and his ability with catapult allowed him to have poise and security to go to warn Azcón that could hit him easily and cleanly with his sling without even approaching and leave him well touched. This one took him seriously, probably because he would have observed his new abilities, and at that point he gave up his insults and bragging, coming to accept him, to admire him and even to be his friend [14,15].

Discussion and Conclusions

In these pages we are unmistakably before a case of "school bullying", since in it all the characteristics required to qualify it are given (repeated physical and verbal aggression, perpetrated by individuals older in age and number). In effect, it was something that was done in a group, in situations of absence of adults, by older children than the one attacked, and it was offended with insults and physical aggressions, and all of this, in addition, of reiterated form. All the conditions demanded by experts for a case of this type are therefore present.

On the other hand, Cajal's response is very interesting and special, which could even be considered as an example in its genre. We should analyze it, not only because it is a very special child, but because both its solutions and its reflections can be an inspiration for those who deal with these issues, both from the point of view of prevention primary as secondary.

The circumstances of the harassment described are similar to the current ones. Children who are harassed today and then are characterized by presenting different characteristics to most of the school children that surround them. Cajal arrives at a new school, and not only is he not accepted, but he is brutally attacked simply because he is different. In the case of Cajal, the differences were curiously positive: he spoke better, was smart, knew many things, had many skills. But it was "different", different because of her speech and her dress. Their habits were 'different' and as it is customary to say, they were therefore 'improper'. The non-acceptance of the other and the possible threat that this can pose to a group is enough to generate a full-fledged attack.

The instructive and surprising thing about this case is that a very young child was able to generate a complete defense system alone to solve his problem. It is true that he was not any child, and therefore cannot be more generalized, nor require that all children have this

same capacity for response, but you can extract and analyze their solutions so they can be known and used by others people who are concerned about the subject.

The first of the solutions that Cajal generates in Ayerbe was assimilation: he sought to become invisible through homogenization.

'I can do like them, so as not to look different and be accepted'. This is what the first Cajal of eight years seems to have thought. And indeed, it was a successful solution. Therefore, we could think that this can be a useful advice to give to children involved in cases of harassment: filing the differences with respect to the group. And that is what all intelligent children usually do, *motu proprio*, precisely the adaptation by mimicry, which is exactly that.

But we also see that the second solution, arbitrated by Cajal at the Huesca High School, when he was twelve years old, was completely different. In the first case it was a child and the solution was the mimetic adaptation, but the second time it was already a teenager and in this case the solution to the chosen harassment was different: the confrontation. This solution, at the beginning, lacking in precision and strategy, was a failure, but nevertheless it led to a new approach and analysis of the problem. It is important to see the reflective and deferred nature of his second response, which led him to success. It was necessary that in the process mediate a physical preparation (to be strengthened), loneliness (to avoid being attacked) and, in addition, discipline and perseverance to achieve the achievement of their goals.

This evolution in the search for solutions, made by a highly intelligent child, also has to make us think that not all solutions have to be the same in different age periods. Children change, and their self-esteem has different hinges, and especially in adolescence it is important that their behavior be consistent with their values, precisely so as not to lose self-esteem. Cajal [11] told the scientists of his time: "It is worth the one who knows and acts and not the one who knows and falls asleep".

And this he applied before himself, when he had to resolve the attacks of his companions [11].

With regard to all this, and from his own adult reflection, D. Santiago formulated a thoughtful evaluation:

"All these childhood conflicts, which to many seem to be pure childish pranks, have decisive importance, not only for the formation of character, but even for the subsequent behavior during the manhood" ([11], p. 59).

It is evident that this case of harassment and its evolution is a source of ideas in the solution of the serious problem that harassment has in our days. The case of Ramón y Cajal is a source of inspiration in the search for solutions to this serious problem. No doubt this is because the case was analyzed by a privileged mind, with experience in the subject, from which we should learn to seek solutions.

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Volume 8 Issue 6 June 2019

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