



Bullying, identity and school performance: Evidence from Chile[☆]



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ABSTRACT

This article examines the relationship among bullying, individual's identity, and school performance in Chile. The results indicate that being a bully or a bully-victim increases the probability of being a low performing student. For the case of victims, our results suggest a heterogeneity according students' ability, decreasing academic achievement for students with below average ability, but increasing it for very high achieving students. We also found that students claiming to belong to a subculture characterized by a defiant attitude towards authority have lower academic achievement. Our results support anti-bullying policies and those attempting to promote student's identities associated with higher academic achievement.

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1. Introduction

Economists have dedicated a significant part of their efforts to understanding the human capital production function given that it is an important determinant of individuals' income and its fluctuations, and thus their material wellbeing (Mincer, 1974; Willis et al., 1985; Becker, 2009). One measure of human capital accumulation that has been studied a great deal is school performance. The existing empirical evidence suggests that variables such as mother's education (Currie and Moretti, 2003),

families' socio-economic level (Currie and Thomas, 1999; Sirin, 2005), peer effect (Hanushek et al., 2003) and teacher quality (Rivkin et al., 2005), among others, are relevant for explaining an individuals' school performance.

Meanwhile, the literature from the fields of psychology and sociology has linked school performance to other variables that are usually omitted from the economic literature. The inclusion of these variables in economic research is fundamental to having a better understanding of the human capital production function.

This article seeks to contribute to narrowing the gap between the disciplines by analyzing the relationship among bullying, student identity, and school performance in 8th grade students in the Metropolitan Region of Chile. These variables are important to investigate because the psychological and sociological literature has demonstrated that they impact the individual's behavior. Specifically, there is abundant evidence in the field of psychology that bullying affects individuals at the cognitive and psychological levels (Patterson, 1986; Olweus, 1993, 1997; Austin and Joseph, 1996; Wolke et al., 2000). On the other hand, there is a large body of evidence in sociology on the important role that identity plays in human behavior (Robert and Carter, 1994; Warde, 1994; Bendle, 2002; Ogbu, 2004). Meanwhile there is scant research in the field of economics on the role of these variables in school performance, especially for developing countries.

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This article contributes to two recent lines of research in the field of economics: the effects of bullying on the acquisition of human capital and the economy of identity. The first line of research has analyzed the effect of bullying on education and labor market outcomes (Brown and Taylor, 2008; Ponzo, 2013; Eriksen et al., 2014). Specifically, Brown and Taylor (2008) examine the effects of being the victim of bullying at 7 and 11 years of age and being a bully at the age of 16 on the level of education achieved and salaries earned at the ages of 23, 33, and 42 in the United Kingdom. The results indicate that both being an aggressor or victim of bullying are negatively correlated to education achieved and salaries earned. Ponzo (2013) uses data from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)¹ 2007 for Italy and finds a negative effect of having been a victim of bullying on standardized test performance for students aged 9 and 13. In addition, Ponzo (2013) estimated the average effect of the treatment using propensity score matching in order to reduce selection bias. Finally, Eriksen et al. (2014), use a model controlling for maternal fixed effects, and several other identification strategies,² to analyze the relationship between being the victim of bullying, as reported by parents and teachers, and school performance of students between 10 and 12 years of age in Denmark. The results indicate that being the victim of bullying decreases school performance.

The second line of research has linked individuals' identities to economic outcomes (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000, 2002, 2005; Austen-Smith and Fryer, 2005; Fryer and Torelli, 2010; Bénabou and Tirole, 2011). Akerlof and Kranton (2000) include individuals' identity as an argument of their utility function. Each individual feels that he or she belongs to a category or identity that is associated with certain norms and ideals. It follows that individuals gain utility when their actions are consistent with their norms and lose utility when they are not. Specifically, Akerlof and Kranton (2002) develop a model that includes the identity of individuals in the education production function. The main prediction of the model is that the economic returns of education can be weak determinants of the students' actual educational effort. As such, there is space within public policy to promote identities that are aligned with achieving better school performance.

The Chilean case is interesting to examine for several reasons. First, various public policies have been implemented in Chile in an effort to improve the quality of the educational system. Specifically in 1981 a school financing system was introduced that had the effect of liberalizing the school system. The reform segmented the system into three types of schools: public schools funded by the state, private subsidized schools financed using demand-driven vouchers, and private schools with no public subsidies (see Prawda, 1993).

There is a debate about the effects that this policy has had on school performance. On one hand, Hsieh and Urquiola (2006) provide evidence that suggests that competition has not generated increases in the performance of public schools. The authors argue that the schools financed through demand-driven vouchers have responded to the incentives of the competitive system not through improved productivity but through the selection of better students. On the other hand, Patrinos and Sakellariou (2011) suggesting the reform improved student performance. Furthermore, some studies indicate that student performance in private

subsidized schools has been marginally better than that of students enrolled in public schools at the national level (McEwan and Carnoy, 2000; McEwan, 2001; Carnoy and McEwan, 2003; Contreras et al., 2010; Mizala and Torche, 2012). There is, however, evidence that this system has generated a high level of social segregation among the various types of schools (Elacqua, 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2014).

In this context, over the past 25 years various public policies have been implemented with the objective of improving students' performance. For example, the school day was extended, an incentives system for teachers was introduced, and public resources provided to schools was increased for those with students with poorer socio-economic situations. The evidence suggests that these policies have had positive impacts on school performance (Bellei, 2009; Contreras and Rau, 2012; Correa et al., 2014). However, there are still large educational challenges. Chile is in second-to-last place in PISA performance among OECD member states. Thus there is a need to understand what other factors can help to explain school performance so that complementary public policies can be designed.

Second, according to data for TIMSS fourth grade students, Chile ranks fifth highest on the Student Bullied at School scale out of 50 countries. Sixty-two percent of students reported having been the victim of bullying on a monthly or weekly basis, which is ten percentage points higher than the average for the countries assessed by TIMSS (Mullis et al., 2012). This is consistent with evidence that suggests that more unequal countries have greater prevalence of bullying (Contreras et al., 2015). As such, it is fundamental to quantify the effect that this widespread phenomenon has on school performance.

Third, during the 2000s, a large proliferation of subcultures was observed in Chile (Aguilera, 2009; Canales, 2009). These subcultures, which have been broadly studied by sociologists (Maffesoli, 1995; Bennett, 1999; Hodkinson, 2002; Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006), are groups in which individuals share a common identity manifested in factors such as clothing, music tastes, language, and lifestyle. This growing interest in subcultures makes it possible to examine whether belonging to a subculture has an impact on school performance. Finally, the database used contains detailed information on respondents and is especially useful for answering our research questions.

The information comes from a study of a sample of 7th grade students that is representative of the school population in the Metropolitan Region of Chile. The students were followed during 7th and 8th grade, the last years of elementary school in Chile. The data were gathered by the Sociology Institute at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (see Valenzuela and Ayala, 2011). This study uses information from the second round of the survey when the students were in 8th grade. The data allow us to access self-reported information on the general performance of 7th and 8th grade students, reported in ranges. In addition, the database provides detailed information on school bullying, which allows us to identify individuals who are not involved in bullying, those who have only been victims (victims), those who have only bullied others (bullies), and those who have been victims and bullies (bully-victims). The respondents are also asked whether they belong to a subculture and the name of the group. This allows us to directly identify the category and identity of the individual. The survey also contains information on other psychological and sociological variables that allow us to control for potential factors that may bias our estimates.

We begin our empirical approach estimating an order logit of the relationship between the variables of interest and school performance controlling for other variables. The results indicate that bullies and bully-victims perform worse on average than those

¹ TIMSS and PIRLS are international comparative assessments for 4th and 8th grade students in more than 60 countries.

² For example, they implement an estimate with instrumental variables using the proportion of peers within the class whose parents faced criminal penalties as an instrument.

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